Towards Interactive Political Leadership

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Abstract
Interactive policy-making is becoming a more integrated way of governing the public sector in the western world. This development represents a shift for politicians from the role as sovereign policy makers to a role as interactive political leaders who involve and collaborate with relevant stakeholders and citizens. Today’s politicians increasingly stand with one leg in each of these roles and are faced with a number of tensions and challenges as a result. The paper presents the results of a comparative case study of three Danish local authorities who seek to develop a more interactive role for elected politicians. The study shows that the politicians find it difficult to adapt to the new role because they find it challenging to balance their representative role, which means that they are not able to fully engage in the dynamic dialogue interactive policy-making requires. The politicians therefore come across weak on the surface, underneath however, they create ‘smoke-filled-rooms’ where they are able to take leadership and direct the outcome of the political processes involving citizens and other relevant stakeholders. This suggests that there are still barriers to overcome in order to move towards a more interactive political leadership.
Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis

Contextual Introduction to Chapter
This chapter is part of a monography that sets out to examine the research question: How does meta-governance of interactive processes and politicians’ handling of their representative role affect their ability to execute interactive political leadership and what bearing do these aspects have on their leadership capacity? This chapter follows an introduction to the thesis, a theory chapter that will specify the lens where through the analysis is seen, a method chapter and an analysis for each case. This chapter will discuss and compare results from three case-studies.

The cases are chosen in a Danish context because Denmark has a strong tradition for collaboration between the public and civil sector, thus there will be good conditions to find cases where the local governments will interact with society in policy-making. The chosen three local governments can be considered ‘typical cases’ due to interactive policy-making becoming a more integrated part of governing in the public sector. In order to put the research question under scrutiny, I have chosen to look into two embedded cases in each local government. The cases are chosen because they represent different ways of involving the public into policy-making. The analysis is built on 46 interviews with politicians, 35 observational studies, document analyses and a social network-inspired analysis. This comparison will identify differences and similarities across the respective cases.

5.1 Introduction
The aim of the chapter is to discuss and compare the most vivid empirical patterns that have occurred in the separate analyses of the three cases studies. The empirical patterns contribute to shed light on what hampers and enhances the movement towards interactive political leadership. Due to the abductive research design, this comparative chapter does not aim to compare the variables in a strict positivistic way, but will instead focus on the broader empirical findings.

The chapter starts by summing up the main findings across the embedded cases in the table below. The chapter proceeds with a discussion and comparison of the following main aspects: 1) political network activities, 2) meta-governance of interactive processes and 3) management of representative mandate. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the learning potentials of the case studies.

The table below sums up the results of the six embedded cases to create an overview of the relation between causes and effects. The table focuses on the main causes from the research question, i.e. how the interactive processes have been metagoverned and designed as well as how the politicians have handled their representative role in order to see how these aspects have affected the ability to execute interactive political leadership and their leadership capacity.
Table 1: Results of Embedded Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE NO.</th>
<th>CASE NAME</th>
<th>CAUSES</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AD-HOC-BOARDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Municipality A</td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Under</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Municipality B</td>
<td>Responsivity</td>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Municipality C</td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Under</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE NAME</th>
<th>CAUSES</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLANSTRATEGY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>Municipality A</td>
<td>Responsivity</td>
<td>Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Municipality B</td>
<td>Receptivity</td>
<td>Over/under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Municipality C</td>
<td>Responsivity</td>
<td>Over/under</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the table shows that the politicians’ ability to execute interactive political leadership is greater influenced by how the politicians handle their representative role than how the interactive processes are metagoverned. It’s a result that supplements the literature that points to metagovernance as a key aspect in harvesting the potentials of interactive processes (Torfing, 2016) by showing a hierarchy between the two aspects. It is therefore not enough to design processes that welcome interaction if politicians are not balancing their representative role. That is evident in case 2a where the politicians are executing interactive political leadership despite the process is placed in the middle of the political interaction ladder. During the process the politicians are capable of balancing their representative role in a way that strengthens their leadership capacity. Metagovernance remains important however because different dilemmas occur on the political interactive ladder which makes the movement towards interactive political leadership more or less possible.

