

Frontline manager's perceptions and justifications of welfare conditionality

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Why study frontline managers?

- Scant research on frontline managers' attitudes towards conditionality
- Frontline managers shape street-level behaviour
- Management matters in the implementation process of new policies

Study context

- Norwegian activation policy
 - Activities characterized as enabling/empowering
 - Mild sanctioning regime
- New section added to the law of social assistance
 - Implementet in 2017
 - «It shall be terms of activity for granting financial benefits to persons under the age of 30, unless wheighty reasons speaks against it»
 - Shift from «can» to «shall»
 - Sanctioning still discretionary, not legally instructed

Study aim

- 1) How do frontline managers perceive and interpret welfare conditionality (conditions of conduct)?
- 2) How do managers justify their normative stances in this regard?

Methods

- Survey data (2015)
 - Nationwide survey among frontline workers and managers
 - 1735 respondents (64% response rate)
 - 30% qualified social workers
 - 83% of the managers yielded strong normative support towards conditionality
- focus group interview data (2017)
 - 7 focus groups
 - 16 interviewees
 - Most of the managers were qualified social workers
- Analysis
 - Thematic content analysis

Descriptive results of survey study

| | Normative support towards conditionality | Belief in the efficiency of conditionality |
|----------|--|--|
| Managers | 83% | 53,7% |
| Workers | 80% | 45,4% |

Findings from interview data

- Strong support to the new act
 - Activities and sanctions perceived as pedagogical tools
 - Social work mainly perceived as compatible with activation policies
 - Paternalism as justificatory narrative

Discussion

- How can we explain/interpret the findings of the study?
- Implications for street-level behaviour and implementation of the new act?