Managerial Autonomy
in Public Organisations

Stefan Boye

Managerial Autonomy
in Public Organisations

PhD Dissertation

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Doing a PhD is a lot of hard work. However, I found out during my time as PhD student that hard work could not even get me halfway there. Without the guidance, support, and good friendships I have had during the work with the dissertation, I would never have been able to finish it. Thus, I would like to thank some of the people who have helped along the way.

First, and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors Søren Serritzlew and Anne Mette Kjeldsen. Thank you for painstakingly reading, commenting, and making suggestions to all parts of my work. I have lost count of how many times we have been short on time because you tirelessly have prepared so many comments and suggestions that took up much longer than our meetings were planned for. You are both brilliant researchers, supervisors, and people in your own right – but I would like to emphasise the interplay and synergy of your competencies, values, and approaches as a reason why you have been such good supervisors for me. Thank you in particular for the period when we all worked from home; you showed a surplus of mental resources when I did not, and you helped and supported me greatly with challenges in working, data collection, teaching, and change of research environment that all were blown up in the air. You saw possibilities when I only saw limitations.

I would like to thank my three mentors, Lotte, Bente, and Heidi. Thank you for getting me into academia, our collaborations since I was a student assistant, and for all I am still learning from you. I hope you can see a little bit of your academic selves in my work and dissertation. Lotte, you are a powerhouse of research, and I like to think that your diligence, meticulousness, and strenuousness have influenced my approach to research. Bente, I am inspired by your "devil-may-care" approach to doing things – perhaps both as an aspiration in my private life and in my way of approaching research. Heidi, you are the most considerate researcher I have met, and you are an exemplary research leader. I would also like to thank my co-authors. Nana, thank you for being an excellent collaborator and for constructively arguing for your perspective. Maria, thank you for really pushing the paper for the better, especially during the time of standstills. Also, to Ken and the public management group at American University, thank you for letting me get a glimpse of a different research environment and for the valuable and important suggestions to the dissertation.

I would like to thank all the managers I have interviewed and discussed the themes in the dissertation with. My hours spent interviewing managers are without doubt the time during my PhD where I have learned the most in

the shortest time. Thank you Magnus for your hard work transcribing the interviews. I would also like to say to all the students I have been privileged to spend time with during my PhD: You are one of the main reasons why doing a PhD is fun, you ensured that I never lost my grip (I think), and it was wonderful to witness your studious efforts. To the students who took part in the Master's course on managerial autonomy, thanks for all our discussions and your work, thoughts, and ideas in your take-home assignments. I genuinely believe you have helped advance my work and the dissertation as well.

I have been fortunate to have excellent office mates who all have helped me along the way and ensured that I stayed caffeinated. Thank you, Søren, for being an important first role model and introducing me to the trade of being a PhD student. Thank you Emily for being an excellent partner in discussion of department gossip, politics, and a bit of research. In addition, thank you for being such as patient listener of when I (occasionally) have some minor grievances. Thank you Mads Pieter for bringing a cheerful drive entering your PhD and reminding me why I decided to start on my project to begin with. The department is full of talented, kind, and top-notch PhD students. Thank you to the PhD group at the department, and thank you, Christoffer, for competently coordinating the group. Also a special thanks to Christoffer encouraging and helping me to apply for an extension of my PhD contract. In addition, special thanks to the PhD mall rats, Mathias, Clara, Trine, Anders, Jørgen, and Mathilde W. Thank you for being such great persons, friends, and colleagues, and I am sorry for all the times I have interrupted your work with random shenanigans. Also thanks to Niels Bjørn, Julian, Aske, and Frederik for being excellent colleagues and always interested in hearing about new and exciting research in public leadership over lunch.

I have also been fortunate to play a part in the activities of the leadership centre, and it has been a privilege to be embedded in such an inspiring and well-functioning research environment. Here, I have found an abundance of role models. Thank you Mathilde C. for taking me down the rabbit hole of qualitative methods and for just being you, a whole and good person to admire. Thank you to Christian J. and Poul, I have been fortunate to know and work with you both since I was a student. I hope we will continue this in the future, I feel like I have even more to learn from you. Thank you to all the inspiring, talented and kind people at the centre: Mads, Anne Mette M., Caroline, Oluf, Louise B., Tine, Anders, Cecilie, Camilla, Mette, Ellen, Daniel, and AK. Also shout out to former centre colleagues, Rebecca, Christian Q., Nanna T., and Lars who now work for the centre's vision elsewhere. The backbone of the good research environment at the department is the brilliant administration. Thanks to Ruth, Lene, Birgit, Line, Helle, Ida, Susanne, Malene, Annette,

and Njall for keeping the department so smoothly afloat, and for always being kind, helpful, and constructive.

Finally, a big thanks to friends and family for putting up with me. Thanks to my family for always being there and for being on my side – and hey, the "assignment" is now done. This is it. Maybe I will even get a real job now. Also a special thanks to my friends at the Monday Club for keeping me sharp in bantering; to the Chess Club for letting me win all our tournaments giving me a lot of self-confidence; and finally, thanks to my two deckhands on the Spækhugger for letting me get some hands-on practice in leadership. Sorry for running the ship aground.

Stefan Boye
Aarhus, November 2021

Chapter 1.
Introduction

The academic and political interest in management and leadership of public organisations has increased manifold in the last decades. The number of empirical studies has climbed sharply, and the parole of management matters is being championed in the academic literature and in public policy. However, for public managers to matter it is reasonable to assume that public managers need some room for manoeuvre in decision-making – they must have *managerial autonomy*. The purpose of the dissertation is to improve our understanding of managerial autonomy in public organisations and the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy.

The study and debate of autonomy of public managers go back to the very beginning of public administration as a research field (Fry and Raadschelders, 2013; Moynihan and Pandey, 2005: 427; Van Wart 2003: 218; Wilson, 1887). In the early years of the study of public administration, arguments were centred on limiting the autonomy of managers vis-à-vis the political level. Woodrow Wilson (1887) argued for a clear line between politics and administration, i.e., politicians should decide the overall direction for society, while the administrative managers should be limited to "a certain degree of administrative autonomy [...] to make policy delivery effective" (Wilson, 1887: 200). Max Weber argued even stronger for limiting managerial autonomy with rules, as the interests of the managers and the bureaucracy could undermine the legitimate will of the politicians (Waters and Waters, 2016). Taylor's (1911) modern and more generic management theory introduced the necessity of managerial autonomy to observe and control the work of employees, and Gulick's (1937: 13) POSDCORB-definition of management (planning, organising, staffing, directing, co-ordinating, reporting, and budgeting) defined a scope of managerial autonomy that is still relevant for public managers today.

Chester Barnard, Herbert Simon, and Mary Parker Follett, among others, added significant theoretical contributions to the manager-centric perspective, arguing that autonomy of managers also emanates from the lower echelons of organisations, e.g., employees (Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1997, see also discussions in Favero et al., 2018 and Fry and Raadschelders, 2013). The debate on the level of managerial autonomy in public organisations rose in the 1940s, challenging the overarching ideal of Wilson and Weber (Van Wart, 2003: 218). On one side of the debate, Finer (1941: 336) took up the defence of traditional thinking and argued that "servants of the public are not to decide their own course; they are to be responsible to the elected representatives of

the public, and these are to determine the course of action of the public servants to the most minute degree that is technically feasible". On the other side of the debate, Leys (1943: 10) stressed that due to the complexity of modern society, "those who enforce the laws must make at least part of the laws which they enforce", and "more and more discretionary powers must be delegated to those who are charged with the regulatory and service functions of government". The period from 1940 to 1980s was characterised by consensus on striving for an "appropriate or modest" degree of managerial autonomy in public organisations where interplay between political and administrative levels was becoming more recognised (Van Wart, 2003: 223). In the 1970s to 1990s, the public management literature focused more on public managers' self-interests. The mainstream ideas drew influence from rational choice economics, and the risks of autonomy of public managers were highlighted, including budget slack (Migué, Bélanger, and Niskanen, 1974), budget maximising (Niskanen, 1971), bureau shaping (Dunleavy, 1991), and personal gain (Moe, 1984). With these concerns in mind – i.e., politicians should legitimately set the course of society, public managers should have some leeway in managing complex public organisations, and the potential risks of self-interests – came New Public Management. Here, the greater extent of managerial autonomy is to be balanced with performance goals set at the political level (de Bruijn, 2010; Hood, 1991; Moynihan, 2006; 2008; van Dooren, Bouckaert, and Halligan, 2015). Contemporary public management theory and practice are partial to New Public Management in regard to managerial autonomy (Bezes and Jeannot, 2018; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). Thus, newer public management thinking manifested in governance paradigms, such as Public Value Management and New Public Governance, also emphasises a high level of managerial autonomy for well-functioning public organisations (Moore, 1995; Torfing et al., 2020: 113-114; 154).

In contemporary Danish policy, there has been a parallel trajectory. In the last decade, commissions and legislation have recommended increased managerial autonomy for public managers (e.g., Lønkommissionen, 2010; Produktivitetskommissionen, 2013; Strukturkommissionen, 2004). Recently, The Danish Management and Leadership Commission (2019) presented seven statements to leaders at all levels, including public managers and politicians. Several explicitly contain recommendations regarding the autonomy of public managers, e.g., "politicians should have faith in leadership" (statement 2), "leaders at all levels should set the course" (statement 5), and "leaders at all levels should set up the team" (statement 6). In continuation hereof, running from May 2021 to September 2024, concrete policy in the form of welfare agreements are being implemented in selected Danish municipalities. The

agreements explicitly entail a higher degree of managerial autonomy in selected welfare organisations in seven municipalities with the intention to foster organisational performance (Act no. 879, Act no. 880; The Prime Minister's Office, 2020).

Thus, throughout the history of public administration as a research field, the concept of managerial autonomy has been a major topic of interest. First, there has been shifting emphasis in terms of what the concept entails, including questions of what it is, what areas are within managers' decision-making, and what areas managers should have autonomy in. Second, there has been a continued discussion of the extent, antecedents, and consequences of managerial autonomy for public managers, and especially what to expect in terms organisational performance. Third, we have seen a relatively constant flow of policy in Denmark recently intended to increase the autonomy of public managers. In the dissertation, I address these central themes.

1.1. Research questions and relevance

Managerial autonomy is generally expected to be lower in public than in private organisations (e.g., Boye et al., 2021; Boye and Tummers, 2021; Boyne, 2002; Pollitt, 2011; Rainey, 2014). Close oversight by elected executives, legislatures, the media, and interest groups limits managers' autonomy (Moore, 1995: 63), and public management is more prone to interventions, interruptions, and constraints of the ability to exercise management and leadership (Rainey, 2014: 81).

Despite the prominence of the concept in academic literature, it is not clear what the concept precisely entails (e.g., Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014: 239; Walker, Boyne, and Brewer, 2010: 276). First, this has led researchers in the field to call for more work on conceptualisation, as the concept has been "imposed by the researchers upon reality", and the observation that there has been no "genuine in-depth investigation of how bureaucrats, regulators or politicians understand the concept of autonomy" (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014: 244-245). Second, the study of managerial autonomy in public organisations has revolved around top-level agency managers close to the political level, while the autonomy of frontline and middle managers has received less attention. Nonetheless, the indirect relation of middle managers to the political level, and the closer proximity to employees, citizens, and the managers' own upper-level management may have significant implications for the very meaning of the concept (e.g., Antonakis and Atwater, 2001; Meier and O'Toole, 2011; Moore, 1995; O'Toole and Meier, 2015; Tummers and t'Hart, 2019).

Revisiting an elusive concept such as managerial autonomy is an important task as the concept is one of the cornerstones in the discipline, essential for many ideas, theories and management doctrines. The risks of unclear concepts are that key theories and assumptions, such as performance management, assumptions of differences between public and private management, and the ideas behind recent public policy all rest on a fragile conceptual foundation. The conceptual study of managerial autonomy, asking the fundamental question, "what are we talking about?" (Gerring, 2012a: 112; Goertz, 2006) thus has the potential to advance the general understanding of public management. A clear and coherent conceptualisation contributes with a common language for academics and practitioners to communicate about public management, and it can provide the building blocks for developing better public management theory (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 165). Specifically, I ask the following research question:

RQ1   What is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?

The concept of managerial autonomy revolves around the assumption that public managers are never isolated from regulations, rules, internal and external stakeholders who wish to control or empower them (Andrews et al., 2012; Bach, 2018; Meier and O'Toole, 2011; Moore, 1995). For instance, work regulation is often assumed to constrain managers and to regulate their relative autonomy vis-à-vis employees regarding when, what kind, and where work is done (Hill et al., 2008). With New Public Management came a focus on private sector management styles, including relaxing ex ante processual controls and increasing managers' autonomy in hiring, firing, and use of rewards (Hood, 1991: 5; Hood and Peters, 2004: 271). The performance management literature has echoed this by arguing that managers "should be given more flexibility in human resources and budgeting matters" (Moynihan, 2008: 26), as "constraints imposed by traditional public organisations have limited the ability of managers to make positive changes" (Moynihan, 2008: 31). The overall goals should be set at the political level, whereas managers at the decentral level should be allowed to make decisions as they see fit at the local level in order to achieve the politically set goals.

Following the developments in contemporary public management theory, the level of managerial autonomy is sought increased through antecedents such as regulation and reforms, based on the notion that increased managerial autonomy has positive consequences for the functioning of public organisations. Paradoxically, a genuine increase in managerial autonomy following recent reforms has apparently failed to appear (Hood, 2000; Jakobsen and Mortensen, 2016; Moynihan, 2006; 2008). Furthermore, it is unclear what consequences to expect from increased managerial autonomy, e.g., in terms of

organisational results and performance. Thus, in order to advance our understanding of managerial autonomy in public organisations, the second aim of the dissertation is to study antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. This contributes with insights about what forms and constitutes managerial autonomy in public organisations, potential implications for how to change managerial autonomy, and what we can expect changes of managerial autonomy to lead to. Specifically, I ask the following research question:

RQ2   What are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy?

1.2. Content and structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of seven chapters. First, in order to take stock of the existing knowledge on managerial autonomy, I systematically review the contemporary literature on managerial autonomy in public organisations in chapter 2. The review provides building blocks for conceptualisation (RQ1), and it exposes existing findings regarding antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy (RQ2). Specifically, I review articles in terms of definitions, operationalisations, and findings on antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in 20 public management journals in the period 2000 to 2019. The review shows that the concept is typically studied at the top-level in government agencies in Europe and United States, that definitions and operationalisations have focused on autonomy in management functions, and that the primary methodological approach has been survey-based. Finally, the empirical focus is on the antecedents of the political environmental and on the consequence for organisational performance.

In chapter 3, I present a conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in public organisations based on the main findings from the review in chapter 2. In the conceptualisation, I define managerial autonomy as *the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities*, and I concretise the scope of managerial autonomy as the capabilities in management and leadership functions. I argue that the concept can be approached as *de jure* managerial autonomy, i.e., objective, e.g., as how it is defined in regulation, and *de facto* managerial autonomy, i.e., subjective, e.g., how it is perceived by the individual manager. Furthermore, I argue that managerial autonomy can be approached as *autonomy to*, i.e., the agency in decision-making, and *autonomy from*, i.e., the exemption of interferences in the decision-making. Finally, I discuss how environmental factors (e.g., publicness, the political environment), organisational factors (e.g., organisational performance, organisational culture), and individual factors (e.g., managerial characteristic) are relevant for understanding managerial autonomy in public organisations.

In chapter 4, I present a methodological approach to studying managerial autonomy as public managers experience it. Specifically, I argue that a qualitative approach with interviews with 17 public managers in three different types of public organisations has the potential to expand and clarify our understanding of managerial autonomy adhering to the investigation of RQ1. The selection of specific public managers for interviewing draws on the systematic review of the antecedents of managerial autonomy in order to maximise the level of variance in conditions of managerial autonomy. The specific interview technique applied focuses on encouraging the interviewed managers to provide examples, putting the concept into a practical context.

In chapter 5, I analyse the qualitative data collected in the interviews. I show how the conceptualisation in the dissertation meaningfully can be used to analyse and understand how the interviewed managers experience managerial autonomy in public organisations. The main finding in the chapter is that managerial autonomy is relative to environmental, organisational, and individual factors as it is experienced and expressed in continued bargaining with these factors in terms of both de jure/de facto managerial autonomy, and managerial autonomy to/from. To conclude the chapter, and in order to assess the overall validity of the conceptualisation, I discuss the goodness of the concept and conclude that the conceptualisation has strengths in resonance, familiarity, and theoretical depth, while it has some weaknesses in differentiation to other concepts and in terms of parsimony.

In chapter 6, I present three manuscripts that relate to RQ2. In the manuscripts, I investigate managerial autonomy at Danish public schools, and the methodological approaches are all quantitative analyses with repeated observations over time, either as difference-in-difference or fixed effects panel analysis of survey data. The case of Danish public schools offers spatial and temporal variance in managerial autonomy, a high number of units to analyse quantitatively, and reasonable similarities with public management in general, providing an opportune possibility to study the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in public organisations. In manuscript A (Regulation), I investigate the regulative antecedents of managerial autonomy; specifically, the association between adoption of local regulation and managerial autonomy. The manuscript argues that the specific content of the regulation, how internal and external stakeholders have been involved in regulative process, and how formalised the regulation is are important variables explaining the managerial autonomy experienced by the managers. Manuscript B (Work organisation) and C (Performance goals) investigate the consequences of managerial autonomy for organisational performance. In manuscript B, I study how the relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees in terms of work organisation affects organisational performance. Specifically,

I show how work organisation allowing employees autonomy to spend some of their working hours away from their physical workplace has small positive associations with organisational performance. In manuscript C, the association between managerial autonomy coupled with performance goals set at superjacent level is tested in terms of organisational performance. The manuscript concludes that managerial autonomy coupled with a high focus on performance goals is associated positively with organisational performance. Table 1.1 summarises the titles and subquestions addressed in the three manuscripts.

Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the dissertation's contributions, some considerations on future research paths, and practical and policy implications that can be drawn from the dissertation.

List of manuscripts in the dissertation:

A. Bente Bjørnholt, Stefan Boye, and Nana Wesley Hansen (2021). The influence of regulative contents, stakeholders, and formalization on managerial autonomy perceived at the frontline. *Public Management Review:* 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1912818.

B. Stefan Boye (n.d.). Decentralizing autonomy in work organization and the relationship to organizational performance. In review.

C. Bente Bjørnholt, Stefan Boye, and Maria Falk Mikkelsen (n.d.). The Dangers of Half-hearted Managerialism: A Panel study of the Link between Managerial Autonomy, Performance Goals and Organizational Performance. In review.

Table 1.1: Short titles and subquestion addressed in the manuscripts

Manuscript	Short title	Subquestion addressed in the manuscript
A	Regulation (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Nana Wesley Hansen)	How does the content of regulation, how stakeholders have been involved in the regulation, and the degree of formalisation of the regulation affect subjective managerial autonomy?
B	Work organisation	What is the relationship between work organisation regulating the autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees and organisational performance?
C	Performance goals (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Maria Falk Mikkelsen)	How do performance goals defined at superjacent level affect the relationship between managerial autonomy at the frontline and organisational performance?