The selection strategy of the embedded cases is built on a hypothesis that the closer involved citizens are in interactive political processes, the greater possibility the politicians will have of executing interactive political leadership. Therefore I have chosen to select two types of embedded cases that represent different degrees of interaction. The first type of embedded case (planstrategies) is chosen as an example of politicians asking actors outside the city hall for input, whereas the second embedded case (ad-hoc-boards) is an example of politicians inviting actors to join the policy development process. The hypothesis is that the ad-hoc-boards create better conditions for executing interactive political leadership because they create the framework for closer interaction. However, as the table shows the ad-hoc-boards do not create better conditions and are not necessarily highest on the political
interactive ladder. As we shall see in the following discussion it is furthermore interesting that different empirical patterns occur related to the placement on the political interaction ladder.

Before elaborating on the cross findings related to metagovernance and the handling of the representative role, the chapter will start by comparing how the politicians in the three municipalities use their network related to the core functions of their leadership.

5.2 Politicians Informal Network Activities

The thesis both examines how politicians handle their representative role on a formal and informal level. That means that the social network-inspired analysis is examining with whom the politicians are interacting in connection to the functions of their leadership when it is not happening in planned and formal activities such as city-hall meetings, board-meetings etc. It is interesting to examine with whom the politicians are interacting with on an informal level because this kind of knowledge sheds light on to what extent politicians are executing interactive political leadership when they are not instructed to. The hypothesis is that the politicians are closely connected to citizens which makes it easier to execute interactive political leadership in informal settings because local politics is traditionally known for its closeness between local authorities and citizens (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). The following section will discuss the main findings and highlight differences and similarities across the three cases.

The analysis of the politicians’ informal network activities shows that there is an unexploited potential where the politicians to a higher degree can interact with relevant actors in order to strengthen their leadership capacity. This point becomes evident because of the structure of the questionnaire that contains both traditional quantitative and network-inspired questions. The answers on the quantitative part indicate that the politicians have a broad network and that they have relatively easy access to differentiated actors with relevant resources and knowledge. That’s an interesting finding because Ansell and Gash’s study from 2008 shows that a broad network is an important factor in creating collaborations around policy developments. In that way it seems the politicians across the three municipalities have a strong foundation in order to create a platform for interaction. However, the network-inspired questions reveal that the politicians are not using the broader network in relation to their core leadership functions where they are far more oriented towards small closed networks. In that way the triangulation of the data nuances the empirical findings. The following section will elaborate on the empirical patterns that appear across the three cases; first regarding the quantitative question and thereafter concerning the network-inspired questions.

5.2.1. How frequent are the Politicians in Contact with Actors in- and outside the City Hall?

The quantitative part shows that the politicians across the three cases have frequent contact with the actors internally in the city hall, i.e. with other members of the council, chairmen and civil servants. The relatively close contact with the administration indicates that there is easy access to information
and professional discussions which can support their role. However, municipality A stands out on different parameters. A notably smaller number of politicians in municipality A state that they have frequent contact with the mayor and other council members. The difference can be due to the fact that municipality A has a broader coalition than the other two municipalities which means that the power is not as centralized as the data indicates it is in municipality C.

When it comes to the politicians’ external network, it is interesting that the politicians across the three municipalities state that they are in least frequent contact with street-level-bureaucrats. That is interesting because Hartley (2005) highlights these kind of actors as valuable in policy development because of their knowledge about the conditions in public institutions.

