Legitimacy Lost
Scandals in the Swedish Public Sector

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Swedish text, English and Spanish summaries
Title: I skandalers spår.
Minskad legitimitet i svensk offentlig sektor
Printed by Kompendiet, Göteborg, 2004
ISBN 91-628-5983-8

Abstract

This book deals with the subject of scandals in the Swedish public sector and, therewith, the legitimacy of organisations. Scandals lead to a loss of legitimacy for the organisations involved. As a result of the social reaction that may be provoked by the disclosure of scandalous behaviour, the organisation is compelled to try and restore its legitimacy. Scandals provide an opportunity to generate more knowledge about the process in which the organisation's legitimacy is reduced and the way in which the legitimacy can be restored.

The research question in this book is: What do scandals in the Swedish public sector signify? The first section of the book focuses on what scandals are, what scandal processes look like and what the characteristic features of scandals in the Swedish public sector are as they are narrated by the media. The second section of the book, takes a closer look at the loss of legitimacy brought about by a scandal and what that means for the organisation.

In scandals in the Swedish public sector, players in leading positions are linked to some transgression, often of a financial nature. The less expected the transgression is, the stronger the public reaction is and the more the organisation's legitimacy diminishes.

Because the scrutiny is so tough after a scandal, it becomes difficult for the organization to decouple as usual. By observing others and paying attention to external reactions, the organisation adapts itself to the demands of external pressure. Simultaneously, the organisation prepares itself for the possibility of future scandals. When the members of the organisation perceive that those outside the organisation consider it is living up to external expectations it is an indication that its legitimacy has now entered the process of restoration, which helps the organisation perceive it is regaining strength. When the organisational legitimacy is restored, external pressure returns to normal.

Keywords

legitimacy, scandal, corruption, organization theory, normalization, de-coupling, hypocrisy, public sector, local government, Sweden