Chapter 2.
Literature review

The aim of the chapter is to take stock of the literature on managerial autonomy. The review informs both research questions, as I review, first, how the contemporary literature conceptualises managerial autonomy and, second, the empirical findings in terms of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. The review provides the basis for the conceptualisation advanced in chapter 3, and it exposes the antecedents and consequences in the literature, enabling me to situate the three manuscripts in the dissertation in chapter 6. Specifically, I conduct a systematic review of the contemporary public management literature.

The chapter is structured as follows. I present the systematic review approach (section 2.1), give an overview of the literature (section 2.2), analyse the definitions applied in the literature (section 2.3), analyse operationalisations of the concept (section 2.4), and finally, I review and present an overview of empirical antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in the contemporary literature (section 2.5).

2.1. A systematic review approach

In this section, I present my approach to the literature review, including search strategy (section 2.1.1), screening and review of articles (section 2.1.2), limitations and scope of the review (2.1.3), and coding of articles (section 2.1.4). I use a systematic review approach to expose the different definitions, conceptualisations, operationalisations, antecedents, and consequences of the concept (Gerring, 1999; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016; Post et al., 2020). With an established concept such as managerial autonomy, a literature review is a critical first step in developing concepts and conceptualisation according to Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2016: 170) and Jaccard and Jacoby (2020).

Specifically, a *systematic* review requires a specific systematic methodology that, compared to, e.g., more traditional literature reviews, ensures a comprehensive and complete picture of the literature (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). Thus, the studies in the review are not chosen to be part of a theoretical argument; the articles are included solely if they relate to the concept. A systematic review aims to summarise literature objectively and transparently.

In practice, I follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA lists items that

must be reported in order to conduct robust, replicable, and transparent literature reviews. This ensures that a review serves as a method to comprehensively and carefully examine existing research (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 99; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). PRISMA has increasingly been applied in systematic reviews in public management (e.g., Boye and Tummers, 2021; Boye et al., 2021; De Vries, Bekkers, and Tummers, 2016; Hansen and Tummers, 2020; Overman, 2016; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers, 2016). The PRISMA-checklist is found in Appendix A, and the data generated from the review is available at the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/63rp7/?view_only=56bbe886019d460d8188867c312038b0).

Before embarking on a detailed literature review, one must ensure that no other reviews have been published recently (Pettigrew and Roberts, 2006: 29). There are other relevant reviews relevant to the research questions, e.g., regarding the effect of managerial autonomy and organisational autonomy in public organisations (Verhoest et al. 2004), delegation (Overman, 2016), and of managerial discretion in the generic management literature (Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker, 2015). Likewise, there is a rather long list of reviews of the effect of management in public organisations (e.g., Andrews et al., 2007; Boyne, 2003; Bryson, Berry and Yang, 2010; George et al., 2021; Meier and O'Toole, 2009; Walker and Andrews, 2015). However, there is no recent systematic review specifically on the concept of managerial autonomy and conceptualisation in public organisations.

2.1.1. Search strategy

In order to perform a systematic search in the literature on a specific concept or phenomenon, one needs to determine what labels have been applied to describe the concept, i.e., which words to include in the search string. Walker, Boyne, and Brewer (2010: 276) note that "the concept of autonomy is referred to in many different ways (for example, it has been called discretion, flexibility, risk taking, entrepreneurship, and other terms), and it resonates with many different theoretical perspectives". The quote indicates that the concept is embedded in a "semantically crowded field" (Gerring, 1999: 382). In the dissertation, I exclusively label the concept managerial autonomy (I discuss this choice more in detail in section 3.1), however, it is not the only label used to describe the – seemingly same – concept in the literature.

Following an initial reading of the literature, I settled on searching for three main labels to uncover the relevant literature: "managerial autonomy", "managerial authority", and "managerial discretion". I chose the three labels to strike a balance of identifying eligible, relevant studies and not capture too many non-relevant studies (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 79-84). I noted

from my first reading of the literature that the labels have seemingly been used interchangeably, sometimes in the same articles. In section 2.2, I analyse and discuss whether there are substantial, conceptual differences in the labels used or whether the differences are more semantic. To ensure that I searched for articles that relate to management or a manager, I use the words "administration", "manage", "govern", or "leader" and all variants of the words, marked with asterisk, "*". To focus the search on managerial autonomy in public organisations, I include the search term "public*" as well. Using the Scopus database, I performed the following search in October 2020:

> TITLE-ABS-KEY (public* AND (administrat* OR manage* OR govern* OR leader*) AND (authorit* OR autonom* OR discretion*)) AND SOURCE-ID (#Journal ID#) AND PUBYEAR AFT 1999

As indicated by the AFT operator, I limited the search to studies published after 1999. First, I did this to focus the systematic review on the contemporary literature, which maximises applicability for the current the state of public management. Second, I did it for practical reasons, since the concept has been studied intensively since public administration became a research field. I focused the search to 20 major public administration and public management journals, and I selected the 20 journals from the top of the Scimago Journal Rank from 2019, and the journals' scope of interest in public management (e.g., self-declared scope of interest on the journal homepage). The 20 journals are reported in Appendix B.

2.1.2. Screening and reviewing eligible articles

The next step in the systematic review is to go from a large number of potential studies to a number of eligible studies, i.e., the studies on the focal concept. In order to extract eligible studies of managerial autonomy published in the period 2000-2019, I went through the search results. First, I screened the articles, i.e., read their title and abstract to determine whether either indicated the relevance of the article; second, I read the full text to determine the final eligibility of the article. The process is illustrated in a PRISMA flowchart in figure 2.1.

The search resulted in 929 articles. The words "autonomy", "authority", and "discretion" are used extensively in the public administration literature to describe a wide range of concepts, theories, and empirical contexts. Thus, I expected to exclude many articles by screening title and abstract, and I ended up excluding 775 articles. Next, reading the full text of the remaining 154 articles, I excluded studies based on three criteria: i) the article does not concern

autonomy, ii) the article concerns employee autonomy, and iii) the article concerns organisational autonomy.

Based on the first exclusion criterion, I excluded articles that use the concept in passing to justify and explain how public management differs from private management, as well as studies of managers' job autonomy (e.g., Hansen and Villadsen, 2010), red tape (e.g., Brewer et al., 2012), decentralisation (e.g., Andrews and de Vries, 2007; Christensen, 2000), and delegation (e.g., Vroom, Genugten, and van Thiel, 2019). Next, I excluded articles about employee autonomy (e.g., Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty and Fernandez, 2017; Sandfort, 2000; Sowa and Selden, 2003). Finally, a large – and difficult – group of studies to assess were studies on organisational autonomy. The excluded studies concern autonomy of organisations without relating this to management or leadership, for instance Ege's (2017) comparison of autonomy of internal public administrations, Thynne and Wettenhall's (2004) discussion of historical contributions to the understanding of organisational autonomy, and Yu and Gao's (2013) study of the decentralisation of organisational autonomy in China.

In order to include relevant studies not captured by the database search of the 20 journals, I tracked the citations of the most cited studies in the sample on managerial autonomy, i.e., Moynihan (2006), Moynihan and Pandey (2005) and Verhoest et al. (2004) (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 98-99). This added eight more studies to my sample.

Figure 2.1: PRISMA flowchart: Identifying and retaining studies on managerial autonomy

Identification

Records identified
through database search
(n = 929)

Screening

Records after
duplicates removed
(n = 929)

Title and abstract
screened
(n = 929)

Records excluded
(n = 775)

Eligibility

Full-text articles
assessed
for eligibility
(n = 154)

Full-text articles excluded (n = 99)
Not autonomy (n = 50)
Employee autonomy (n = 20)
Organizational autonomy (n = 29)

Included

Articles included
(n = 63)

Cite-tracking key articles
(n = 8)

Note: Following Moher et al. (2009).

2.1.3. Limitations and scope of the review

Before moving on to the specific coding and analysis of the articles in the review, it is important to make some notes on the scope and limitations of the review. First, the different ways of labelling the concept have made it hard to search for and identify articles. I have chosen the three major labels from a potential myriad of sublabels, e.g., by leaving out "flexibility", "risk taking", and "entrepreneurship" as suggested by Walker, Boyne, and Brewer (2010: 276), due to practical limitations (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 84). The proportion of articles retrieved from the search is (63-8)/929 = 0.06, i.e., about 6%, indicating that I have struck a relatively good balance in this regard. The proportion of relevant articles corresponds to similar systematic reviews in the literature that use the PRISMA-approach (e.g., Andersen, Boesen, and Pedersen, 2016: 5%; Boye at al., 2021: 3%; Boye and Tummers, 2021: 5%; Hansen and Tummers, 2020: 4%; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers, 2015: 2%).

Second, many concepts are similar or related to managerial autonomy (Goertz, 2006: 29), e.g., delegation, decentralisation, red tape, accountability, and responsibility, which increases the potential for blurry boundaries between concepts. This limits systematic reviews if authors situate or refer to their research with words not captured by the search string. For instance, the concept of delegation concerns "transfer of decision powers over a public task from an organisation that is directly controlled by a democratically elected official or a member of a presidential cabinet to another public or private organization" (Overman, 2016: 1240), and decentralisation specifically focuses on delegation from higher to lower levels. On the one hand, this is an organisational-level variable at a higher level than managerial autonomy as it focuses on organisational capacity, not specifically related to a manager or relating to management. On the other hand, authors may not have focused on this subtle difference in their choice of words. Another related concept is red tape perceived by public managers (e.g. Brewer et al., 2012), which very likely overlaps conceptually with managerial autonomy as well.

Third, this is a systematic review exclusively of articles published in journals within a limited period. The general public management literature is obviously also relevant to understanding managerial autonomy in public organisations, e.g., Meier and O'Toole (2011), Moore (1995), Rainey (2014), Simon (1997), and in the "grey literature", e.g., reports, conference papers, dissertations, theses, book chapters, and ongoing research (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 80; 90-98). In the conceptualisation in chapter 3, I incorporate the broader literature as well, but it is not *systematically* uncovered as the articles in this chapter. Nonetheless, the process of reading, reviewing and coding the

article-based literature from 2000 to 2019 has exposed me to many relevant sources I also use in the conceptualisation in chapter 3.

2.1.4. Coding of articles

In order to guide and extract the relevant information of existing conceptualisations and antecedents/consequences of managerial autonomy, I systematically coded the 63 eligible articles in three overall themes: i) background characteristics, ii) conceptualisation, and iii) antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. The codebook is available in appendix C. The coding makes it possible for me to extract the relevant information from the studies needed to compare, discuss, and analyse the conceptualisations, antecedents, and consequences (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 51; 154-155).

First, coding the background characteristics gives me an overview of the methodologies and empirical context of the articles. As the dissertation draws on insights from the literature as a whole, it is important to uncover any scope conditions to the concept, e.g., whether it only applies to one level of management or in a specific empirical setting (Goertz, 2006: 193). Specifically, I coded the studies in terms of i) authors, ii) year of publication, iii) publishing journal, iv) methodological approach, v) type of sample investigated (e.g., areas, types of managers, sample size), and vi) level of management in four categories, i.e., *not explicit* for articles not describing the level of management; *top level*, for articles investigating senior level managers and bureaucrats close to the political level; *frontline*, for articles investigating managers lower in the hierarchy, middle managers, and frontline managers; and *various*, for articles with samples of managers on various hierarchical levels.

Second, to expose existing conceptualisations applied in the literature, I code the explicit definition of the focal concept applied in the article (if explicit in the article), and how the article had operationalised it (if studied empirically, and if explicit in the article) as "it helps identify what other scholars feel are the defining characteristics of the concept" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 170). The systematic coding of definitions and conceptual operationalisations allows me to compare them systematically and find difference, communalities, and contrasts. Furthermore, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2016: 180) recommend focusing on the operationalisations of concepts, as "ambiguities in a conceptual definition often reveal themselves when a scientist is trying to operationalize a concept" (see also Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 99).

Third, I coded antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy exposed in the articles (if any). Whereas a definition specifies what a concept is, and sometimes what it can affect, its antecedents supply information about

where it has been (i.e., its history and development) and/or how it is formed or influenced. Consequences specify how it affects other concepts. Focusing on antecedents and consequences follows the approach by Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015) on the concept of managerial discretion in the generic management literature. In their review, they distinguish between antecedents and consequences on three factors, and to structure the findings in the existing literature, I follow Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015) and code whether the antecedents/consequences concern environmental, organisational, or individual factors to organise and condense the findings in the literature (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 171-177).

In this section, I have presented the systematic review approach. Following a search of the contemporary public management literature, I have identified 63 articles related to managerial autonomy. The concept of managerial autonomy seems to be a semantically crowded field with many similar concepts. In the next section, I start by analysing some background characteristics of the literature to determine whether the literature can be approached as coherent and on the same concept.

2.2. Background overview of literature

In this section, I analyse the background characteristics of the identified articles. Before I can meaningfully review the literature as a whole, I analyse, first, label uses and to what extent the articles are commensurable and concern the same concepts or phenomena. As mentioned, the concept managerial autonomy attracts many different words, labels, and definitions. On the one hand, this could indicate *conceptual confusion*, i.e., inconsistently applied concepts (Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu, 2006: 212), or *conceptual proliferation*, i.e., the development of concepts with different names but overlapping conceptual domains (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 166). Both potentially harm the accumulation of research and knowledge, as it leads to confusion among researchers. In even worse cases, researchers might interpret the different labels as distinctive entities and build streams of research around one of them, while others treat them interchangeably (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020). On the other hand, the different label uses could be a manifest of different *systemised concepts* of the same *background concept* (Adcock and Collier, 2001). Background concepts are "the broad constellation of meanings and understandings associated with a given concept" (Adcock and Collier, 2001: 531). If this is the case, labels and conceptualisations of managerial autonomy, managerial discretion, and managerial authority could, potentially, all relate to the same overarching background concept.

First, from the first part of the coding of year, journal, author, method, sample, and level of management, I can conclude that the articles are published relatively evenly in the investigated period, with 28 articles between 2000 to 2010 and 35 between 2011 and 2019. Most articles are published in *Journal of Public Administration and Theory* (n = 10), followed by *Public Management Review* (n = 9), *Review of Public Personnel Administration* (n = 5), and *Public Administration Review* (n = 5). A dozen authors have published more than two articles, with the most active authors publishing nine articles, and the two next most active six articles. The dominant methodological approach is surveys (n = 42 articles) and case studies (n = 12), thus corresponding to findings of general systematic reviews of public management literature (Boye and Tummers, 2021; Groeneveld et al., 2015). The level of investigated managers is typically top (n = 32), various (n = 16), frontline/middle (n = 9), and not explicit (n = 6). Second, in coding the background characteristics and reading the literature, I was able to inductively identify four research streams revolving around the empirical subject matter, e.g., what managers are studied, what type of public organisations, and to some extent what countries. Out of the 63 eligible studies, I was able to classify 42 articles to a specific stream of research based on the empirical object studied, i.e., European government agencies, U.S. local government, HRM-reforms, and public schools.

Table 2.1 shows an overview. The largest group of studies of managerial autonomy concern European government agencies, typically managerial autonomy as an aspect of agentification, i.e., disaggregation of ministerial organisations. The label used in this literature is almost exclusively "managerial autonomy", and the studies in the stream are typically based on surveys of top-level bureaucrats. The U.S.-based counterpart to this stream of research labels the concept "managerial authority", and articles in this stream approach the concept in theories of performance management and managing for results reforms. Like the European sister stream, the main methodological approach is surveys of top-level managers. When reading and reviewing the literature, I found noticeably little co-citing and relation between these two research streams, indicating some extent of conceptual proliferation. The third stream focuses on public schools, and the topic is often how managerial autonomy relates to organisational performance. The methodological designs in this stream offer some advantages compared to the three others in terms of making causal claims due to quasi-experimental and experimental approaches. The final stream of research concerns HRM-reforms and focusses on work organisation in public organisations, e.g., the relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees, and managers' autonomy to hire and fire employees.

Table 2.1: Four major streams of research distinguished by empirical context

Empirical object	European agencies	U.S. local government	Public schools	HRM-reforms
Main label	Autonomy	Authority	Various	Authority/ discretion
Management level	Top-level	Top-level	Frontline/ middle	Various
Main method	Survey	Survey	Quasi-experimental	Survey, administrative data
Theoretical approaches	Agentification, NPM, principal-agent	NPM, principal-agent, performance information	NPM, leadership theories	U.S. state reforms (Georgia), HRM
Most active researchers	Verhoest, K. (9), Wynen, J. (6), Verschuere, B. (4)	Moynihan, D.P. (5), Pandey. S.K. (3)	Andersen, S.C. (2), Nielsen, P. A. (2)	Coggburn, J.D. (2)
n	21	8	8	5

Note: n = 21 classified in "other" category.

Finally, for 21 articles, I was not able to pinpoint a specific, common empirical context. This group of studies is quite diverse and includes studies on government agencies in Canada (Aubert and Bourdeu, 2012; Lonti, 2005; Lonti and Verma, 2003), Hong Kong (Painter and Yee, 2011), Australia (Aulich, Batainah, and Wettenhall, 2010), New Zealand (Löfgren et al., 2018), Sweden (Pemer, Börjeson, and Werr, 2020), Japan (Yammato, 2006), and South Korea (Kim and Cho, 2014). The other category also comprises studies of hospital reforms in Singapore and Hong Kong (Caulfield and Liu, 2006; Ramesh, 2008), the autonomy of water utilities managers in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Braadbaart, Eybergen, and Hoffer, 2007), Swedish managers in the social insurance system (Karlsson, 2019), and managers in the Dutch police and medical sector (Knies and Leisink, 2014).

In sum, the literature focuses primarily on top-level management, empirical investigations are based on surveys, and I have identified four major streams demarcated mainly by the empirical context studied. On the one hand, the label use of the different streams to some extent indicates conceptual proliferation. For instance, in the stream investigating European agencies, managerial autonomy is used almost exclusively. In the U.S.-based performance management literature, managerial authority is used. On the other hand, in reading the reviewed articles, it seems, at first glance, like the labels managerial discretion, managerial authority and managerial autonomy are

used interchangeably, and many authors switch between the labels through-out the manuscript. This indicates, to a higher extent, semantic differences in choice of labels, or systemised concepts on the same background concept (Ad-cock and Collier, 2001). In the next section, I analyse whether the definitions applied in the streams of research differ.

2.3. Definitions

In this section, I review the specific definitions applied in the contemporary literature, as it gives an overview of what other scholars feel are the defining characteristics of the concept (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016; 170).

In order to analyse and understand how the existing literature has defined managerial autonomy, I approach the definitions with Sartori's (1970) level of abstractness and Adcock and Collier's (2001) notion of background and sys-tematised concepts. Sartori (1970) argues that a fundamental feature of con-cepts is the level of abstractness, i.e., high-level abstraction concepts are de-fined in broad extensions with few attributes. These concepts are typically conducive to generalisations but also prone to vagueness and conceptual ob-scurity. Lower-level abstraction concepts have narrow extensions and specific attributes, are more accurate but more contextual and less generalisable. In a similar vein, Adcock and Collier (2001: 531) distinguish between background concepts as a "broad constellation of meanings and understandings associated with a given concept", and systematised concepts as "specific formulation of a concept sued by a given scholar or group of scholars".