It is furthermore interesting that a great number of politicians in municipality B and municipality C state that they have frequent contact with party unions, civil unions and companies; whereas a much smaller number of politicians in municipality A state that they have frequent contact with civil unions and companies. A way of interpreting these results is like Alexander, Lewis and Considine (2011) who show that politicians and bureaucrats’ networks are influenced by the institutional context. Applied on this study, municipality B and municipality C have shown great ambitions regarding changing the institutional framework to support interactions with external actors in order to enhance policy development. Municipality B has more specifically worked with involving citizens in redefining and developing welfare in the municipality. Municipality C has brought the citizens into the core of policy-development by inviting them into political boards. The majority of politicians stating that they have frequent contact in municipality B and municipality C indicate that the institutional framework influences their contact surface. It can of course be discussed whether it is the institutional settings that shape the political behaviour or it is the other way around. However, the analyses across the three cases nonetheless show that there is a coexistence of an institutional framework that welcomes interactions and politicians who informally seek to interact with a broader network of actors.

5.2.2. Network-Inspired Questions

While the previous section was about how frequent the politicians have contact with different actors, this section is about who the politicians: get enquiries from about challenges in the local society, who the politicians go to in order to discuss enquiries, develop political solutions and mobilise support. The network-inspired questions are therefore opening up to a more in-depth data type that contributes with knowledge about what characterises the relations. This data shows another pattern than the previous section. The politicians are in all three cases primarily oriented towards actors internally in the city hall. This is surprising compared to the politicians’ frequent contact with external actors.

The network-inspired analysis shows that the politicians in all three municipalities have a broad contact surface when it relates to who gives them enquiries about challenges in the local society. Across the three municipalities 40% of the enquiries are characterised by coming from ‘citizens’ in the municipalities, i.e. persons they know from the public sphere but haven’t got any personal relations to. This gives the impression that there is an easy access to the politicians. It is however, notably that 36%
of the enquiries in municipality A come from actors that the politicians know from their political work, whereas that number is only 20\% in the other municipalities. That suggests that the access to the citizens is not as easy for regular citizens in municipality A as it is in the other municipalities. This result can be related to the greater attention municipality B and municipality C have paid to involving citizens, which could have led to citizens finding it easier to make enquiries because the politicians are more visible.

The politicians have thereby got a broad circle that potentially can support the respective function associated with their leadership. When looking closer at whom the politicians go to it seems they are all oriented towards other politicians and administration. This is surprising when examining who they will go to in order to develop politics. This work is primarily being carried out by politicians and civil servants. Very few politicians are going to party unions and civil unions. However, these politicians are characterised by having a single mandate in the city councils. This means that they have a greater need for professional discussions outside the city council compared with politicians from parties with more mandates. This empirical pattern across the three municipalities is similar to Leifeld and Schneider’s (2012) conclusion that politicians are aware of the transactional costs that are related to reaching out to new relations in order to make policy-development. More specifically the politicians are firstly oriented towards actors that can contribute with knowledge and secondly how easy they are to establish contact with. That means that the politicians have a tendency to go through already institutionalised channels, because they trust the information and it can be time consuming to invest in new contacts.

With this knowledge in mind, the following section will compare the results from the six embedded cases. The first section will focus on metagovernance.

5.3. Metagovernance of Interactive Processes
Overall the analysis of the respective embedded cases shows that the politicians find it difficult to get anything concrete out of the interactive processes that can support their leadership capacity. This point is similar to Lees-Marshments study (2015) that shows that politicians find it difficult to integrate public input into their work. It diverges however from Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) and Mayer, Edelenbos and Monnikhof (2005) that point to interactive processes as beneficial for decision-making. This result suggests a great need for focus on how interactive processes can be designed, framed and facilitated, so they to a higher extent enrich politicians’ functions. It is important to discuss how the political role can be strengthened in these processes because interactive governance is becoming a more integrated way of developing policies in the western world (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016), as discussed in chapter 1. That means a lot of resources are going into some processes that politicians find difficult to harvest the potentials of.

The studies of the embedded cases shed light on different challenges on the different steps on the political interaction ladder which makes it more or less possible to execute interactive political leadership. Only one of the embedded cases is found on the first step on the political interaction ladder. It is case 2b that unsurprisingly doesn’t result in an interactive political role because the process does
not welcome interaction. As described in chapter 4 the council disagreed on this decision which resulted in two camps. The one camp was content without interaction with the citizens in relation to developing their planstrategy. They already felt equipped to represent the citizens from other interactions. The other camp fought for a more interactive process because they felt detached from the citizens’ views and therefore wished for closer communication. However they did not succeed in getting influence on the design-phase of the interactive process that could support their functions.

