



Trust-based management as an innovation: Actors and attitudes in the discursive space

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Abstract

This article explores the public discourse on the organizational concept of trust-based management (TBM) as an innovation, through a content analysis of different stakeholder groups' attitudes towards TBSL in 181 selected articles in 12 Norwegian newspapers from 2010 to 2020. During this period, the ideas of trust reforms spread from Denmark to Norway and Sweden, and some organizations began with systematic implementation of TBM. The prevalence of discourse follows a common S-curve as it is known from other management innovations. Politicians and especially leaders were most positive to TBM. There was no direct negative publicity about TBM, but some actors problematized TBM more than others. Employees problematized more than managers, and public employees problematized more than politicians. Although politicians were the most active in the discourse of TBSL, it was not the politicians who drove the discourse. Politicians, however, promoted the discourse after it had emerged, a role that in research is usually attributed to management consultants. Furthermore, the number of positive articles fell earlier among employees than among managers, and the number of problematising articles rose earlier for employees than for managers. We link these findings to two partly opposite driving forces related to legitimation and learning: the desire to achieve legitimacy by connecting to a popular, assumed by many new concept; and that different actors experience different aspects of TBM from discursive and practical work at different organizational levels and in different roles, which characterizes their experiences of and thus attitudes towards TBM in the discourse.

Keywords: Trust-based management, diffusion of management ideas, innovation, quantitative content analysis, public sector reforms.



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