One the on hand, it is important to note that the "most appropriate defini-tion of a social class depends on how the construct is used in the theory being advanced and how it fosters coherence in the overall theory" (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 99). Gerring (1999: 380) notes that more "powerful" concepts and labels allow inference of "many things". Sartori (1970: 64) and Adcock and Collier (2001: 539) warn against "conceptual stretching" in the quest to de-velop more generalisable concepts, where researchers extend the number of cases to which a conceptual definition applies without changing the set of at-tributes used to define the concept. The result is a conceptual mismatch be-tween the attributes used to define the concept and the cases the concept en-compasses. Thus, there are some trade-offs in the level of abstractness in def-initions.

Table 2.2 presents a list of definitions from my categorisation of all the explicit definitions I have been able to identify in the 63 articles (n = 46, for a full overview of all identified definitions and my categorisation, see open data on OSF). I have categorised the definitions in high, medium, and low level of

abstractness. The specific definitions presented in the table are chosen as representative of their group of definitions in the literature in terms of abstractness. The most abstract definitions have a maximal extension, e.g., "the degree of freedom and authority managers have to decide what to do" (Knies and Leisink, 2014: 118)", while the least abstract definitions have maximal intension, e.g., "the relative freedom that managers experience in decision-making processes related to the inputs and processes of the organization, for example, with regard to planning, organizing, budgeting, and staffing" (Van der Voet and Van de Walle, 2018: 10).

My categorisation of the definitions is distributed evenly in the three levels of abstractness. Overall, there are many similarities in the definitions. First, most definitions explicitly refer to decisions or decision-making (e.g., Knies and Leisink, 2014; Moynihan and Pandey, 2006; Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert, 2007). Second, the concept is mostly defined in positive terms, i.e., by focusing on the possibilities in decision-making. To a lesser extent, the definitions in the literature also underline negatively defined elements as the absence of barriers or constraints. For example, Wynen and Verhoest (2015: 358) include "independently from political and administrative principals on the choice and use of resources", and Verschuere and Barbieri (2009: 349) include "without interference from the oversight authority" in their definition. Third, the definitions emphasise a state of autonomy, and some qualify this further by explicitly pointing to the concept being experienced or subjective. For example, Van der Voet and Van de Walle (2018: 10, my *emphasis*) define the concept with reference to "freedom that managers *experience* …".

The definitions in the medium and low level of abstractness typically also define the concept with reference specifically to particular managerial areas of decision-making, e.g., "planning, organizing, budgeting, and staffing" (Van der Voet and Van de Walle, 2018: 10). Thus, many definitions explicitly identify the concept as multidimensional (e.g., Verhoest et al., 2004). One thing to note in this regard is that the definitions in the reviewed literature almost exclusively focus on management, e.g., planning, budgeting, organising, staffing and controlling, all aspects under the POSDCORB-acronym (Gulick, 1937: 13; Yukl and Gardner, 2020: 51). In comparison, the reviewed literature focuses very little on autonomy in leadership, i.e., a manager's autonomy to establish shared direction, align, motivate, and inspire employees (Kotter, 2008: 4-5).

Table 2.2: Level of abstractness in definitions in the literature

Abstraction		Examples of labels and definitions
High level (n = 14)	Universal, broad extension, few attributes or properties	Discretionary room as "the degree of freedom and authority managers have to decide what to do" (Knies and Leisink, 2014: 118).
		Managerial discretion as "the latitude of action managers have in a given situation" (Karlsson, 2019: 316).
Medium (n = 16)		Managerial authority defined as "there are a number of different aspects of managerial authority: budgetary, personnel, procurement, etc. What binds these different aspects of authority together is the idea of freedom in decision making" (Moynihan and Pandey, 2006: 124).
		Managerial autonomy defined by "decision making as to the choice and use of financial, human and other resources at strategic or operational level" (Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert, 2007: 471)
		Managerial autonomy defined "as the extent to which an organization can decide independently from political and administrative principals on the choice and use of resources (Verhoest et al. 2004) and thus refers to the managerial decisions senior managers can make" (Wynen and Verhoest, 2015: 358).
Low level (n = 16)	Narrow extension, specific attributes or properties	Managerial autonomy defined as "having its own decision-making competences without interference from the oversight authority, for example about the use of organizational resources such as finance and HR (managerial autonomy), or about the policy in the field where the agency is active (policy autonomy)" (Verschuere and Barbieri, 2009: 349).
		Managerial autonomy refers to "the relative freedom that managers experience in decision-making processes related to the inputs and processes of the organization, for example, with regard to planning, organizing, budgeting, and staffing" (Van der Voet and Van de Walle, 2018: 10).

Note: n = 18 articles contain no explicit definition of managerial autonomy.

Due to this and the conclusion that there are several streams of literature on the concept, I have not been able to identify different levels of abstractness in the definitions in different streams. I find no association (chi^2(8) = 9.41, p = 0.31) between the five empirical streams (including the category "other"), and the level of abstractness in the definitions thus indicates that the concept is not treated differently in the literature. I also investigate this more qualitatively and to exemplify this, consider Moynihan and Pandey's definition (2006: 124) in table 2.2, where they stress the that the concept is freedom in decision-making over a range of different areas, e.g., budgetary, personnel, procurement. This definition is representative and influential in the literature on U.S. local government. Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert's (2007: 471) definition stresses decision-making and is close to Moynihan and Pandey's (2006: 124). Thus, there seems to be some evidence of conceptual proliferation, i.e., development of concepts with different names but overlapping conceptual domains (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 166), indicated by the parallel use of the labels managerial autonomy (e.g., Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert, 2007) and managerial authority (e.g., Moynihan and Pandey, 2006). However, substantially the definitions seem to overlap, which indicates that the articles relate to the same background concept, making it reasonable to treat the literature as a whole.

In sum, the definitions vary in terms of abstractness, and most definitions are closely related to management rather than leadership. The definitions focus on decision-making, positively defined as the possibilities to take decisions, but to some extent also incorporate negatively defined elements, as the absence of barriers and constraints in making decisions. The definitions mainly emphasise a "state of having autonomy", and some refer to a subjective or perceived notion of having it. There seems to be no significant differences in terms of abstractness or content of the definitions in the different streams of literature, implying that it is meaningful to use and combine the insights from the different streams in the review of the literature as a whole (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 98). In chapter 3, I therefore draw on the literature as a whole to advance the conceptualisation in the dissertation. In the next section, I further investigate the conceptual domain by focusing on how the studies operationalise managerial autonomy.

2.4. Operationalisations

In this section, I review the specific operationalisation of the concept in the reviewed articles in order to uncover in more detail what *managerial autonomy is*, as "ambiguities in a conceptual definition often reveal themselves when a scientist is trying to operationalize a concept" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

and Podsakoff, 2016: 180; see also Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 99). Like many social science concepts, managerial autonomy in public organisations is not directly observed; we can only obtain indirect evidence of the concept and its relationships with other concepts through operationalisation (Goertz, 2006: 7). Specifically, the section is divided into subsections of survey operationalisations (section 2.4.1) and non-survey operationalisations (section 2.4.2).

2.4.1. Survey operationalisations

42 out of 63 studies have explicit survey measures of managerial autonomy, and most of them rely on self-reporting by public managers on a set of survey items. Most often, a summative index from a list of items is used to construct a scale and/or subscale of managerial autonomy. An item pool of the reviewed literature is available in the open data on OSF. I have identified 343 survey items in 42 studies that use surveys to measure managerial autonomy. Three datasets have been utilised in several studies, which causes overlap in the items used, i.e., the survey from the COBRA-studies (e.g. Boon and Wynen, 2017), the dataset of NASP-IV (e.g., Moynihan and Pandey, 2006), and CO-COPS-studies (e.g., Bezes and Jeannot, 2018). I found no articles in the contemporary literature dedicated to validating multi-item psychometric scales, e.g., testing the content, construct, and criterion validity of the focal concept (DeVellis, 2016: 83-103).

Many studies construct subscales of managerial autonomy. Moynihan (2006) constructs two indexes of "financial management authority" and "human resources managerial authority". Painter and Yee (2011) construct an index of "strategic personnel autonomy", one for "operational personnel autonomy", and a third for "financial management autonomy". Vershuere (2007) and Vershuere and Barbieri (2009) distinguish between six substantive aspects of managerial autonomy in their survey operationalisation, i.e., "strategic HRM autonomy", "operational HRM autonomy", "strategic financial managerial autonomy", "operational financial managerial autonomy", "policy autonomy vis-à-vis the political oversight authority", and "policy autonomy vis-à-vis the administrative oversight authority". The COBRA-survey of agency managers in multiple European countries is the most featured in the literature and is used in Bach (2014), Boon and Wynen (2017), Wynen, Verhoest, and Rübecksen (2014), Wynen et al. (2014), and Wynen and Verhoest (2015, 2016). The survey measures managerial autonomy on two subdimensions, i.e., "personnel management autonomy" and "financial management autonomy". Thus, the specific survey operationalisations seem to correspond to the defi-

nitions and the examples provided in the definitions in table 2.2, e.g., by relating to autonomy in management functions and by emphasising the multidimensional nature of the concept.

The specific number of items vary in the literature. In Moynihan and Pandey (2006), centralisation of decision-making authority is based on three items; in Lonti and Verma (2003), an index of managerial autonomy is calculated from 11 items; and in Moynihan (2006), indexes of financial management authority are calculated based on four items, and a human resources managerial authority index on 18 items. In a handful of studies, the authors apply a more overall, reflective approach to measuring managerial autonomy by measuring more broad subjective experiences and perceptions, e.g., Knies and Leisink's (2014) five-item index of "discretionary room", and Moynihan and Pandey's (2005) index of "centralization of decision-making authority", or Kirkhaug and Mikalsen's (2009) of superior authority position. As for the definitions, discussed in section 2.3, some survey items denote the negatively defined aspect of the managerial autonomy concept. For example, in the COBRA-survey (e.g., Boon and Wynen, 2017), the specific items are qualified by the sentence "without ministerial or departmental influence". In the NASP-IV survey, the items are qualified by "until a supervisor approves a decision" (Moynihan and Pandey, 2005).

Turning to the specific items included in the operationalisations in the studies that apply surveys, there seems to be some consensus about what constitutes the scope of managerial autonomy. In order to uncover this, I inductively categorised what area or management/leadership function the survey items focused on (see table 2.3). I find that the survey operationalisations in the literature most often include items regarding the extent of managers' autonomy over staffing in terms hiring, firing, and promoting (n = 30). Second are items on autonomy over budget and financial spending of resources (n = 28). Fewer items focus on elements of performance management (n = 18), salary/rewards (n = 17), organisational change (n = 11), policies and goals (n = 8), and work organisation (n = 2). Thus, in accordance with the conclusion of the review of definitions, the prime focus seems to be on autonomy in management functions and to a lesser extent leadership.

Table 2.4: Scope of managerial autonomy in survey items

Area (n)	Description	Examples
Hiring, firing (30/42)	Managerial autonomy in hiring, firing, or promotion of employees	Moynihan (2006), Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert (2007), Roness et al. (2008), Verhoest and Wynen (2018), Yammato (2006)
Budgeting (28/42)	Managerial autonomy over budgets, spending, loans	Lonti (2005), Van de Walle (2018), Verschuere and Barbieri (2009), Aulich, Batainah, and Wettenhall (2010), Krause and Van Thiel (2019)
Performance management (18/42)	Managerial autonomy of performance management, evaluation of employees, training/developing	Painter and Yee (2011), Boon and Wynen (2017), Williamson (2011), Krause and Van Thiel (2019), Bach (2014)
Salary, rewards (17/42)	Managerial autonomy over level of salaries, and use of rewards	Coggburn (2001), Lonti and Verma (2003), Nielsen (2014), Van der Voet and Van de Walle (2018), Braadbaart, Eybergen, and Hoffer(2007)
Organisational change (11/42)	Managerial autonomy over organisational structures, and how the organisation operates	Bezes and Jeannot (2018), Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018), Van de Walle (2019), Aulich, Batainah, and Wettenhall (2010),
Policies and goal setting (8/42)	Managerial autonomy in choice, development, and implementation of policy and goals	Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014), Nielsen (2014), Verhoest et al. (2004)
Work organisation (2/42)	Managerial autonomy over employees' working hours, location, and tasks	Knies and Leisink (2014), Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018)

2.4.2. Non-survey operationalisations

In the other group of operationalisations, the concept is not operationalised via surveys. A major part of studies in this group focus on reforms or policy changes related to managerial autonomy. For instance, Nigro and Kellough (2000) study the removal of merit-system protection and placing of personnel management decisions in line agencies. Hays and Sowa (2006: 106) study HRM reforms that aim to increase "administrative flexibility, add responsiveness, and expedite hiring and other important supervisory decisions". Ramesh (2008) studies years of reforms of the Singaporean hospital sector.

Another approach is to operationalise the concept from administrative data or formal organisation to determine the level of managerial autonomy. Coggburn (2000) argues that managerial autonomy at state-level can be

measured by dividing the number of part-time employees by the sum of full-time employees. Alkadry and Tower (2011) use the number of people a manager supervises and the annual procurement level as a measure, and Pemer, Börjeson, and Werr (2020) argue for governance structure as a valid measure of managerial autonomy.

Four studies utilise (quasi)-experimental changes to managerial autonomy. Cardenas and Cruz (2017), Birdsall (2017), and Wang and Yeung (2019) use the fact that some states adopt policies increasing and/or decreasing managerial autonomy in difference-in-difference analyses and the synthetic control method. Andersen and Moynihan (2016) randomise school principals to four groups of varying managerial autonomy to hire a new employee in the only field-experiment found in the literature.

In sum, the operationalisations in the literature provide insights to identifying the scope of managerial autonomy by showing what and how authors have approached operationalisation and measurement. Specifically, the review shows that the prime focus has been on autonomy in management functions, and to a lesser extent leadership functions. The literature is mainly survey-based. Furthermore, some case studies study managerial autonomy as the adoption of formal reforms. In chapter 3, where I advance the conceptualisation in the dissertation, I will draw on these insights. In chapter 6, I present the three manuscripts in the dissertation. In manuscript A (Regulation) and manuscript C (Performance goals), I measure the level of managerial autonomy using panel surveys of school principals, and in manuscript B (Work organisation), I utilize a reform of the work organisation. In the next section, the empirical findings of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy are reviewed.

2.5. Antecedents and consequences

The dissertation asks first, *what is managerial autonomy, and how is it conceptualised* (RQ1), and second, *what are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy* (RQ2). The review of empirical findings in terms of antecedents and consequences in the literature directly informs RQ2 and to some extent RQ1. I follow Goertz (2006: 5), who notes, "concept analysis involves ascertaining the constitutive characteristics of a phenomenon that have central causal powers … a purely semantic analysis of concepts, words, and their definitions is never adequate by itself". Thus, whereas a definition specifies what a concept is, and an operationalisation tells how the concept is measured or observed, its antecedents supply information about where it has been, i.e., its history and development, and/or how it is formed or influenced. The consequences, e.g., organisational effects, of a concept say something

about what it may become or entail. Thus, I draw from insights in terms of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in the conceptualisation in chapter 3, the methodological approach in chapter 4, and in my analysis of interviews in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I add studies to the literature of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy; hence, the review has helped situate these studies as well.

My specific approach to reviewing the antecedents and consequences follows Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015), who have done the same thing for the literature on managerial discretion in private organisations. Like them, I have categorised sources and consequences of managerial autonomy investigated in the literature in three factors: the environment, the organisation, and the individual manager (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987). In this section, I tabulate the findings for all the articles to provide full transparency of the review and to maximise use of the review for future researchers (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006: 165).

Of the 57 empirical studies of managerial autonomy, 27 articles concern antecedents of managerial autonomy (section 2.5.1), 27 use managerial autonomy as independent variable (section 2.5.2) to show its consequences, and four examine managerial autonomy as a moderator or mediator variable (section 2.5.3) between other antecedents and outcomes.

2.5.1. Antecedents of managerial autonomy

In the reviewed literature, I have identified 27 articles that investigate antecedents of managerial autonomy. As seen from table 2.5, 18 studies focus on environmental factors as antecedents of managerial autonomy, 14 on organisational factors, and 5 studies on individual factors.

The group of studies of environmental antecedents of managerial autonomy is dominated by studies of policy reforms and regulative changes. Nigro and Kellough (2000) study how the reform of the state removal of merit systems protection for all employees and placement of personnel management autonomy to line agencies affect autonomy in hiring and firing. The authors conclude that the reform made it easier for managers to hire and fire. Also in U.S.-state settings, Hays and Sowa (2006: 110) conclude that where grievance rights have been increasingly restricted, "supervisors enjoy flexibility in the range of decisions that they can make vis-à-vis their subordinates and that employees are able to grieve fewer matters". Moynihan (2006) studies the relationship between managing for results reforms and the degree of self-reported managerial autonomy, and finds, contrary to the aim of the reform, no support for an association between the reform and managerial autonomy. He terms this a partial adoption of the reforms and concludes that constraints on

managerial autonomy remain. Moynihan and Pandey (2006), Coggburn (2001), Palus and Yackee (2016), and Krause and van Thiel (2019) all find that political factors (i.e., political support, partisan alignment, and policy conflict) affect managerial autonomy of public managers.

At the organisational level, the studies focus on organisational structures such as type, size, age, task, budget, and culture. The empirical results are mixed, however. For instance, in Van de Walle (2019), organisational size correlates with self-reported managerial autonomy in European agencies, while Lonti (2005) finds a negative correlation between size of workforce and managerial autonomy in the Canadian federal government. For organisational task, Verschuere and Barbieri (2009) find little support for agency task explaining the degree of managerial autonomy in Flanders and Italy, while Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) find that agency task relates to formal autonomy, but less to perceived financial, HRM, and policy autonomy.

In terms of individual-level antecedents, Portillo (2012) explores how women and coloured local government managers are more often challenged on their managerial autonomy and to a higher extent must rely on official rights and rules in articulating their managerial autonomy. Gender is also included in the survey studies of Bezes and Jeannot (2018) and Van de Walle (2019), which show no support for an association on self-reported managerial autonomy in their regression analyses. The surveyed top agency managers' job experience does not seem to affect managerial autonomy in the two studies either, which corresponds to Williamson's (2011) findings regarding school principals. Palus and Yackee (2011), however, report a positive association between number of years in current manager position and the degree of managerial autonomy over policies.

In sum, the contemporary literature on the antecedents of managerial autonomy has focused on environmental and organisational factors, such as NPM-inspired reforms and organisational structures, i.e., organisational task and size. The findings show that political influence and interference are important and empirically related to managerial autonomy in public organisations. Finally, I conclude that the contemporary literature on antecedents is more unclear at the organisational and individual levels, e.g., in terms of the influence of organisational size or task, and gender or age on managerial autonomy.

Table 2.5: Articles examining antecedents of managerial autonomy

Factor(s)			Study	Method	Independent variable(s)	Key finding
Env	Org	Ind				
X			Coggburn (2000)	Administrative data on percentages of part-time employees	Personnel deregulation	States with higher levels of personnel deregulation have higher managerial autonomy
X			Nigro and Kellough (2000)	Survey of supervisors and employees	Reform of civil service	Reform has made it easier for public managers to fire and hire employees
X			Coggburn (2001)	Survey of top state government personnel official U.S. states	Public employee unionism, political party control, administrative professionalism	Public employee unionism, political party, administrative professionalism correlate with states' personnel deregulation levels
X			Cheung (2002)	Case study of Hong Kong public hospital reform	Management reform of the hospital sector	Reform has given medical managers more control and power
X			Moynihan (2004)	Case study of three U.S. states; interviews	Reform (managing for results)	Reform gave opportunities to use managerial authority/discretion
X			Hays and Sowa (2006)	Survey of agency directors in U.S. states	HRM reform (restricted grievance rights)	Reform has given higher flexibility in the range of decisions vis-à-vis subordinates
X			Caulfield and Liu (2006)	Case study of Hong Kong reform of hospitals	Reform (establishment of statuary corporation)	Reform allowed higher degree of management autonomy and flexibility
X			Moynihan (2006)	Survey of specialists in state government; content analysis, interviews	Reform (managing for results)	Reform does not seem to be associated with perceived managerial authority

| Factor(s) | | | Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Key finding |
Env	Org	Ind				
X			Ronness et al. (2008)	Survey of agency managers in Norway, Ireland, and Flanders	Regulation, i.e., how superior bodies use different rule- and regulation-based control	High level of regulation shows similar variance in the level of managerial autonomy
X			Aulich, Batainah, and Wettenhall (2010)	Survey of non-departmental agency heads from Australia, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy and Norway	Country (Australia versus five other countries)	Australian agency heads perceive more managerial autonomy than agency heads from Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy and Norway
X			Krause and van Thiel (2019)	Survey of German managers in municipally owned corporations	Degree of process control, output control, and policy-profession conflict. Controls: party of mayor, corporation type, task	Process control, output control, task, and policy profession conflict reduce managerial autonomy
X			Karlsson (2019)	Interview with Swedish managers at various levels in social insurance system	Public sector governance discourses (managerialism)	Managerialism has resulted in an embedded understanding and in an endeavour towards managerial discretion
	X		Lonti (2005)	Survey of middle managers	Organisational type, size of workforce, emphasis on results, seniority of workforce, magnitude of crisis	Positive correlation of managerial autonomy with corporate unit, results emphasis, and negative with core government unit, size of workforce
	X		Verschuere and Barbieri (2009)	Survey of agency managers in Flanders and Italy	Agency age, measurable task	Agency age and task explain little variation in managerial autonomy
	X		Painter and Yee (2011)	Survey of government agency managers	Variables on organisational structure, task, and policy domain	Non-department bodies distant from the core of government have higher levels of managerial autonomy

40

| Factor(s) | | | Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Key finding |
Env	Org	Ind				
	X		Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014)	Survey of agency directors	Organisational tasks, size of budget	Tasks relate to perceived financial, HRM, and policy autonomy
	X		Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018)	Survey of Danish teachers on accept of their manager	Performance information at organisational level	Signals showing low or high performance increase acceptance of management authority, whereas average performance signals reduce acceptance
	X		de Visscher and Randour (2014)	Survey and interview of presidents and directors-general in Belgium's federal administration	Level of management, Copernic reform	Presidents have higher managerial autonomy than directors-general. No positive change in the last decade for either group
	X		Zhang and Feiock (2010)	Survey of top level managers in U.S. local government	Elected mayor, mayor's political experience, professional experience, education, network, partisan affiliation, council-manager relationship, gender, city-population, city income	Managers enjoying great administrative autonomy are less likely to possess great policy-making power [also in table 2.6 on the consequences of managerial autonomy]
		X	Portillo (2012)	Interview with local government officials	Manager's gender, race, and age	Women and people of colour experience their authority differently than white men; authority is challenged more often, and they must rely on official rights and rules

| Factor(s) | | | Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Key finding |
Env	Org	Ind				
X	X		Moynihan and Pandey (2006)	Survey of agency managers in U.S.	Management reforms, organisational culture, focus on results, political support of elected officials, influence of client groups, influence of the public	Positive correlation on managerial authority: reforms, organisational entrepreneurial culture, focus on results, political support, influence of client groups and the public. Negative: organisational bureaucratic culture
X	X		Bach (2014)	Survey of agency managers in Norway and Germany	County, agency task (regulation, service delivery, policy advice), political salience, income, legal type, legal autonomy, agency size	Norwegian agencies have higher HRM autonomy, agencies with higher income, agencies with formal autonomy have higher de facto HRM autonomy
X	X		Wynen, Verhoest and Rückbecksen (2014)	Survey of agency managers in Norway and Flanders	Organisational autonomy, result control, agency size, age	No direct effect of organisational autonomy or result control on managerial autonomy on lower levels of management; however, interaction decreases managerial autonomy
	X	X	Williamson (2011)	Survey of school principals, mix of ownership	Degree of organisational publicness, location, number of students, length of position, socio-background of students	Public school principals report less managerial autonomy in personnel decisions
X	X	X	Bezes and Jeannot (2018)	Survey of top agency managers in 11 countries	Intensity of NPM-reforms; agency type, size, manager gender, age, education, experience	Intensity of NPM reforms correlates positively with managerial autonomy; top-level and more educated report higher MA; older report less MA; economic and finance agency report least MA

Factor(s)			Study	Method	Independent variable(s)	Key finding
Env	Org	Ind				
X	X	X	Palus and Yackee (2016)	Survey of U.S. state agency heads	Partisan alignment, agency characteristics, state context, administrative expertise	Partisan alignment is associated with lower levels of managerial policy discretion
X	X	X	Van de Walle (2019)	Survey of top agency managers in 15 countries	Agency status, policy field, manager hierarchical position, sex, age, public experience, country	Formal status, hierarchical position of manager, organisational size correlate with managerial autonomy

43

2.5.2. Consequences of managerial autonomy

In the review of the consequences of managerial autonomy, I have identified one study on environmental factors, 20 on organisational factors, and six on individual factors.

One article studies the consequence of managerial autonomy for environmental factors. Eglene, Daves, and Schneider (2007) study how managerial autonomy appears to affect the development of public sector networks (e.g., that operate in the environment of the manager's organisation). At the organisational level, the study of the consequence of managerial autonomy has focused on organisational performance. Eleven studies focus on organisational performance, and nine studies conclude with mainly positive associations of managerial autonomy and organisational performance, one finds a negative association, and one study concludes with mixed findings. Higher levels of innovative behaviour (Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert 2007), innovative culture (Wynen et al., 2014), and customer-oriented culture (Wynen and Verhoest, 2015) are other consequences of managerial autonomy.

Individual-level consequences of managerial autonomy include positive associations with interactions with politicians (Kirkhaug and Mikalsen, 2009), performance management, including performance information use (Andersen and Moynihan, 2016; Moynihan and Pandey, 2010; Verhoest and Wynen, 2018), salary (Aldrary and Tower, 2011), and supervisory support (Knies and Leisink, 2014)

In sum, the consequences of managerial autonomy are found to be related primarily to organisational performance and the individual manager's use of performance information. The findings also attest to managerial autonomy being in close relation to organisational factors, such as organisational performance and culture. Comparing the findings in terms of antecedents (section 2.5.1), the review shows that managerial autonomy seems to be related to variables also studied as antecedents, e.g., interaction with political level, culture, and work organisation. This underlines a relative nature of concept where managerial autonomy also entails that managers can manipulate organisational variables. I discuss this in chapter 3.

2.5.3. Moderation and mediation of managerial autonomy

Finally, four studies include managerial autonomy as moderator or mediator variable (see table 2.7). In Meier et al. (2015) and Nielsen (2014), managerial

autonomy positively moderates the relationship between management and organisational performance. Van der Voet and Van de Walle (2018) show that managerial autonomy mediates the relationship between cutback and job satisfaction, and Pemer, Börjeson, and Werr (2020) show that managerial autonomy moderates the influence of experience on hiring of management consultants.

Table 2.6: Articles examining the consequences of managerial autonomy

Factor(s) Env	Org	Ind	Study	Method	Dependent variable(s)	Key finding
X			Eglene, Daves, and Schneider (2007)	Case study of four projects in state agencies	Public sector knowledge networks; leadership style, focus, and communication strategy	Formal managerial authority and perceived authority appear to have influence on the development and performance of public sector knowledge networks.
	X		Lonti and Verma (2003)	Survey of Canadian government managers	Flexible work practices	Managerial autonomy leads to increased adoption of flexible work design and employee involvement practices
	X		Verhoest (2005)	Case study; document analyses; semi-structured interviews in Flemish agency	Performance	Managerial autonomy combined with result control, financial incentives, and competition lead to performance if they are well balanced, and certain conditions are taken into account
	X		Moynihan and Pandey (2006)	Survey of U.S. agency managers	Performance	Decentralised decision-making authority is positively correlated with organisational effectiveness
	X		Yammato (2006)	Survey of Japanese agency managers	Performance	Operational autonomy has positive correlates with organisational effectiveness, efficiency and quality of services
	X		Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert (2007)	Survey of agency heads; case study	Innovative behaviour (IB); performance	Managerial autonomy has a positive relationship with IB
	X		Braadbaart, Eybergen, and Hoffer (2007)	Survey of water utilities managers, multiple countries	Performance	Managerial autonomy is statistically significantly correlated with six out of eight performance indicators

46

Factor(s)			Study	Method	Dependent variable(s)	Key finding
Env	Org	Ind				
	X		Ramesh (2008)	Case study of Singaporean hospital reform	Performance	Managerial autonomy (reform) to promote effectiveness requires more state intervention (government oversight and coordination) than realised
	X		Aubert and Bourdeu (2012)	Interviews; document analysis	Performance	Decision-rights decentralisation and organisational performance have positive association
	X		Damme and Brans (2012)	Case study of four agencies	Process design and management	Managerial autonomy is positively correlated with intensity of process design and management
	X		Brewer and Walker (2013)	Survey of local government managers	Performance	Managers' inability to punish low performers lowers organisational performance, but inability to reward high performers is inconsequential
	X		Morales, Wittek, and Heyse (2013)	Survey of key informants in private and public organisations	Organisational change (OC)	In private organisations, negative association between managerial autonomy and OC. For public organisations, no relationship
	X		Wynen et al. (2014)	Survey of agency managers multicounty	Innovation-oriented culture (IOC)	Managerial autonomy has positive relationship with IOC. The interaction between high personnel management autonomy and high result control is negative
	X		Kim and Cho (2014)	Survey and interviews in South Korean agencies	Performance	Human resource management autonomy and financial autonomy have statistically significant negative relationships with performance

47

Factor(s)			Study	Method	Dependent variable(s)	Key finding
Env	Org	Ind				
	X		Wynen and Verhoest (2015)	Survey of Flemish agency managers	Customer-oriented culture (COC)	Personnel management autonomy appears to influence COC within an agency, financial management autonomy appears to have no effect on COC
	X		Wynen and Verhoest (2016)	Survey of agency managers multicounty	Use of internal performance-based steering (IPS)	Financial management autonomy influences IPS positively; positive interaction between financial management autonomy and external result control
	X		Cardenas and Cruz (2017)	Difference-in-difference analysis of school reform	Social equity (SE)	Administrative discretion (reform) may result in an efficient but unfair allocation of students across schools, thus undermining SE
	X		Birdsall (2017)	Synthetic control method of school reform enhancing managerial authority under performance accountability systems	Performance	Reform (managerial authority) makes no discernible difference in student pass rates on state exams, but there is a positive difference in the percentage of students meeting college admissions criteria
	X		Boon and Wynen (2017)	Survey of agency managers; administrative data	Size and organisation of overhead	Formal management autonomy influences the size and organisation of overhead; de facto management autonomy is positively associated with in-house finance and control
	X		Wang and Yeung (2019)	Difference-in-difference of school reform (granting more managerial autonomy)	Performance	Reform (managerial autonomy) had a positive effect on proficiency rates in mathematics exams, overall performance, and regents diploma graduation rates

48

| Factor(s) | | | Study | Method | Dependent variable(s) | Key finding |
Env	Org	Ind				
		X	Kirkhaug and Mikalsen (2009)	Survey of agency managers in Norway	Interaction with politicians	Administrative autonomy leads to more intensive interaction with political principals
		X	Moynihan and Pandey (2010)	Survey of senior managers in U.S. local government	Performance information use (PIU)	Managerial decision flexibility increases reported PIU
		X	Zhang and Feiock (2010)	Survey of top-level managers	Policy-making power	Managers enjoying great administrative autonomy are less likely to possess great policy-making power [also in antecedents of managerial autonomy]
		X	Alkadry and Tower (2011)	Survey of chief procurement officers	Salary	Authority, as control of money and number of people, has positive associations with salary
		X	Knies and Leisink (2014)	Survey of middle managers in police and medical centres	Supervisory support (SS)	The discretionary room managers experience has positive association with SS and is mediated by willingness to support employees
		X	Andersen and Moynihan (2016)	Controlled field experiment of Danish school principals	Acquisition of policy-relevant information	Managers randomly assigned greater discretion in the allocation of personnel resources were more likely to acquire information on school performance
		X	Verhoest and Wynen (2018)	Survey of agency managers in multiple countries	Use of performance management techniques (PMT)	Managerial autonomy does not seem to increase the use of PMT

49

Table 2.7: Articles using managerial autonomy as mediator or moderator

Factor(s)			Study	Method	Independent variable(s)	Dependent variable(s)	Key finding
Env	Org	Ind					
X			Meier et al. (2015)	Cross-country survey of school principals (U.S. and Denmark)	Internal management (IM), external management (EM)	Performance	Managerial authority (country context: adversarial system vs. corporatist system) moderates the relationship between IM/EM and performance
	X		Nielsen (2014)	Survey of school principals; administrative data	Performance management	Performance	Managerial authority over human resources, hiring and firing, task autonomy, and decentralising pay negotiations moderates the relationship positively; decentralisation goal setting negatively
		X	Van der Voet and Van de Walle (2018)	Survey of agency top managers	Cutback	Manager's job satisfaction	Managerial autonomy mediates the relationship between cutback and job satisfaction
		X	Pemer, Börjeson, and Werr (2020)	Administrative data; interviews	Chief executive experience	Hiring of management consultants	Managerial discretion moderates the relationship between chief experience and hiring of management consultants

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter described the systematic review of 63 articles on managerial autonomy published in 20 major public management journals since 2000 in relation to the research questions in the dissertation: *What is managerial autonomy and how can it be conceptualised?*, and *what are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy?*

The reviewed literature contains recurring motifs. Managerial autonomy is mainly studied for top-level managers, definitions and operationalisations focus on decision-making in various areas of management and leadership functions. Furthermore, managerial autonomy is measured in surveys, i.e., as experienced by managers, or as changes to the formal organisation, e.g. in changes to policies or reforms. In chapter 6, I present two manuscript relying on self-reported managerial autonomy and one relying on regulative changes to work organisation and relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees. Finally, the literature emphasises the relative nature of the concept and its close connection to the political level. In terms of antecedents, the influence of reforms and political inferences on managerial autonomy is in focus, and in terms of consequences, the association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance. In the analysis of interviews with public managers in chapter 5, these are recurring themes as well, and in my qualitative analysis of the interview data, I relate my findings to many of the studies reviewed in this chapter. In chapter 3, I advance a conceptualisation of managerial autonomy based on these key findings from the contemporary literature.

Chapter 3.
Conceptualisation

In this chapter, I present and discuss the conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in the dissertation. Concepts are "cognitive symbols (or abstract terms) that specify the features, attributes, or characteristics of the phenomenon in the real or phenomenological world that they are meant to represent and that distinguish them from other related phenomena" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 161). Conceptualisation lies at the heart of all social science endeavours, it is integral to every argument, and it addresses the basic social science question: What are we talking about? (Gerring, 2012a: 112; Goertz, 2006). Thus, the purpose is to organise phenomena into meaningful categories, establish a common language to communicate ideas, and provide the building blocks of theory (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 165).

I approach conceptualisation by focusing on "what is important about an entity" and by discussing antecedents and consequences in order to "provide more than a definition" (Goertz, 2006: 27). Conceptualisation resembles an experienced-far account of the concept from the researcher's perspective and the existing literature (Geertz, 1974: 28). In chapter 5, I approach the concept as an experienced-near account from the perspective of public managers. In chapter 6, I present three manuscripts that draw on the operationalisation presented in this chapter.

In order to advance a conceptualisation, I elaborate on the conceptual label used in the dissertation (section 3.1), the definition (section 3.2), the scope (section 3.3), the conceptual attribute of de jure/de facto managerial autonomy (section 3.4), the attribute of autonomy to/autonomy from (section 3.5). Finally, I discuss how the concept relates to environmental, organisational, and individual factors (section 3.6).

3.1. Label

In this section, I explain my choice of label for the concept in the dissertation. Any concept of significance to social science is likely to call up multiple labels, words, and definitions. Consequently, and because much is at stake in an author's choice of label and terms, these descriptive arguments often remain essentially contested (Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu, 2006; Gerring, 2012b). The literature review in chapter 2 showed that a list of labels has been applied

to the study of managerial autonomy, including the three main labels, managerial *autonomy*, managerial *discretion*, and managerial *authority*. I used the main labels in my search strategy to identify relevant literature (section 2.2.1), and as I reviewed the literature, other related wording emerged, such as managerial decentralisation, discretionary authority, managerial flexibility, managerial leeway, manoeuvre room, discretionary room, and managerial power. The conclusion in my review was that the labels managerial authority, managerial discretion, and managerial autonomy have been used interchangeably, although there are also some signs of conceptual proliferation in the literature.

I want to explain why I have chosen, exclusively, to use the label *managerial autonomy* in the dissertation. As a first step in developing concepts, Jaccard and Jacoby (2020: 101) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2016: 170) recommend looking up the term of the concept in a common dictionary, as it may help specify a definition with better clarity. *Merriam-Webster* (2019) defines "autonomy" as (1) the quality or state of being self-governing, (2) self-directing freedom and especially moral independence, or (3) a self-governing state; "authority" as (1) power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behaviour, or (2) freedom granted by one in authority; and "discretion" as (1) individual choice or judgment, or (2) power of free decision or latitude of choice within certain legal bounds. All three base definitions of autonomy, authority, and discretion seem to have relevance for describing the conditions of public management. Authority and discretion seem to a higher extent to denote behaviours ("power to influence" and "choice and judgement"), while autonomy seems to be more related to a state of being or a characteristic of an actor (Carpenter, 2001; Hupe, 2013: 435). Second, I have looked but have not found in-depth and explicit discussions of the use of the different labels in the public management literature. Briefly, Walker, Boyne, and Brewer (2010: 276) note that "the concept of autonomy is referred to in many different ways (for example, it has been called discretion, flexibility, risk taking, entrepreneurship, and other terms), and it resonates with many different theoretical perspectives." Carpenter (2001: 17) notes in relation to bureaucratic autonomy that "[d]iscretion is part of a contractual arrangement (…) a statue may give an agency discretion or leeway to interpret or enforce a law within certain bound. Bureaucratic autonomy, by contrast, is eternal to a contract and cannot be captured in a principal-agent relationship". To scrutinise the use of labels further, I turn to the related literature on street-level bureaucracy, as there has been some discussion of the use of different labels to describe the autonomy, authority, and discretion of street-level bureaucrats. Hupe (2013: 434) summarises the discussion on autonomy versus discretion in this literature and notes that the concept of autonomy is used more in relation to occupations and organisations. Echoing the behavioural aspect of the dictionary definition

of discretion, Huber and Shipan (2012) approach discretion and autonomy as two related concepts, where bureaucratic autonomy is the prerequisite for "level of discretion in statutes" as the dependent variable. Third, the final argument for choosing the label managerial autonomy is that it is the most used label in the reviewed literature.