Two out of the three embedded cases on the second step on the political interaction ladder show that the politicians can’t use the input from the cases. This is because the input doesn’t relate to the challenges the politicians are facing. That is most evident in case 1b and 3b where the interactions take place in the citizens’ surroundings. The politicians are not only meeting them on their home ground, they are also letting them determine what they are discussing within a given framework. The processes are therefore designed in a way that doesn’t fit the framing. The embedded case 2a is also found on this level on the interactive political ladder but the process is designed differently. That means that there are no formalized meetings with citizens setting the agenda. The politicians do therefore have a firmer grip over the process because they react to enquiries and criticism that relates to the vision and plans for their particular process, avoiding random input.

The empirical pattern on the third step on the ladder shows that the politicians find it difficult to engage themselves fully in the processes. It comes across in the way the processes are designed where final decisions are made outside the ad-hoc-boards. This is happening in the embedded cases 1a and 3a where the politicians protect their mandate in so-called ‘smoke-filled-rooms’. These rooms make it possible for the politicians to withdraw from the processes and make decisions that are not transparent for citizens. This arrangement makes the politicians less invested in the dialogues because they know they are not obligated to find common solutions with the external participants.

It is therefore visible that different problems occur on the different steps on the ladder that challenge the politicians. The next section will discuss how the politicians handle their representative role on the different steps on the political interaction ladder.

5.4 Management of Representative Role
As mentioned previously in this chapter the most central finding in this study is that the politicians’ ability to execute interactive leadership is dependent of the way they manage their representative role.

The first step on the political interaction ladder shows two different ways of managing the representative role. One of them is to veer towards an under-responsive role as the sovereign policy-maker, whereas the other veers toward the over-responsive role as the follower. The under-responsive part of the politicians feel equipped to make decisions on behalf of the citizens, whereas the over-responsive feel detached and not ready to represent them. Both roles can be dangerous to pursue because on the one hand weakens their legitimacy not to have contact with the citizens and on the other hand weakens their autonomy, if they cannot make sovereign decisions. The politicians are therefore at risk of undermining their own role. It is interesting that some council members ask for a more
interactive political process and that they are not trying to create this process outside the formal framework. This is because the network-analysis firstly gives the impression that the politicians in municipality B have great conditions for doing so because of their frequent contact to differentiated actors. Secondly because case 2a shows that other politicians in the municipality have great success with reaching out to relevant actors outside the institutional framework.

The politicians are managing their representative role in three different ways on the second step on the political interaction ladder. There are however common characteristics between case 1b and 3b where the politicians are overall handling their role by listening to external participants without entering a dialogue with them about their opinions or ideas. How they administrate the input does however differ. That means that the politicians in case 1b have a tendency to be under-responsive and that the politicians in case 3b veer both towards an under- and over responsive role. These movements can be problematic as mentioned above because the interactive processes can give external actors expectations the politicians can and will not meet. It’s furthermore problematic to take on a listening position because it gives the politicians less control with the interactions and in that way they cannot ensure the relevance. Whether the interactive processes support the functions of the political leadership depends on how the politicians are interacting and whether they get to control the process to their advantage. It is as Wolvin (2010) suggests of utmost importance that the politicians have a goal with their listening experience in order to integrate the inputs in the functions of their leadership. The politicians in case 2a succeed with strengthening their political role and that is due to the way they manage their representative role. They balance keeping their authority by not taking external actors further into their work than they are ready to by creating a dynamic dialogue with relevant actors that can support their leadership capacity. The politicians are therefore entering a dialogue with the actors that criticise their visions and plans as the process proceeds. The politicians show their responsiveness by listening and integrating the views they find appropriate, but they are also willing to discuss why they disagree with others. The politicians are therefore not compromising on their vision but are viewing the process as a learning situation that needs adjusting along the way. This gives them a strong leadership capacity giving them an efficient platform to work from.

