

Session 5

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Management of risks – a paradox?

An ordinary administrative tool is “risk management”, with strong elements from instrumental rationality (Banfield 1959). The risk connects to whether it is possible to fulfil measures or not (in a strict sense). In a context of contingency function, risk are often unforeseen unwanted incidents. There are at least five varieties in how unexpected incidents occur, scaling from known risks, but unknown amplification to “a bolt from the blue” (Kylene, 1985). There is also a classification of different risks according to management means (Renn, 2008).

This paper is about introducing an administrative tool in an area of uncertainty, which makes obstacles for management. Interviews with administrative- and preparedness managers in municipalities and county governors shows that some elements from the risk management recipe can overlap, but also show some paradoxes.

Municipalities are multi standard organisations offering a wide variety of services (Røvik,1992) facing institutional complexity (Greenwood et al. 2011). We discuss different dilemmas and paradoxes with the tool “risk management” from different angles. Clarke (1999) stating that “fantasy documents” seemingly signals control, but if the risk should occur, there will be lack of sufficient resources and capabilities. The dilemma of hypocrisy is here essential (Brunsson, 2002). Power (2004) states that if risk management is everything, then it becomes nothing. On the other hand, we have Weick (2001) presenting strategies for coping with uncertainty. Here is a mind-set of thinking ahead and proper skills and training, offering a dynamic supplement to the risk management tool.