3.2. Definition

The next step is to define the concept to distinguish it from related phenomena (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 161). In section 2.4, I gave an overview of the range of definitions and their level of abstractness in the contemporary literature.

An appropriate definition depends on how the concept is used and studied (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 99). In the interest of advancing a broad and "powerful" conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in the dissertation that covers many instances (Gerring, 1999: 385), I have opted for a relatively abstract definition with a broad extension. Specifically, with inspiration from the group of highly abstract definitions, presented in section 2.4, I rely mainly on Verhoest et al. (2004: 104) and Knies and Leisink (2014: 188). Verhoest et al. (2014: 105) point to autonomy as i) "the level of decision-making competencies" and ii) "the exemption of constraints on the actual use of decision-making competencies". Knies and Leisink (2014: 118) define discretionary room as "the degree of freedom and authority managers have to decide what to do." I define managerial autonomy as follows:

Definition   The relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities

In comparison to the existing definitions in the literature, I have made some important refinements in the definition in the dissertation. First, I have chosen to focus the definition as "managerial decision-making capabilities", to stress that the concept relates to a state of being, or potential decisions that a particular manager can make (rather than managerial actions, behaviour, or actual decisions). Thus, the use of the word "capabilities" signals that the concept lies somewhere in the intersection between *capacities* and *abilities*. Ability is what a person is able to do, capacity is the extent of a person's ability to do something, and capability refers to the highest level of ability that can be demonstrated under the right conditions. The plural signals that managerial autonomy can vary on different capabilities. Furthermore, "managerial" implicates that the conceptualisation focuses on the level of decision-making capabilities for individual managers rather than the management autonomy of, e.g., management teams or organisations. In section 3.3, I elaborate on the scope of managerial autonomy as different decision-making capabilities. In

section 3.4, I argue that capability is a qualifying use of wording for how managerial autonomy can be approached as de jure managerial autonomy, e.g., as defined objectively in regulation, and de facto managerial autonomy, e.g., as perceived subjectively by individual managers.

Second, I have chosen to include the word "relative" in the definition to signal that managerial autonomy is a relative concept that exists in relation to an area left open by surroundings – like "the hole in a doughnut" (Dworkin, 1978: 31 cited in Evans and Harris, 2004: 881). It implies that managerial autonomy is more than delegation of competences from a principal to an agent and that it is embedded in "multi-actor configurations" (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014: 240; see also Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter and Krause, 2015). Furthermore, it implies that the concept is dynamic over time and across situations, i.e., it varies from low to high. This is explicitly addressed in two sections. In section 3.5, I argue that the concept can be approached conceptually as managerial autonomy to, i.e., agency in managerial decision-making, and managerial autonomy from, i.e., as exemption of interferences in managerial decision-making. In section 3.6, I illustrate how to discuss how the factors from the literature review, i.e., environmental, organisational, and individual, illustrate the relativity of managerial autonomy (Goertz, 2006: 4-5; 27).

3.3. Scope

The review in chapter 2 points to a strong consensus in the literature that the extent of managerial autonomy can be approached in different areas of decision-making. The literature has primarily focused on managerial autonomy in the classic management POSDCORB-functions (Gulick 1937: 13). As noted in the literature, the concept is multidimensional (e.g., Bach, 2018; Nielsen, 2014; Verhoest et al., 2004, 2010), which is evident in how it is defined (section 2.4) and operationalised (section 2.5) in the literature. For instance, I identified seven distinctive areas of decision-making that have been studied, i.e., managerial autonomy in 1) hiring and firing, 2) budgeting, 3) performance management, 4) salary and pecuniary rewards, 5) organisational change, 6) policies and goal setting, and 7) work organisation.

In my conceptualisation, I draw on the analysis of the operationalisations in the literature. The argument in the dissertation is that managerial autonomy can be approached in terms of relative decision-making in two overarching capabilities, i.e., leadership, and management. The two define the scope of the concept, i.e., what distinguishes what is included in the domain of the concept (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 166). In a similar vein, in the literature on managerial autonomy in private organisations, Hambrick

and Finkelstein (1987: 371-372) describe "substantive" and "symbolic" domains where managers have autonomy. In terms of leadership, managerial autonomy relates to the decision-making capabilities in establishing shared direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people (Kotter, 2008: 4-5). In terms of management, managerial autonomy relates to decision-making capabilities in classic the POSDCORB-acronym (Gulick, 1937), i.e., planning, organising, staffing, directing, co-ordinating, reporting, and budgeting.

In accordance with the approach in the contemporary literature, the conceptualisation stresses substitutability between the different capabilities of managerial autonomy, i.e., if one of the capabilities is the subject of inquiry, then it is sufficient to be related to the managerial autonomy concept (Goertz, 2006: 40; 45-50). For example, managerial autonomy can be studied exclusively in terms of decision-making on the budget or work organisation. This indicates that the concept is a "family resemblance concept", where an object, i.e., the relative level in managerial decision-making, qualifies for membership of the concept if at least capability in leadership or management is present (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 164).

The findings in the review of antecedents and consequences justify approaching the concept as different capabilities, as they have different associations with antecedents and consequences. For example, Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) show how agency task is stronger correlated with some capabilities of managerial autonomy than others. Zhang and Feiock (2010) show associations between two capabilities where administrative managerial autonomy is negatively correlated with policy autonomy. Regarding consequences of managerial autonomy, Wynen and Verhoest (2015) find that personnel management autonomy influences customer-oriented culture but do not find the same for financial management autonomy. Nielsen (2014) shows that managerial autonomy over human resources moderates the relationship between performance management and organisational performance positively, while managerial autonomy over goal setting moderates the relationship negatively. These findings underline the importance of studying and conceptualising the concept as multidimensional over different capabilities.

Focusing conceptually on the specific scope of managerial autonomy makes it possible to advance the concept in more detail in terms of different management levels. For example, in respect to managing at the frontline, it seems reasonable to assume that specific capabilities are more prone to vary than others. O'Toole and Meier (2015: 250) argue that if managerial autonomy is vested at lower levels of public management, e.g., the frontline, "the activities of top management shift somewhat toward the human resources functions, especially the selection of individuals who will carry out the goals of the organisation. Top management also will focus on goals and strategy". Van De

Walle (2019) compares public managers at different hierarchical positions and finds that managers at higher levels experience higher managerial autonomy in six capabilities, i.e., budget allocations, contracting out of services, promoting staff, hiring staff, dissing or removing staff, and making changes in the structure of the organisation, while they experience less politicisation than managers at lower levels.

The contemporary literature on managerial autonomy focuses primarily on top-level managers, whereas frontline studies focus of managerial autonomy seem to focus on a slightly different set of capabilities. Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018) investigate teachers' acceptance of their school principal's management as the range of behaviours they are willing to comply with. The focus is on the extent of managerial autonomy in the eyes of employees in terms of personnel policies, work organisation, teaching methods, and organisation of cooperation between teachers (Nielsen and Jacobsen, 2018: 689).

In sum, the scope of managerial autonomy can be approached as managerial autonomy in decision-making capabilities in *leadership* and *management* functions. The definitions and the operationalisations applied in the contemporary literature have acknowledged this. The findings in the literature on antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy show that different capabilities have different associations with antecedents and consequences, thus emphasising why it important to explicitly address the scope in the conceptualisation.

3.4. De jure/de facto

In this section, I advance the attributes of de jure/de facto managerial autonomy. De jure managerial autonomy is related to an objective side of managerial autonomy, e.g., how it is defined in regulation, whereas de facto managerial autonomy is the subjective side, e.g., the individual manager's perception of their managerial autonomy.

Several authors have noted the distinction between what I term de jure managerial autonomy and de facto managerial autonomy (e.g., Bach, 2018; Yesilkagit and van Thiel, 2008; Verhoest et al., 2010). It is also termed formal/actual (Bach, 2018; Yesilkagit and van Thiel, 2008), objective/subjective, and actual/perceived (Ammons and Roenigk, 2020) in the literature. Thus, there is some confusion over the use of labels, e.g., displayed by the conflicting use of the label "actual". In order to promote more simplicity, I want to advance the use of de jure/de facto, as these terms are well established labels within social science.

The distinction between the two has been manifested in definitions in the literature. Van der Voet and Van de Walle (2019: 10, *my emphasis*) explicitly

define managerial autonomy as "the relative freedom that managers *experience* in decision-making" (see table 2.2 in chapter 2). The subjective nature of managerial autonomy is also noted by, for instance, Karlsson (2019), who concludes that managers' perception of the discourse of managerialism influences how they perceive their degree of managerial autonomy. Many studies of managerial autonomy focus exclusively on changes to de jure managerial autonomy operationalised as policy changes, regulative changes, or reforms (see section 2.5).

The attributes of de facto/de jure have different theoretical underpinnings. De facto managerial autonomy implies subjectivity, and the notion that what guides managers is not necessarily the amount of de jure managerial autonomy formally granted, but rather how the individual managers perceive the scope of their autonomy (Yesilkagit and Van Thiel, 2008). De facto managerial autonomy is rarely explicitly defined, and "in theory, it has no rigid bounds and partly limited by self-awareness of constraints that may be untested rather than explicit" (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987: 371) – managerial autonomy is a product of "experience, scanning, and insight" (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987: 373). The line of argumentation corresponds to classic insights from the behavioural sciences where perceptions influence behaviour and individuals respond to their specific interpretation of reality, i.e., the Thomas theorem (Merton, 1995: 380). De jure managerial autonomy is independent of the individual manager's subjective perceptions and denotes an objective approach to the level of managerial decision-making capabilities. Notably, in the reviewed literature in chapter 2, the empirical correlation between de jure and de facto managerial autonomy is in general found to be weak. For instance, Yesilkagit and van Thiel (2008) find for Dutch agencies, and Verhoest et al. (2010) for Flemish agencies, a weak correlation between de jure and de facto managerial autonomy measured by surveys. Nigro and Kellough (2000) study how managers perceive (de facto) deregulation (de jure) of the public personnel management process and find weak ties.

Table 3.1 illustrates the argument of de facto and de jure managerial autonomy in combination. The table is inspired by the discussion in Ammons and Roenigk (2020: 35), who introduce and label four managerial cases of combined low/high de jure/de facto managerial autonomy, i.e., empowered, determined-despite-the-odds, ready-with-an-alibi, and restricted managers. The *empowered* manager enjoys a high level of de jure managerial autonomy, and a high level of de facto managerial autonomy. The combination implies that the manager experiences the devolved autonomy matching their experience of it, and that they enjoy a high level of managerial autonomy. The *determined-despite-the-odds* manager has a low level of de jure managerial auton-

omy but perceives a high level of de facto managerial autonomy. The combination implies that the manager perceives "adequate" autonomy (Ammons and Roenigk, 2020: 35) despite little evidence of de jure managerial autonomy. These managers perceive a high level of managerial autonomy without "official recognition" (Hupe 2013: 432), as they have pushed the limits of their autonomy beyond what is defined formally. The *ready-with-an-alibi* manager has a high level of de jure managerial autonomy but experiences a low level of managerial autonomy. This combination implies that managerial autonomy is present formally, but the autonomy is not de facto claimed or internalised by the manager. The *restricted* manager has low levels of both de facto and de jure managerial autonomy and is unequivocally limited in their managerial decision-making capabilities.

Table 3.1: Level of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy

		Level of *de facto*	
		Low	High
Level of *de jure*	Low	Restricted	Determined-despite-the-odds
	High	Ready-with-an-alibi	Empowered

The attributes of de jure/de facto level of managerial autonomy open for some interesting notions on the relative nature of managerial auonomy. First, it opens for the continued alignment process in managerial autonomy, where public managers in part have to orient themselves in terms of the de jure level of managerial autonomy and perhaps also the possibility to test, or challenge, the de jure limits of their managerial autonomy. Second, if there are changes in the de jure level of managerial autonomy, e.g., political principals or administrative executives change their signal or introduce policy regulating the degree of autonomy nested to managers, a realignment process must take place. This alone implies the possibility of de-alignment between de jure and de facto managerial autonomy. Third, in the broader public management literature, Hood (2000) coined the paradox of half-hearted managerialism, i.e., an actual limited degree of (de facto) managerial autonomy following policy reforms (de jure) aiming to foster it (Hood 2010: 15). Verschuere and Barbieri (2009: 347) underscore that "the concept of managerial autonomy of the managers as fundamental element of NPM reforms has also been questioned. Some scholars argue that formal freedom has been introduced and that managers have been given freedom within boundaries (see Hoggett 1991). So autonomy might be more a perception than a reality." Similarly, Moynihan (2006, 2008) has noted an impartial adoption of performance management systems, where per-

sonnel and budgeting flexibility have not been provided even though the doctrine suggests it, e.g., performance management systems are perceived as "administrative burden but not an increase in discretion" (Moynihan, 2008: 45). In other words, reforms aiming to extend de jure managerial autonomy actually limit de facto managerial autonomy.

In sum, in the conceptualisation I propose, managerial autonomy can be approached de jure and de facto, and the combination of the two attributes is of analytical value. De jure managerial autonomy denotes objective and formal managerial autonomy, e.g., as defined in regulations and policy, whereas de facto managerial autonomy denotes the subjective experience of managerial autonomy.

3.5. Autonomy to/autonomy from

The next conceptual attributes I want to advance are *managerial autonomy to* (agency in decision-making) and *managerial autonomy from* (the exemption of interference in the decision-making).

Managerial autonomy to, as agency in managerial decision-making, is understood as the capacity to act and make choices. This attribute is apparent in all definitions in the contemporary literature, and is illustrated in table 2.2, e.g., "decide what to do" (Knies and Leisink, 2014: 118), "decision-making as the choice and use" (Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert, 2007: 471), "extent to which an organization can decide", and "having its own decision-making competences" (Verschuere and Barbieri, 2009: 349). Managerial autonomy from is also apparent in the definition but less explicit. In table 2.2, e.g., Knies and Leisink (2014: 118), Moynihan and Pandey (2006: 124) define managerial autonomy with reference to freedom, while Wynen and Verhoest (2015: 335) add the explicit qualification "independently from political and administrative principals on the choice and use of resources", and Verschuere and Barbiere (2009: 349) add "without interferences from the oversight authority".

In terms of operationalisations in the literature, the autonomy from attribute is more explicit. Verhoest, Verschuere, and Bouckaert (2007) include the preamble: "within the regulative framework set by oversight authorities" to their survey questions, implying that autonomy is relative to the potential interference from the oversight authority. In Verhoest et al. (2004: 109), the central premise is that in order to know the level of managerial autonomy, you must "not only analyse the decision-making competencies on managerial and policy matters of the agency, but also to what extent the government can constrain the use of these competencies by structural, financial, legal, and interventional means". Another example is the survey-based study by Moynihan and Pandey (2005: 125, *my emphasis*), which measures the concept based on

the following items: "there can be little action taken here *until a supervisor approves a decision*", "in general, a person who wants to make his own decisions *would be quickly discouraged in this agency*", and "even small matters have to be *referred to someone higher up for a final answer.*" Damme and Brans (2012: 1052) focus on the extent of legal, political, and administrative process rules when looking at the autonomy of managers. In a case study, Verhoest (2005: 236) argues that the NPM doctrine entails that more managerial autonomy is devolved by the government manifested by less input control on financial and human resources management.

With the attributes of *managerial autonomy to* and *managerial autonomy from*, a question of weighting arises, i.e., is one "more necessary" than the other (Goertz, 2006: 46). Ontologically, it makes little sense to talk of decision-making capabilities if one is entirely and functionally restrained or under complete interference, thus indicating that the *autonomy from* attribute is more important. However, it seems reasonable to assume that unless completely restrained, one always has some degree of agency in decision-making or is under some interference. In the words of Carpenter (2001: 18), autonomy "cannot be defined in absolute terms ... autonomy so defined is the stuff of deities, not political actors". Note also that the conceptualisation stresses that the relationship between *autonomy to* and *autonomy from* constitutes what the phenomenon is, and that the relationship between them is of identity – not necessarily of causation (Goertz, 2006: 59). In other words, managers can potentially have *autonomy to* as agency in managerial decision-making and at the same time face interferences in terms of *autonomy from* or any combination of the two.

In table 3.2, I combine the level of autonomy to, i.e., the level of agency, and the level of autonomy from, i.e., the level of interferences. Again, I propose four managerial cases, i.e., restricted, administrator, fifth-wheel, and empowered managers. The labels for the administrator and fifth-wheel are borrowed from Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987: 390), although my interpretation and connotation deviate somewhat from their original rendering of the managerial cases and labels.

Table 3.2: Managerial autonomy to and managerial autonomy from

		Level in *autonomy from*	
		Low	High
Level in *autonomy to*	Low	Restricted	Administrator
	High	Fifth-wheel	Empowered

The *restricted* manager has a low degree of agency in decision-making, faces a high degree of interference, and effectively has little managerial autonomy as capabilities in decision-making. The *administrator* has a low degree of agency, i.e., the areas of decision-making available are very limited. However, they face no interferences in decision-making in these matters. The label is used because one could expect that the agency in decision-making is limited to, e.g., fulfilling an organisational maintenance role, internal adjustments, and administrative functions, thus, drawing little attention or interest from stakeholders or interferences. The *fifth-wheel* manager has the agency and scope of managerial decision-making but faces a high degree of interference in decision-making, which questions whether it is meaningful to say they have managerial autonomy as capabilities in decision-making. The manager is along for the ride, as they typically operate in the shadow of powerful interferences and strong influences on their decision-making. The *empowered* manager has agency in decision-making and faces no significant interferences.

Approaching the concept in the attributes of autonomy to/from illustrates some interesting things. Like the attributes of *de jure* and *de facto* managerial autonomy, the distinction between *autonomy to* and *autonomy from* offers analytical value in understanding managerial autonomy in public organisations. First, the general expectation is that at higher levels of public management, the politicisation and interference of political principals can be expected to be higher because of the closer proximity to the political level (e.g., Hood and Lodge, 2006; Wilson, 1989). However, as also noted in previous section, Van de Walle (2019) finds that politicisation is experienced as *higher* at the *lower* levels of management. This could indicate that lower levels of management have more principals and stakeholders potentially limiting the level of *autonomy from*. In other words, public managers at lower levels can be expected to a higher degree to be "victims" of interruptions and external interferences from upper levels or external stakeholders (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016: 39) transforming managers to a *fifth-wheel* under such strong interferences that they are left conveying the will of other powerful stakeholders. Thus, on the one hand, public managers typically face a wide array of stakeholders who may have interests in interfering in their decision-making (Moore, 1995). Moreover, the typical public manager works in close proximity to employees (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002) and the target population (Lipsky, 1980). This means that their managerial decision-making is visible to a larger group of individuals, and that they are more likely to be directly evaluated in terms of, e.g., organisational performance (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). On the other hand, a manager may exploit strategically the presence of multiple stakeholders and principals, possibly at different administrative and political levels, e.g., if the principals' interests are in conflict (Christensen and

Mortensen, 2016; Hammond and Knott, 1996; Voorn, van Genugten, and van Thiel, 2019).

Second, the combination of the two attributes implies that only when both autonomy to and autonomy from are high can we expect high levels of managerial autonomy, depicted as the *empowered* manager in table 3.2. In three out of four cells, there is potential for limits in level of managerial decision-making capabilities, either in the form of low degree of managerial autonomy to (i.e., agency in decision-making) or low degree of managerial autonomy from (i.e., interferences in decision-making). This is interesting because it says something about the paradox of half-hearted managerialism, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, an approach to why managers do not experience more managerial autonomy (de facto) is the possibility that the level of *autonomy from*, as the extent of interference, has not followed the same development as *autonomy to* in new public management-inspired reforms (Pollitt, 2011: 41-47). In order words, interference from, e.g., the political level, has increased as a means of controlling public managers, effectively limiting the level of managerial decision-making capabilities. In this regard, Kettl (1997: 448) distinguished between *making managers manage* and *letting managers manage* approaches in new public management. In making managers manage, interference and control of managers were subject to market forces, whereas letting managers manage "is at its core an empowering philosophy, which aims to break down restrictions on managers' flexibility" (Kettl, 1997: 449).

Third, the intricacies of managerial autonomy as both *autonomy to* and *autonomy from* can be combined with the attributes of *de jure* and *de facto* managerial autonomy. In table 3.3, four cells expose the concept of managerial autonomy in public organisations. *De jure autonomy to* is the formally defined level of agency for public managers, e.g., the formal rights of managerial decision-making in, e.g., work organisations, the formal managerial prerogative, and the formal agency to, e.g., hire/fire employees. *De facto autonomy to* is the perceived agency of the manager in this regard. *De jure autonomy to* is the formally defined degree of interference in managerial autonomy, e.g., how organisations have formally chosen to structure the level of management, legal frameworks of the extent of political interference in the management of government agencies, and how policies set limits for interference in the managerial work of decentralised public organisations. *De facto autonomy from* is the perceived interference in this regard.

Table 3.3: Combination of managerial autonomy de jure/de facto and autonomy to/from

|	Autonomy to	Autonomy from
De jure	De jure level of agency in managerial decision-making	De jure level of interference in managerial decision-making
De facto	De facto level of agency in managerial decision-making	De facto level of interference in managerial decision-making

In sum, in this section I have advanced the conceptual attributes of *managerial autonomy to* (the agency of managerial decision-making) and *managerial autonomy from* (interference in managerial decision-making). Together, the two attributes offer an approach to managerial autonomy as the *relative level of the managerial decision-making capabilities*.

3.6. Relative to environment, organisational, and individual factors

In the last section of the chapter, I discuss the relativity of managerial autonomy by focusing on antecedents and consequences (Goertz, 2006: 4-5, 27). I structure the discussion in terms of environmental (section 3.6.1), organisational (section 3.6.2), and individual (section 3.6.3) factors. As mentioned in section 2.5, Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) argue that managerial autonomy is determined by three sets of factors: the environment and the extent to which it allows alternative actions, the internal organisation and the leeway it gives managers, and the managers themselves and their ability to envision different alternative actions (see also Pemer, Börjeson, and Werr, 2020).

I apply this framework but emphasise that managerial autonomy as the capabilities of managerial decision-making is *relative* to these factors rather than determined by them. Furthermore, I note that there are substantial overlaps and linkages between the three level of factors, which may be especially pronounced in public organisations, where the political environment presumably plays a major role for public managers (e.g., O'Toole and Meier, 2011; Rainey, 2014; Wilson, 1989). Figure 3.1 illustrates the main idea that managerial autonomy as the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities relates to factors in the environment, organisation, and the individual.

Figure 3.1: Environmental, organisational, and individual factors and managerial autonomy
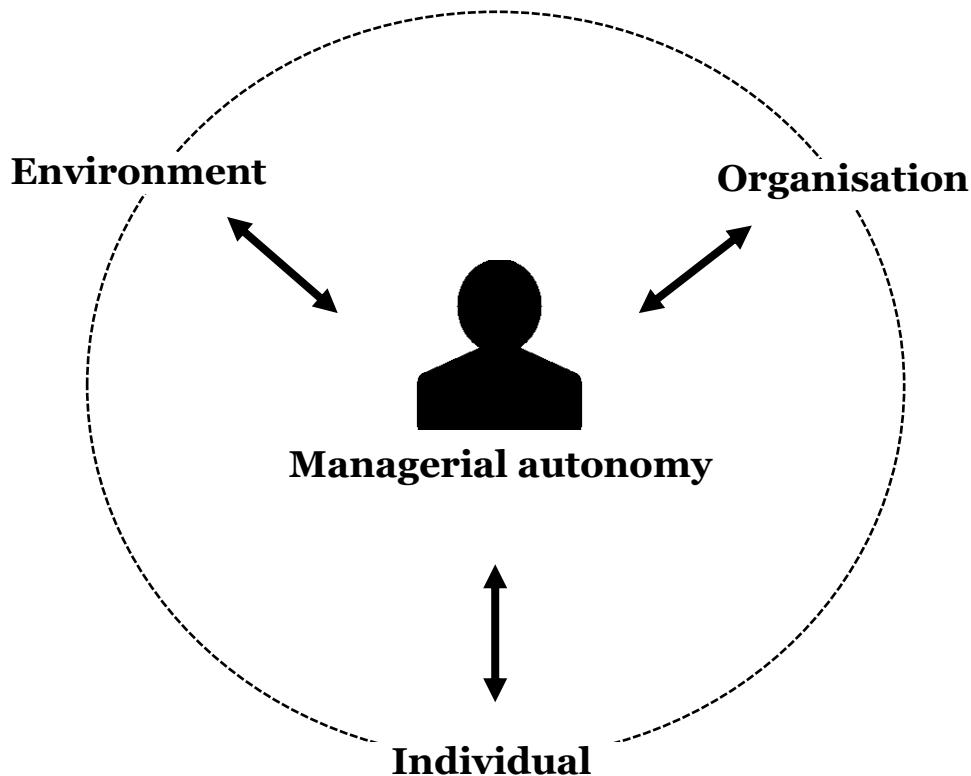
Note: Inspired by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987: 379), and Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015: 107).

3.6.1. Environmental factors

Public organisations are "open systems" (Andrews et al., 2012: 7; 17), and thus, management of public organisations is typically approached and theorised in relation to the environment (e.g., Meier and O'Toole, 2008, 2011; O'Toole, Meier, and Nicholson-Crotty, 2005; Moore, 1995). How the environment contributes to managerial autonomy can be approached in different ways (Moynihan and Pandey, 2005: 423). The common denominator is the interference and influence on managers broadly from the environment, and how managers can actively manage it.

For instance, in the dimensional approach to publicness, public organisations vary in environmental exposure to political authority and economic authority (Bozeman, 1987; Merritt, 2019). Exposure to political authority determines the degree to which organisations and their managers are subject to political influence, e.g., from principals and stakeholders that may exercise formal or informal control (Bozeman, 1987: 11; Rainey, 2014; Meier and O'Toole, 2011). This is exemplified by public managers being contested or overruled by politicians, upper-level management, or external stakeholders

(Meier et al., 2015). Exposure to economic authority determines the degree to which organisations are subject to interference in terms of allocating resources (e.g., financial, and human). Factors influencing economic authority include ownership, private funding (e.g., user-paid service fees), market-based mode of social control, civil service personnel systems, working hour agreements, and purchasing and procurement systems (e.g., Rainey, 2014: 77-84). The high publicness of public organisations is often assumed to entail a higher managerial complexity for public managers than for private managers (Pollitt, 2011: 24). Verhoest et al. (2004; 2010) propose another approach to environmental influence and interference. They develop a typology of external restraints and theorise it explicitly to managerial autonomy. *Structural autonomy* denotes the shield from influence by the government through lines of accountability. *Financial autonomy* concerns dependence on government funding. *Legal autonomy* concerns the legal status in preventing the government from restraining decision-making competences. Finally, *interventional autonomy* is the extent of freedom from ex-post evaluations, audits, and threats of interventions. Note that the typology seems to fall within the attribute of de jure managerial autonomy from, i.e., as formally defined degree of interference, while the publicness approach to a higher degree can be understood in the de facto managerial autonomy attribute.

The interaction between managers and their environment has been a common theme in the public management literature, and the classic politics-administration dichotomy is a recurring motif in theoretical discussions of managerial autonomy (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman, 1981; Wilson, 1887). For instance, Hansen and Ejersbo (2002) argue that in order to understand the interaction and interplay between the political and the administrative level, it is important to pay attention to the two groups' logic of action. The political level is driven by an inductive logic of action, i.e., they approach issues case by case and focus on competing issues. The administrative level is driven by a deductive logic of action, i.e., they approach cases with reference to laws, rules, and objectives focusing on consensus of overall goals.

A reasonable assumption is that a public manager at most times prefers having autonomy, or turf, rather than being controlled or subject to external interferences (e.g., Bendor et al., 2001; Wilson, 1989). Thus, managers may intentionally try to "cultivate" the environment or actively seek to increase, decrease or, in general, (re)shape the degree of managerial autonomy to their needs (Cho and Ringquist, 2011: 59, Meier and O'Toole, 2011; Moore, 1995; O'Toole and Meier, 1999). Various strategies are available. Public managers may engage in co-optation and collaboration with employees' unions or in confrontation with the help of the political-administrative system to preserve

or increase managerial autonomy (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016). In explicit relation to the political level, the theory of public service bargains (PSB) provides a theoretical perspective on how and why managers actively shape their managerial autonomy. PSBs are implicit or explicit agreements between politicians and managers where the managers gain managerial autonomy in exchange for loyalty and competence (Hood and Lodge, 2006: 6) or the obligation to take direct responsibility for errors and misjudgements taken on the basis of the autonomy (Hood, 2000: 9). In a similar vein, Huber (2007) argues that managers can use "strategic neutrality" to simultaneously manage subordinates and sustain political support, thus building autonomy and serving both managerial and political needs.

However, managers may also want to reduce their managerial autonomy to lessen the complexity of management or to avoid it as managerial autonomy may come with accountability (Hoque, Davis, and Humphreys, 2004). Some authors have noted that autonomy does not necessarily turn bureaucrats into independent managers. Under certain conditions, it actually increases their interaction with, and dependence on, their political masters (Kirkhaug and Mikalsen, 2009: 150). In more bureaucratic and political settings, managerial autonomy might be used as a political asset, accumulated as a consequence of bureaucratic reputation and then used to accommodate the manager's political goals (Carpenter, 2001; Christensen, 2000). Thus, the relation to the political environment points to managers being both "context creating" and "context dependent" in terms of their managerial autonomy (Ospina, 2017: 282).

Moore's (1995) framework of political management and O'Toole & Meier's (1999, 2011) framework of network management are other examples. In Moore's (1995) framework of political management in the "strategic triangle", the assumption is that to achieve their objectives, public managers must engage with stakeholders beyond the scope of their own autonomy; they must find "appropriate ways of taking into account the authorizing environment" (Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg, 2015: 5; T'Hart and Tummers, 2019). O'Toole and Meier (1999, 2011) likewise emphasise that public managers operate in networked settings and that their success relies on some collaboration and coordination with external stakeholders. For instance, public managers may need permission (autonomy from) to use resources (autonomy to) or need assistance in producing the results for which they are responsible. In a sense, public managers must thus "persuade" external actors, what Moore describes as a "political rather than managerial" task (1995: 114), and it illustrates how managerial autonomy is exercised in relation to a political environment in public organisations (Meier and O'Toole, 2011).

In section 2.6.1, I concluded that regulation, policies, and reforms are the most studied environmental factors that affect the level of managerial autonomy in the contemporary literature. At the frontline level of management, Williamson (2011) empirically compares managerial autonomy over personnel policies of public and private school principals. Personnel policies are more formalised in public schools, and public principals report less autonomy in personnel decisions. In the qualitative findings, the principals attribute the highest constraints to their autonomy to "district and union or professional group constraints on human resource decision-making" (Williamson, 2011: 272). Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018) and Meier et al. (2015) argue similarly that the strength of employee unions is important in understanding managerial autonomy for frontline school principals. Meier et al. (2015) focus on the role of national contexts, including how the level of managerial autonomy differs in Danish schools compared to Texan schools. They conclude that differences between the adversarial system and the corporatist systems in the countries affect managerial autonomy, i.e., "in a system that concentrates political power and has processes for building consensus, the task of management becomes much easier" (Meier et al., 2015: 133).

In sum, the importance of the environment for understanding managerial autonomy is both empirically (see also section 2.6.1) and theoretically proven. I very briefly introduced some major theoretical approaches to this, including how managerial autonomy is relative to degree of publicness, external restraints, and various strategies advanced in the literature related to managerial autonomy. The environmental factor in relation to managerial autonomy is unsurprisingly the most theorised in the public management literature, as the public environment naturally constitutes a vital factor in the distinctiveness of public management.

3.6.2. Organisational factors

The organisational factors denote the extent to which the organisation itself and organisational characteristics relate to managerial autonomy. In the systematic review in section 2.6, I conclude that organisational characteristics such as the task and size of an organisation are empirically found to be related to the degree of managerial autonomy. For instance, public managers in larger organisations are expected to be in a better position to resist attempted interference and top-down control (e.g., Bach, 2014; Bach et al., 2020: 7). Organisations with more financial resources or a larger budget are expected to provide the conditions for higher degree of managerial autonomy (e.g., Bach, 2014; Van Thiel and Yesilkagit, 2014; Zhang and Feiock, 2010).

Managerial autonomy in relation to organisational performance and organisational culture is relatively well studied. For instance, politicians may ascribe more credit to managers when organisational performance is very high or very low, i.e., public managers "earn autonomy" if performance improves (Carpenter, 2001; Hoque, Davis, and Humphreys, 2004: 355; Nielsen and Moynihan, 2017). Likewise, Meier et al. (2015: 113) stress the influence of external stakeholders who "may initiate interactions because of (perceived) performance problems", and that "external actors, including those in formal accountability channels, may seek to penetrate the processes of internal organizational production and influence some of the operations that are normally the province of management, i.e., "micromanagement". Another important aspect is the role of organisational performance in relation to employees. Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018) show that employees' zone of acceptance, i.e., acceptance of their leader, also depends on performance information. Acceptance of the manager tends to be higher if employees receive signals that the organisation is doing well or is performing poorly. The implication is that managers might use this strategically by disclosing information about organisational performance to affect employee acceptance of management, thus actively increasing their level of managerial autonomy (Nielsen and Jacobsen, 2018: 684). In terms of level of management, employees' acceptance of their managers may be of special importance to managers at lower levels who have direct, often daily, communication with employees (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Findings point to a notion that managerial autonomy also emanates from within the organisation and the lower echelons of public organisations, rather than exclusively from the top as also noted in the classic literature of Barnard, Follett, and Simon (Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1997, see also Favero et al., 2018: 106-107).

In the contemporary literature, Carpenter and Krause (2015) have taken up some of the task of developing theory based on this with clear connotations to the principal-agent framework (Moe, 1984; Miller, 2005). They argue that compliance by an agent (e.g., employee) is motivated by both the agent's sanctioned acceptance of the principal's autonomy (i.e., managerial autonomy) and by the principal's "sanctioned acceptance" of the agent's legitimacy (Simon, 1997: 10). The relationship between principal and agent reflects a partnership of bargaining and mutual exchange, some of which is contractual and formal in nature, and some of which is outside the purview of explicit contracts (Carpenter and Krause, 2015: 8). In comparison to principal-agent or delegation frameworks, both agent and principal are contract makers who shape the terms of whatever autonomy is to be delegated by the principal to the agent in formal and informal arrangements (Carpenter and Krause, 2015: 10; 13).

Thus, autonomy is "intrinsically shared among principal(s) and agents" (Carpenter and Krause, 2015: 18).

Organisational culture is another well studied concept in relation to managerial autonomy (Moynihan and Pandey, 2006; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015; Wynen et al., 2014). For instance, Moynihan and Pandey (2006) argue that organisational culture matters for managerial autonomy. An "entrepreneurial/goal-oriented culture" that emphasises innovation, growth, adaptation, and goal achievement is consistent with empowering managers with higher levels of managerial autonomy – as opposed to "bureaucratic culture" (Moynihan and Pandey, 2006: 126). Wynen and Verhoest (2015) and Wynen et al. (2014) approach the relationship to organisational culture in the other causal direction theoretically, i.e., as a consequence of managerial autonomy. The argument is that managerial autonomy stimulates a more innovative and external customer-oriented culture in public organisations as a higher level of managerial decision-making makes it possible to develop new ways of managing the organisations.

In sum, two organisational variables, organisational performance and organisational culture, have dominated the contemporary literature on organisational factors relating to managerial autonomy. Both have been theorised and investigated as antecedent and consequence of managerial autonomy, which demonstrates their close relation to managerial autonomy.

3.6.3. Individual factors

While environmental and organisational factors are "outside" relations to various stakeholders such as upper-level managers, political principals, and employees, the individual factors are related to managers. The conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in the dissertation explicitly relates to individual factors. First, managerial autonomy is defined in terms of capabilities, alluding to the significance of the individual level. Second, the de facto attribute explicitly relates to individual-level perceptions of managerial autonomy.

However, the relation between individual factors and managerial autonomy is not a big theme in the contemporary public management literature. An example is Portillo's (2012) study of the relationship between managers' gender, race, and age and their managerial autonomy, which finds that women and people of colour experience that their autonomy is challenged to a higher degree than white men's. She argues that "the very meaning of their authority is therefore different: It is more rule and rights based, more formal than informal, more explicit than implicit. Yet, because it is more rule based, formal, and explicit, their authority is also more open to question and challenge, and more resented as an artifice" (Portillo, 2012: 87). Bezes and Jeannot (2018)

and Van de Walle (2019) include individual-level control variables (e.g., sex, age, experience, education) to explain the degree of managerial autonomy.

The relation between individual factors and managerial autonomy is more developed in the literature on private management. In their review, Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015) point to personality traits, cognitive complexity, and tolerance of ambiguity as important individual-level factors relating to managerial autonomy in private organisations. There is no obvious reason why such factors would not be relevant in a public setting as well. In a related literature, Andersen et al. (2018) show that personality traits of both politicians and upper-level managers in Danish municipalities affect the leadership behaviour exercised by politicians. Other individual factors that are likely relevant for managerial autonomy are individual-level resources such as work time, level of education or training, and cognitive abilities. Under the plausible assumption that the public environment is complex to the degree as discussed in 3.6.1, one would expect bounded rationality to play a part in managerial autonomy in public organisations (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016; March and Simon, 1958).

In the classic literature, there are some interesting discussions of the individual-level factors of autonomy of managers. Barnard (1938: 173-174) argues that a manager's autonomy to a "considerable extent" is independent of personal ability and that there exists an authority of position, cf. de jure managerial autonomy. However, some managers have a "superior ability", i.e., they have knowledge and understanding, regardless of their position, to "command respect" and to exercise leadership. Managers who are able to combine both positional authority and "authority of leadership" have high managerial autonomy (i.e., give orders outside the zone of indifference). Barnard (1938) follows classic work by Max Weber, who distinguished between three forms of authority: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic (Weber (1911) in Waters and Waters 2016). According to Weber, agents follow principals by traditional authority because of the norms, habits, and the "eternal past". In a rational-legal sense, they follow because of bureaucratic authority, rules, and laws. Finally, agents follow principals with charismatic authority because of their personal abilities, heroism, and inspirational behaviour.

In sum, managerial characteristics likely play a role for managerial autonomy in public organisations. However, theoretically, individual-level factors do not seem to as a developed literature as the environmental and organisational factors in public organisation.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter set out to conceptualise managerial autonomy with inspiration from the contemporary literature reviewed in chapter 2. Specifically, I define managerial autonomy as *the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities*. I have concretised the scope of managerial autonomy as the capabilities over management and leadership functions. I argue that the concept can be approached as de jure, i.e., objective, managerial autonomy, e.g., as how it is defined in regulation, and de facto, i.e., subjective, managerial autonomy, e.g., how it is perceived the by individual manager. Furthermore, I argue that managerial autonomy can be approached as autonomy to, i.e., agency to decision-making, and autonomy from, i.e., the exemption of interference in decision-making. Finally, I have discussed how environmental factors (e.g., publicness, the political environment), organisation (e.g., organisational performance, organisational culture), and individual factors (e.g., managerial characteristic) can illustrate the relative nature of managerial autonomy in public organisations.

Chapter 4.
Methodological approach

In this chapter, I present a qualitative methodological approach to studying managerial autonomy as experienced by public managers. The methodological approach promotes the investigation of RQ1, i.e., *what is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?* As the chapter will show, the literature review in chapter 2 and the conceptualisation presented in chapter 3 play a major role in the interviews with 17 public managers in Danish primary schools, high schools, and job centres. The organisations where the interviews are conducted are selected purposefully, the interview guide is developed on the basis of existing literature, and the data is coded deductively.

First, I argue why a qualitative approach has merits in investigating the dissertation's first research question, the logic of inquiry, and the quality criteria of the approach. Second, I discuss why organisations with varying degrees of publicness and organisational performance are selected. Third, I describe the context of the three selected types of public organisations. Fourth, I discuss my interview approach. Finally, I discuss my coding and analytical approach.

4.1. Qualitative approach

Presenting a conceptualisation from the existing literature and using it as foundation for data collection and analysis is common in qualitative data analysis (Ashworth, McDermott, and Currie, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019). The qualitative approach has several advantages in terms of understanding the concept of managerial autonomy.

First, the approach is useful in developing, clarifying, and expanding concepts because it can describe a phenomenon in detail as it occurs in context (Ashworth, McDermott, and Currie, 2019: 319; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2016: 180; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 7-8, 21; Nowell and Albrecht, 2019: 350; Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 293; Stake, 2006: 27). In other words, it allows for answering the fundamental question of conceptualisation, i.e., "what we are talking about" (Gerring, 2012a: 112) by focusing on practitioners' frame of reference of the concept (Gibson and Brown, 2009: 8). Second, the approach allows for flexibility in terms of, e.g., data collection, as the chapter will show, including the use of semi-structured interviews. This is useful because there seems to be some variation in the understanding and definitions in the academic literature, which can be expected empirically as well

(Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014; Soss, 2006), and the approach allows me to be open and flexible to deviate from pre-existing knowledge – even as the overall approach is primarily deductive (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 31). Third, qualitative research is conspicuous in its absence in the literature on managerial autonomy. This has led to the call for more qualitative work on, e.g., conceptualisation, as the concept has been "imposed by the researchers upon reality", and the observation that there has been no "genuine in-depth investigation of how bureaucrats, regulators or politicians understand the concept of autonomy" (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014: 244-245; see also Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker, 2015 for a similar argument in private organisation research).

Some research criteria are developed specifically to evaluate qualitative research (Andersen, Laustsen, and Cecchini, 2020). In order to address the quality of the analytical approach and credibility of the results, I will discuss and evaluate the validity within the quality criteria proposed by Maxwell (1992; 2012; 2013). I rely on an understanding of *validity* that refers to the "correctness or credibility" of the account, while not trying to imply an objective truth – i.e., validity refers explicitly to the researcher's conclusions and inferences, not the data itself (Maxwell, 1992: 281-283; 2013: 122). Maxwell further distinguishes between *descriptive*, *interpretive*, and *theoretical* validity. *Descriptive validity* refers to whether the account provided is descriptively accurate (Maxwell, 1992: 286). This can be either primary, i.e., the validity of what I as a researcher report having heard, or secondary, i.e., the validity of things that could in principle be observed but are inferred from other data. *Interpretative validity* relates to the validity of the interpretations of the experiences, understanding, and the examples from the interviews, i.e., the validity of what the interviewed managers *mean* (Maxwell, 1992: 288). The concept managerial autonomy is not physical, and to make sense of it as a researcher, I need to infer or interpret the interviewed managers' words (Maxwell, 2012: 137-139). *Theoretical validity* refers to how theory, concepts, and categories are applied to managerial autonomy, including the postulated relationships between the attributes I advanced as a researcher in chapter 3 (Maxwell, 1992: 291-293; Maxwell, 2012: 139-141). *Generalisation* refers to the degree to which the account of a situation or a population can be extended to other persons, times, or settings than those studied (Maxwell, 1992: 293), which includes *internal generalisability*, i.e., extending within the community or group studied, and *external generalisability*, i.e., extending outside the setting or population studied.

In sum, the qualitative approach has some advantages in terms developing and clarifying concepts, including flexibility and the possibility to study the concept in context, and as experienced by public managers. The validity of the

qualitative approach can meaningfully be evaluated on the basis of a methodologically realist stance and the corresponding research criteria, stressing the credibility of the analytical interpretations and conclusions.

4.2. Case selection

In order to advance a methodological design, cases must be selected for inquiry. In this section, I will explain why and how the case selection supports the purpose of the qualitative approach, i.e., to study managerial autonomy as experienced in a public management context. I have selected public organisations with the aim of maximising variance in conditions of managerial autonomy (Gerring, 2006; Seawright and Gerring, 2008: 300; Stake, 2006: 24), preserving contextual awareness, and staying within practical limitations (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 27). The following reasons have guided me in this choice.

First, maximum variance selection makes it possible to study how managerial autonomy is experienced in different types of public organisations and to use this as analytical leverage as maximum variance implies a wide range of examples, contextual experiences, and understandings of decision-making capabilities. This allows me to analyse contrasts over spans of different units, compare findings between types of organisations and potentially arrive at "more fully specified constructs" (Bazeley, 2013: 347). Second, the case selection allows me to expose "indexicality", i.e., that concepts assume different meanings in different contexts or areas (Soss, 2006: 139). Third, maximising variance provides some basis for the generalisability of the understanding of the concept as the case selection potentially illuminates a fuller range of the concept (Flick, 2009; Maxwell, 2012: 135; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 28; Seawright and Gerring, 2008: 297-300). Following these three arguments, the case selections strengthens the possibilities to develop and refine the concept, e.g., by potentially uncovering and explaining scope conditions or boundaries of the conceptualisation

In the case selection, I also emphasise the need to preserve contextual awareness, to stay within practical limitations, and to select cases based on findings from the existing literature. First, I preserve contextual awareness and literacy by limiting the selection to three types of public organisations, which allows me to prepare, situate, and gain in-depth insight into the specific types of organisations. Specific knowledge and understanding of the investigated areas are essential in conducting and analysing semi-structured, phenomenologically informed interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 224-225) (see also section 4.4). Context-specific knowledge includes understanding of rules, regulation, and conditions specific to the exact type of organisation.

Knowledge about context is useful in the interview situation, as it helps me understand and probe the finer and more contextual points made by the interviewed managers regarding their managerial autonomy (Ashworth, McDermott, and Currie, 2019; Gerring 2012b; Stake, 2006). In the data analysis, it ensures interpretative validity, i.e., that I interpret the managers' statements correctly. This preparation is condensed and manifested in sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.3., where I describe the types of organisations.

Second, and in order to select specific managers for interviews, i.e., the unit of analysis, I need to select on variables that have been demonstrated to relate to managerial autonomy in the literature. Based on the systematic review in chapter 2, some of the most investigated variables are *publicness* and *organisational performance*. Following this, I first select type of organisation based on degree of publicness. Second, I select specific organisations based on level of organisational performance. Both variables can be meaningfully assessed and measured, as I will discuss momentarily. However, the selection does not strive to make causal claims or investigate causal mechanisms between publicness or organisational performance and managerial autonomy. The case selection it is exclusively a means to maximise variation. In the next sections, I elaborate on how selection in terms of variance in organisational publicness and performance is useful in order to answer the research question.

As the review in chapter 2 and the discussion in chapter 3 attest to, the literature reveals that publicness is not simply a theoretical construct for classifying organisations – it has implications for public management and for managerial autonomy (Boye et al., 2021; Boye and Tummers, 2021; Boyne, 2002; Merritt, 2019; Petrovsky, James, and Boyne, 2015; Rainey, 2014). In two recent reviews of the contemporary empirical literature, Boye and Tummers (2021) and Boye et al. (2021) review how publicness relates to public leadership and management, respectively. Boye and Tummers (2021) find several assertions in the literature on public leadership that publicness influences the possibilities and constraints of public managers to exercise leadership, e.g., in terms of enacting transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. In their review of the difference between public and private management, Boye et al. (2021) review studies that explicitly investigate differences in managerial autonomy between private, public, and non-profit managers. They find that seven out of seven identified studies of the relationship between publicness and managerial autonomy report empirical evidence that publicness affects the degree of managerial autonomy (i.e., Desmarais and Chatillon, 2010; Feeney and Rainey, 2010; Hansen and Villadsen, 2010; Leroux and Feeney, 2013; Ssengooba et al., 2002; Williamson, 2011).

First, I select organisations with varying degrees of publicness. The dimensional approach to publicness stresses that public organisations are not just

public or not public – they vary dimensionally in exposure to political authority and economic authority (Bozeman, 1987; Merritt, 2019; Petrovsky, James, and Boyne, 2015). Thus, an organisation is "more or less public" depending on the mix of political and economic authority it is exposed to (Bozeman, 1987; Rainey, 2014). Political authority is expected to be most important of the two dimensions (Bozeman, 1987). Exposure to political authority is the degree to which organisations are subject to principals and stakeholders that may exercise formal control over them (e.g., indirectly in legislatures or directly as governing boards) (Bozeman, 1987: 11; Rainey, 2014; Meier and O'Toole, 2011). An example is managerial autonomy being contested by political inference and institutional constraints where managers might be overruled by interventions from politicians, upper-level management, or external stakeholders that may penetrate the internal, organisational procedures (Meier et al., 2015; Moore, 1995). Exposure to economic authority is the degree to which organisations are subject to interference in terms of allocating resources (e.g., financial, or human). This, presumably, has implications for managers' decision-making capabilities of financial resources, human resources, monetary rewards, and allocation between tasks (Rainey, 2014; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000; Meier and O'Toole, 2011). Exposure to economic authority includes ownership, private funding (e.g., user-paid service fees), market-based mode of social control, civil service personnel systems, working hour agreements, and purchasing and procurement systems (e.g., Rainey, 2014: 77-84). Thus, the publicness approach and its impact on management of public organisations shares many similarities with the attribute of managerial autonomy from (see section 3.5). Second, I select on the level of organisational performance, which has been demonstrated empirically to be associated with organisational performance (see sections 2.5.2 and 3.6.2).

I have identified three types of public organisations that vary in degree of exposure to political and economic authority where publicly available data on organisational performance is also available. I select Danish organisations based on the combination of the two dimensions of publicness, i.e., diverse cases at the end of continuums of the dimensions (Seawright and Gerring, 2008): high schools as a type of public organisation with low exposure to both economic and political authority, primary schools as a type of organisation with high exposure to political and economic authority, and job centres as cases of moderate exposure to the two publicness dimensions.

In the next subsections, I discuss the fundamental features of the three types of organisations, and how the features are relevant for managerial autonomy. The case descriptions offer contextual insight into exposure to political and economic authority, i.e., essential background knowledge to conduct and analyse the interviews with managers in chapter 5 (Gerring, 2012b: 735;

Maxwell and Mittpalli, 2011: 156; Stake, 2006: 27-28). As the degree of publicness is not necessarily static – it shifts over time and within organisations (Antonsen and Jørgensen, 1997; Bozeman and Mouton, 2011: 375) – I am especially attentive to how specific policies and reforms have developed in recent years in terms of exposure to political and economic authority.

4.2.1. Public high schools (HS)

In Denmark, there are around 144 public high schools (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015), they are publicly owned and funded, and they service around 149,000 students (Houlberg et al., 2016). The high schools produce similar services, i.e., general upper secondary education in preparation for higher education. The management structure of most schools is relatively simple. The principal is responsible for personnel management (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015; Staniok, 2017), and middle managers mainly have administrative tasks (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2017). In the literature, principals have been characterised as having a "high level of managerial autonomy" (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015: 833), "principals in this area have substantial autonomy" (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2017: 259), and "a strong formal position with great autonomy and have the greatest influence on school decisions in general" (Fjendbo, 2021: 36).

The high schools are self-governing, own their buildings, have considerable latitude of actions, the principal formally answers to the board, which is composed of members reflecting the school's specific academic profile, is responsible for administrative and financial management (Christensen, Heinesen, and Tranæs, 2014: 24, 30), and appoints and dismisses the principal (Jacobsen, Nielsen, and Hansen, 2014: 95-97; Houlberg et al., 2016: 171). However, the central government also exercises influence over the high schools with different tools, including general legislation and targeted programs by the ministry. The educational sector in Denmark is highly politically salient and attracts the interest of the population as well (Stubager, Hansen, and Jensen, 2020).

In terms of exposure to economic authority, the schools have their own budgets and are autonomous in terms of spending financial resources within their organisation. They are financed by activity, i.e., the number of students attending the schools. However, due to the Danish labour market and corporatist system in the educational sector, the principals face relatively strong unions and political constraints "which reduce discretion somewhat, in relation to the use of wage incentives and firing" (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015: 833). The central government has some measures to influence the economic author-

ity of the high schools as well, e.g., the annual fiscal bill that regulates the activity-based funding and completion rate, and adjustment to the "remoteness rate", i.e., grants to schools in remote locations (Houlberg et al., 2016). In addition, the high schools' budgets are reviewed and audited by the Ministry of Children and Education.

The biggest policy changes related to managerial autonomy are the new status of self-governance in 2007 and the new working hour agreement in 2013 (Christensen, Heinesen and Tranæs, 2014: 17). Self-governance includes activity-based financing, a larger role for the principal, and introduction of governing boards. However, the high schools did not become exempt from exposure to political authority, as national regulation of the curriculum (e.g., the Educational Act), activities of the schools, and the strong status of employees from collective agreements are in still in effect (Christensen, Heinesen and Tranæs, 2014: 24-26). In 2013, the collective agreements were renegotiated, which dissolved the centrally decided number of working hours and labour standards, thus, de jure, giving the school principal a greater managerial prerogative in deciding the teachers' working hours and tasks. In recent years, the legislative volume of acts has increased (Jakobsen and Mortensen, 2016: 302). In sum, high schools are selected as cases with low exposure to political and economic authority.

4.2.2. Public primary schools (PS)

The 1,312 Danish public primary schools are publicly owned and are attended by approximately 550,000 students (82 pct. of all Danish children) between age 6-7 to 15-16 (Houlberg et al., 2016). The schools produce similar services, under the National Act of the Danish Primary School, to prepare students for further education, give them the will to learn, make them aware of Danish culture and tradition, other countries and cultures, the relationship to the nature, and the individual student's learning and development (Act no. 823).

The schools are nested in multi-layered and interrelated governing systems where the municipalities and local councils have formal responsibility for the schools (Act no. 823). The administrative management structure consists of some upper-level management at the municipal level (managing directors and administrative managers), typically overseeing all schools in a municipality. At the school level, the principal is responsible for personnel management, and the vice-principal's tasks are typically administrative, e.g., scheduling. The principals have been described as having "substantial discretion at the school level" (Andersen and Mortensen, 2010; Nielsen, 2014: 440), but also, compared to American colleagues, as more exposed to economic and political authority (Meier et al., 2015).

In terms of exposure to political authority, there is a relatively complex system of governance between national, municipal, and school level (Houlberg et al., 2016: 49). At the national level, acts and regulations set the overall purpose and frame for the Danish schools, while the local government in the 98 municipalities run the schools. As for high schools, the political salience is high (Stubager, Hansen, and Jensen, 2020), there is a strong corporatist systems with collective wage agreements (Meier et al., 2015), and a highly unionised employee group (Nielsen and Jacobsen, 2018).

The area is financially decentralised from the national level to municipalities (Houlberg et al., 2016: 35). Municipal tax revenue is supplemented by national funds, and it is then up to the municipality to distribute the funds to schools and ensure that the national requirements are met. Thus, the municipalities allocate resources and budget size to individual schools, and the municipalities decide the school structure, e.g., number of schools and size of classes. In terms of perso/nnel management, the school principals have some autonomy over hiring and firing, though the formal decision is technically taken by municipalities (Meier et al., 2015).

The recent public school reform in 2014 aspired to give school principals more local-decision making autonomy (Houlberg et al., 2016: 42-43). The reform entailed a longer and more varied school day, including elements of more lessons and physical education. In 2014, the national government also freed itself of former working hour agreements with the explicit aim to strengthen managerial autonomy at the schools (Act no. 409; Andersen, Boye and Laursen, 2018; Houlberg et al., 2016). The new national working regulation (Act no. 409) aimed to give school managers a stronger management prerogative over teachers' working hours by introducing a workplace attendance requirement and abolishing the former cap on teaching hours. The reform is an example of a change to de jure managerial autonomy (see section 3.4). In recent years, the primary school sector has in general seen an increase in the extent of national regulation, like the high schools (Jakobsen and Mortensen, 2014; 2016). In sum, primary schools are selected as cases with high exposure to political and economic authority.

4.2.3. Job centres (JC)

The 94 public job centres in Denmark are governed by the local municipal government, and the municipalities are responsible for implementing the national labour market policy (Act no. 1482: §2). The job centres are one-stop shops that assist applicants in finding recruitment, jobs, and information on the labour market, and they mediate labour, activation schemes, and visitation of all unemployed in Denmark. The management of the job centres typically

consists of a general manager and managers overseeing different functionally demarcated areas within different unemployment categories. In empirical research, job centre managers and politicians describe the area as "bureaucratic" and "formalised" (Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017: 101-102).

The organisational features concerning exposure to political authority are complex at national, regional, and local level. In addition to the municipal actors, e.g., local councillors and upper-level management, the central government plays a strong role (Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017), and regional labour councils give advice to groups of municipalities (Thuesen and Bille, 2017: 68). The central government steers the municipalities and job centres too with political goals and instruments, including regulation, financial incentives, IT, and other demands (Act no. 1482: §19; Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017). The political salience of the employment sector is generally low and, in recent years, declining (Stubager, Hansen, and Jensen, 2020).

The job centres' exposure to economic authority is relevant for the job centre managers, who point to this aspect as one of the most important for their job (Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017: 76-77). The results-based reimbursement system influences economic decisions at the individual job centre as funding is gradually reduced (from 80% to 20%) every week after the fourth week of unemployment. In addition, various funds administered at the central level have previously been shown to affect managerial behaviour at the centres (Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017).