The politicians are, in both processes on the third step on the political interaction ladder, handling their role by being under-responsive towards the external actors. As described previously these processes are designed in a way that protects the politicians’ representative mandate by giving them smoke-filled-rooms to operate from. Both processes suggest that the politicians feel secure in this type of setup because it gives them a feeling of control in an insecure situation. The politicians are therefore able to distance themselves from the work in the ad-hoc-boards because they have the final decision-making competency, which means that they are not engaging themselves in the dialogues and thereby missing out on the possibility of supporting their leadership capacity. In that way they are ending up in the dilemma described by Torfing, Peters, Pierre and Sørensen (2012) where the politicians on the one hand are not involved enough in the process to get any influence, whilst they on the other hand try to maintain their authority by holding on to their right to make final decisions. Even though it appears
problematic that the politicians are withdrawing to smoke-filled-rooms where external actors are not involved, it is not the core of why this movement leads to a weakened legitimacy and frustration for the external actors. The problem is instead communication. The politicians fail to communicate and justify their actions and that weakens their leadership capacity.

5.5 What can we learn from the three Case-Studies?
Politicians are in recent years experiencing great changes in the way policies are developed and therefore their work routines. This creates a great demand of their ability to juggle different roles at the same time. It gives rise to discuss how the working conditions can be improved in order to support politicians’ possibilities to benefit from the development. Even though this study doesn’t give rise to generalisation in a classical sense the empirical patterns can be worth noting in an analytical sense in creating interactive political processes.

Interactive Processes and the Difficult Balancing Act
The findings across the three cases are overall pointing to taking a closer look at the way politicians manage their representative role in order to strengthen their leadership capacity. It is important to clarify this role in order to avoid movements towards the under- and over representative role in interactive processes which weakens their leadership capacity. A clarification of the representative role is closely connected to increase the politicians’ awareness on when to start interactive processes. More specifically what they wish to gain from interactions. The politicians are across the three cases enthusiastic about the thought of interactive processes but are not ready for it in praxis. This means that the politicians are not harvesting the potential. This can be handled by politicians taking on a hands-on role in the interactive processes, where they are visible by facilitating and entering the dialogue. However case 1a, 1b, 3a and 3b show that this can be a difficult role to take on. This can have different causes; one of them is that interactive arenas are battlefields where actors wish to gain influence. This means that politicians will be cautious with speaking their mind freely because that will create oppositions. They therefore have to be careful with what they say in order not to lose support. For that reason it becomes problematic to balance the role of creating trust and safety between the actors on one hand and on the other trying to create direction.

Closer collaboration about Framing and Design of Interactive Processes
To raise the politicians awareness of how to handle their representative role in interactive process and when to initiate them requires that they are involved from the beginning. The three case studies overall show that the politicians are often not very involved in the framing and designing part of the processes. The politicians are furthermore not showing any awareness of what consequences the initial framing has for their possibilities to influence the processes. The initial framing has great impact which is evident across the six embedded cases. When problem diagnoses and frames for how to solve an issue is determined early on, the politicians are being limited with regards to influencing the outcome. The administration can in that way both hamper and enhance the possibility of executing interactive
political leadership. These empirical findings are in line with Sørensen (2006) and Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) that highlight politicians role in framing and designing the interactive processes.

The administration does not only play an important role in framing, designing and facilitating the processes. They do also play an important role in which politicians will be able to impact the processes. Another interesting finding across the three cases is that it does not only matter how the politicians respond to the external actors, it does also matter how the administration view this relation. In especially one of the cases this creates tension because the administration is overly responsive towards the external actors. That means that the administration perceive it as their role to implement what the citizens are expressing, which means that they undermine the politicians’ point of views.

This chapter has shown that it is a balancing act for politicians to engage in interactive processes and that different dilemmas occur in relation to the different steps on the political interaction ladder.

Reference list:


