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Title

Universities need leadership, academics need management : discursive tensions and voids in the deregulation of Swedish higher education legislation / Marianne Ekman ; Monica Lindgren ; Johann Packendorff

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss how ‘managerialist’ and ‘leaderist’ discourses (O’Reilly and Reed Public Administration 88:960–978, 2010; Organization Studies 32:1079–1101, 2011) are drawn upon in the context of the deregulation of Swedish higher education. As of 2011, there has been new legislation that frames Swedish universities as ‘autonomous’ and transfers most of the regulative responsibilities from the government level to university vice-chancellors. The aim of this article is to inquire into how tensions within and between managerialist and leaderist discourse are handled in the promotion of New Public Management reforms and the consequences thereof in terms of how leadership in the higher education sector is constructed. We analyse how these discourses are employed in the core documents leading up to the 2010 Riksdag decision to enact most of the proposed deregulations, and the subsequent evaluation undertaken by the social democratic government that took over in 2014. Based in this analysis, we suggest that the texts indeed draw upon notions of leadership and leaders as

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necessary for Swedish universities to survive and thrive in the future, but that the envisaged practise of this ‘strong leadership’ can either be characterised as a discursive void or described in terms of de-personalised, instrumental managerial surveillance and control. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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