The job centres and the employment area have seen relatively many reforms recently, including cash benefit reform, the reform of early retirement pension and flex job, the employment initiative reform and the inter-municipal reimbursement reform. The reforms have mainly targeted eligibility for different welfare benefits, effectively influencing work procedures at the job centres (Thuesen, Bille, and Pedersen, 2017), while the reimbursement reform and the number of reforms have more directly affected managerial autonomy (Thuesen and Bille, 2017). Performance management systems monitoring operation and accountability have become increasingly common in this area in the last decade (Petersen, 2021: 537). In sum, job centres are selected as cases with moderate exposure to political and economic authority.

Table 4.1 summarises the key features in terms of exposure to political and economic authority. The main difference is in governance, as public schools and job centres are run by elected local councils, while high schools are self-governing and have their own governance boards. Local governance, in these cases, implies a somewhat more complex administrative management structure with more layers of management. The main similarities are decentral institutions, relatively strong central governing in rules and regulation, and public funding.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of the three investigated types of organisations

	High schools	Primary school	Job centres
Task	Secondary schooling	Primary schooling	Match employers and employees
Ownership	Institutional	Public	Public
Exposure to political authority	Low: National goals and regulation Institutional self-governing	High: National goals and moderate regulation Local governance	Moderate: National goals and relatively strong regulation Local governance
Exposure to economic authority	Low: State grants and income from activity-based funding; schools have their own budgets and own their buildings	High: Financial decentralisation at municipal-level	Moderate: Most often activity-based funding
Management structure	Board | *School principals* | Middle managers and employees	Local councillors | Managing director(s) | Administrative top manager | *School principals* | Middle managers and employees	Local councillors | Managing director(s) | Administrative top manager | *Job centre manager* | Middle managers and employees
Employees	Street-level bureaucrats, medium professionalism, high unionisation	Street-level bureaucrats, high professionalism, high unionisation	Street-level bureaucrats, medium professionalism, high unionisation

The employees in the three types of organisations also share similarities, which is arguably relevant in terms of understanding managerial autonomy. First, the organisations are all tasked with welfare, and street-level bureaucrats work outside direct managerial oversight and with irreducible discretion that managers cannot eliminate (Evans and Harris, 2004: 879; Lipsky, 1980: 18-23, 161-162). Managerial autonomy in such organisations will meaningfully have to be studied vis-à-vis the employees' relatively high level of autonomy or discretion (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 18).

Second, all three areas represent a relatively high degree of professionalism, i.e., "the occupational level of specialised, theoretical knowledge combined with the existence of firm intra-occupational norms" (Andersen and Pedersen, 2012: 48). The degree of professionalism is a prerequisite for the employees' autonomy vis-à-vis their managers, which means that managerial decisions or efforts to control employees are regarded as illegitimate (Lipsky, 1980: 19). Third, the high level of unionisation, as in the rest of the Danish public sector, is expected to strengthen the employees' position in relation to their managers.

The unit of analysis within the organisations is the frontline managers (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019; Ragin, 1992) marked with italics in table 4.1, in the row for management structure. I focus on frontline managers as it, first, makes it possible to explore the context of managerial autonomy vis-à-vis employees, other actors ranked alongside the managers, and upper-level management. Second, the literature review shows that managerial autonomy is most often attached to individual managers, and I place individual managers' understandings and sense-making efforts, i.e., contextualised experiences, at the forefront of my empirical investigation (Soss, 2006: 138-140; Spencer et al., 2016). Third, one-on-one interviews with individual managers have some practical advantages in terms of contact and recruitment compared to, e.g., interviews with management teams or several managers at the same time.

In sum, the selection of managers in primary schools, high schools, and job centres strives to maximise variance in conditions of managerial autonomy to create a basis for investigating managerial autonomy as contextualised experiences with ample variety. I have elaborated on the characteristics of the three types of organisations in the interview study, as rich descriptions are a prerequisite for valid analyses and interpretations of contextual experiences. In the next section, I describe how I contacted and recruited managers for the interviews.

4.3. Contact and recruitment

This section explains how I contacted and recruited managers for interviews. I will discuss how the recruitment process and the characteristics of the interviewees potentially influence the validity and generalisability of the study's conclusions.

In practice, I made a list of all Danish municipalities with a job centre, at least one high school, and at least one public primary school. This excluded small municipalities, and for practical reasons, I also excluded municipalities with no bridged connection to the mainland. I then excluded the largest cities

in Denmark, i.e., Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, and Aalborg, as the governance structure differs significantly in these municipalities. The final list consisted of 79 out of 98 municipalities, which I sorted in low, mean, and high level of organisational performance based on the performance of their job centres. This was done in accordance with The Danish Ministry of Employment's ranking (2018) of each municipality's employment efforts in relation to social assistance benefits (*kontanthjælp*), unemployment insurance benefits (*dagpenge*), and sickness benefits (*sygedagpenge*). Municipalities are ranked based on their actual number of benefit recipients compared to an expected number of benefit recipients and are ranked from 1-98 in a value-added measure of performance. I chose three municipalities that are high performers and three that are low performers and contacted them by e-mail to recruit them (see appendix D for the letter of invitation). I contacted job centres first as no municipalities have more than one job centre. I expected the job centres to be hardest to recruit for the project but was proven wrong, as *all* managers at job centres I contacted agreed to participate.

In the next step, I aimed at selecting one low/high performing primary school and one low/high performing high school within the same municipality as the selected job centre. The information on primary and high school performance is calculated by the same logic as for the job centres and made publicly available by The Ministry of Children and Education. I used the most recent year available at the time, 2019. The performance is school value-added exam marks and is calculated by taking the expected mean (based on the students' socioeconomic characteristics) and subtracting this from the observed grade level (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015). Positive values denote higher than expected performance, while negative values denote lower than expected. The scores are accompanied by calculations of statistical significance, and most schools do not have a mean score that is statistically significant different than one would expect given socioeconomic variables (76% of primary schools and 61% of high schools). I consider these schools at a medium level of organisational performance.

The aim was to visit a municipality and conduct several interviews on one day and hold constant the city where the organisations are located. In terms of analysis, it keeps, e.g., the socioeconomic status of the population and the political context in the municipality constant to some extent. In practice, I sent a mail directly to the targeted managers identified on the organisations' homepages. In the mail, I stated the purpose of the project, what the interview entailed for the manager, and guaranteed anonymity (see appendix D for the invitation mail). If I did not get any response, I tried to contact the managers by telephone. It was relatively easy to identify the targeted manager in primary

and high schools, while the management structure at job centres is more complex. Consequently, I ended up interviewing managers at different levels at the job centres. In the interviews, I asked them to elaborate on the specific management structure to take this into account in the analysis. I do not think this had a negative effect on the aim to maximise variance in managerial autonomy; in fact, it may have introduced further variation. Empirical research has shown that the degree of managerial autonomy correlates with the level of management (Bezes and Jeannot, 2013; Brewer and Walker, 2013; Van de Walle, 2019). However, it may have affected comparability between the interviews at job centres compared to the primary and high schools, where all the interviewed managers are at the exact same level.

Table 4.2: Recruitment of managers to interview

	Contacted	Accepted	Declined	No contact
Job centres	6	6	0	0
High schools	13	6	4	3
Primary schools	12	5	3	4
Sum	31	17	7	7

Table 4.2 shows the recruitment process. The interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (autumn 2020) with restrictions on physical work, and some schools were closed due to affected students, while other schools were reluctant to participate because of restrictions and general busyness. Seven high schools and seven primary schools did not want to participate or did not respond. The typical explanations for not wanting to participate were time-constraints and/or COVID-19. As a consequence and since there are relatively few low and high performing high schools to choose from, the selection turned out a bit different from the aim of high and low performers from the same municipalities. I had to select from other municipalities (most often neighbouring municipalities) as well and, thus, to some extent deviate from the strict focus on high and low performing primary schools and high schools. Effectively, I end up with the organisations as illustrated in table 4.3, including organisations from 12 different municipalities, and six organisations with medium organisational performance. The interviewed managers are denoted with "PS1" to "PS" for primary schools, "HS1" to "HS5" for principals in high schools, and "JC1" to "JC6" for managers at job centres. In the remainder of the dissertation, I will refer to the interviewees with these labels.

Table 4.3: Final selection of 17 organisations

Performance / Publicness	Low	Medium	High
Low	HS3, HS5	HS1, HS4, HS6	HS2
Medium	JC2, JC3, JC4	…	JC1, JC5, JC6
High	…	PS3, PS4, PS5	PS1, PS2
n	5	6	6

Note: Different municipalities (n = 12), and in terms of the five Danish regions: North Denmark Region (n = 3), Central Denmark Region (n = 3), Region of Southern Denmark (n = 7), Region Zealand (n = 1), Capital Region of Denmark (n = 3).

As argued in section 4.2 on case selection, the aim is to maximise variation, and 17 cases across three types of public organisation give a reasonable chance of representing variability in the concept (Nowell and Albrecht, 2018). In terms of internal generalisability, the data for all three types of organisations has been collected in both rural and urban areas in Denmark, and in organisations with different levels of organisational performance. This strengthens internal generalisability, i.e., the findings can be extended to other organisations within the same types studied. However, it is worth considering whether the managers who participated are systematically different from the managers who refused to participate or did not respond to my request. The selection of low and high publicness organisations ensures that different contexts are covered, allows for triangulation between types of organisations should allow for external generalisation (Stake, 2006: 59; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019). However, as argued in section 4.2, the fact that the three types of organisations are all welfare organisations, two are specifically tasked with schooling, limits external generalisability. Nevertheless, and in line with other studies (e.g., Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015: 833; O'Toole and Meier, 2011: 34; Fjendbo, 2021: 37), schools are among the most common types of public organisations and share some key characteristics of the broader set of public organisations, at least in the Danish context. Overall, I find it reasonable to argue that the findings can be generalised internally in the three types of public organisations. External generalisation requires more caution, as data covers three types of public organisations purposefully selected but not necessarily representative of public organisations in general.

Due to restrictions and the ongoing pandemic, a handful of the interviews were conducted using video software by interviewees' request (I offered this opportunity if the interviewees preferred it, see letter of invitation appendix D). One phone interview was conducted following technical issues with the video software. Table 4.4 lists the different interview modes applied.

Table 4.4: Mode of Interview

	Face-to-face	Video	Telephone
Job centres	5	1	0
High schools	4	2	0
Primary schools	3	1	1
Sum	12	4	1

Computer-assisted interviewing is different from in-person interviewing due to the artificial distance, and gestures are not easily observable (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 204-205). I only experienced minor drawbacks in the quality of these interviews, which I suspect is because computer-assisted communication was used extensively in the period I conducted my interviews. Furthermore, one-on-one interviews were relatively well suited for this mode of interviewing where interviewer and interviewee take turns speaking. Thus, the video or telephone interviews did not cause me to approach the interviews any differently than face-to-face interviews, nor did it cause me to question the validity of my analytical conclusions.

In sum, the contact and recruitment mainly supported the aim to maximise variance. There were some practical limitations in terms of recruiting managers for interviews, and the mode of interviewing had to be adjusted to the circumstances in the period of investigation. This has not led me to question the validity of my analytical conclusions or the ability to generalise the findings in any major ways. In the next section, I elaborate on my interview approach.

4.4. Interview approach

In this section, I explain why a semi-structured interview approach, with extensive use of prompts for examples, is appropriate to investigate managerial autonomy in public organisations. The semi-structured interview guide is developed based on the conceptualisation in chapter 3.

I choose a semi-structured interview approach with individual managers, first, because the literature review and conceptualisation highlighted that managerial autonomy (unlike, e.g., organisational autonomy) can be studied as an individual-level concept. Semi-structured interviewing offers privileged access to individuals' everyday lives (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 229), here, how public managers in their everyday work life experience their managerial decision-making capabilities, including specific possibilities and constraints. Second, the semi-structure allows me to deviate from the interview guide and

to be flexible in exploring interesting points raised by the interviewed managers (Nowell and Albrecht, 2019; Soss, 2006). The conceptual attributes discussed in chapter 3 are the basis of the interview guide, and I extracted the themes of the interview guide from the attributes. In practice, I used the questions in the interview guide more as guidelines rather than questions I strictly had to ask word-by-word.

The interview guide was tested in a pilot interview and afterwards adjusted. During the first handful of interviews, minor adjustments were also made to the interview guide (see the final interview guide in appendix E). In general, getting the interviewees to reflect on experiences in their role as public managers was not very hard as they are used to talking and communicating. Furthermore, I assume it strengthens the descriptive validity of the account, i.e., I am not worried about the accuracy of the account, or whether the managers were reluctant to speak their mind. All interviewed managers explicitly expressed their interest in the subject and were eager to discuss my questions. The main challenge was to be aware of how the interviews unfolded – given the semi-structured approach – and to patiently note interesting points to follow up on. Thus, although it allowed me to be receptive to local idiosyncrasies, it could reduce the comparability of the interviews if the interviews went in completely different directions (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 14). Another pitfall was collecting too much "superfluous" information if the interview was not focused enough (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 32). However, I did conduct all interviews myself within a limited period in autumn 2020 with the other interviews in clear recollection, and with these potential pitfalls in mind. I tried to strike a balance in the interviews between a standardised protocol for data collection in multiple organisations and flexibility and openness.

As mentioned, I bring the existing set of conceptualisation and meaning from chapter 3 with me in the development of the interview guide, and based on Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015: 185-196) general recommendations, I specifically used different question techniques throughout the interview. The main approach was to ask short and simple, very open questions, and prompt interviewees to give examples from their workday (see full interview guide in appendix E). The approach is informed by phenomenological interviewing, i.e., "questions based on themes of experience contextualisation, apprehending the phenomenon and its clarification" (Bevan, 2014: 136), both in terms of capturing the underlying meaning of the concept, and how it shows up on its own practical terms as it is experienced by the managers (Creswell, 2012: 76-82; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 54-55). The aim was to obtain and understand contextualised experiences, and I extensively prompted for examples if the interviewees did not provide examples (Spencer et al., 2014).

I asked for examples of constraints and possibilities in managerial autonomy, i.e., both the negative and positive attributes of the concept, following Goertz (2006) and Klein, Goertz, and Podsakoff (2008: 68), i.e., "when developing a concept and its corresponding measure one needs to think seriously about the 'positive' and 'negative' poles of the concept". Managerial autonomy is an abstract concept, and by promoting the use of positive and negative examples, I encourage *instantiation*, i.e., "a deliberate process that involves specifying concrete instances of abstract concepts to help clarify their meaning" (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 96). Thus, the examples help concretise the concept by bridging the experienced-far, more conceptual and theoretical thinking (e.g., from the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and the conceptualisation in chapter 3), to the empirical, experienced-near practical realm effectively supporting interpretative validity. This demanded relatively high contextual familiarity with the investigated types of organisations (as argued in section 4.2), and I often asked for further elaboration on policies and specific organisational structures to understand the examples provided by the managers.

In the beginning of the interview, I prioritised time to introduce and orchestrate the interview as very open and explained my aim with the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 183). To open the interview, I first asked the managers to present themselves, followed by a very open, broad, and exploratory question: "What do you understand by managerial autonomy" to frame the interview. The main label for managerial autonomy in Danish has been the word "ledelsesrum" (e.g., The Danish Leadership and Management Commission, 2018; 2019). However, there are no exact translations of the word in English, and in the appendix and the interview quotes, I have mainly translated it with managerial autonomy. The translation in the Gyldendal's dictionary (2021) is "managerial capacity", which I do not see as an appropriate translation (see also my discussion on the label use in section 3.1). An alternative translation, although used relatively rarely in English, is "managerial room for manoeuvre". I use this translation in some of the quotes where the meaning of the quote is better conveyed using this translation, e.g., due to metaphoric or figuratively speaking.

Thus, the "ledelsesrum" label is familiar to and resonates with the interviewed managers (Gerring, 1999), and I use it as an interview tactic, as I expect it will generate rich associations in the interviewed manager (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 277-278). This first question is very important and is intended to prompt the interviewees to outline what that particular term means to them, and what they find most important in their understanding of the concept (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020). It was, thus, a deliberate effort to

understand the concept as experienced-near, i.e., how the interviewees "naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on" (Geertz, 1973: 28). In the analysis, I have treated the answer to this question with special interest, as this gives me an indication of the managers' immediate and intuitive understanding of the concept. Furthermore, it is a good way to open the interview as it allows the interviewee to speak at length.

However, it also demanded that I was very receptive to what the respondent chose to focus on in answering the question. Furthermore, it put relatively high pressure on the level of abstractness for the interviewed managers from the very beginning (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015: 186). In all interviews, I noted in great detail the specific answer to this question and then tried to refer to the interviewees' wording in their responses to this question as the interviewed progressed. As the guide and interview progress, the questions become more thematic. My general impression was that the opening question served its purpose well, and that all interviewees gave elaborate answers.

Later in the interviews, I tried to invite more of a discussion of the topic (Gibson and Brown, 2009: 8). In some sense, the interview changed character into expert interviewing, where I as an interviewer took the role of "expert from a different knowledge culture" (Bogner and Menz, 2009: 68-69). For instance, I tested some of my arguments and assertions on the concept of managerial autonomy and tried to "trade information" with the manager. This was done with special interest in fostering theoretical validity. I only did it in the last part of the interviews to not "contaminate" the first part. This was possible as the managers I interviewed are used to conveying and discussing their opinions, experiences, and positions, and because I had prioritised to gather contextual knowledge in the three investigated areas (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015: 201-202). In this part of the interview, I strived towards a more symmetrical relationship where I represented the academic angle, and the interviewee represented the empirical angle (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020). The result was inter-subjective knowledge produced by two persons with a common interest (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015) and an aim to bridge the conceptual and the empirical realms (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 26). In general, I think this was a constructive approach to the interviews, and a few interviewees explicitly commented that they liked it.

In sum, I apply a semi-structured interview approach with explicit prompts for specific examples of low and high degree of managerial autonomy in the managers' everyday work life in order to collect data on the contextualised experiences of managerial autonomy.

4.5. Data coding

This section elaborates on data coding and how it has supported my aim to analyse and understand managerial autonomy as experienced by public managers. The role of previous literature and theory (chapter 2) in the conceptualisation (chapter 3) has led me to approach the data coding deductively, i.e., approach the data a priori with a list of predefined codes.

The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were transcribed verbatim by a student assistant, following a transcription guide to increase the descriptive validity (see appendix F) (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015: 235-247; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 11). After every interview, I wrote a case memo capturing my experience and initial interpretation of the interview, including ideas for the analysis. This helped me in the analysis and interpretation of the interviews, thus, fostering descriptive and interpretive validity. I imported all my material to the software QSR NVivo software version R1.0 for coding and analysis.

The overall coding approach is deductive, and follows a concept-driven coding scheme. Previous literature plays a large role in the coding of the data, as I have extracted a list of attributes of the concept from a conceptual synthesis and a systematic review of the contemporary literature in chapter 2 and 3 (Bernard and Ryan, 2010; Blaikie, 2010: 68; Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 271). Thus, I have made a start list of codes prior to collecting, reading, and interpreting the data (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 74). The code list consists of nine codes (see table 4.5). The coding of the data to some extent validates the conceptualisation that I discussed in chapter 3. Nevertheless, I stay open to more inductive points emerging from the data and to "friendly amendments" in the analysis of the data, where I suggest refinements or make small changes to the conceptualisation to ensure validity (Adcock and Collier, 2001: 533).

The nine codes are: *Understanding*, focusing on the managers' core understanding, coded based on the answer to the first question, as discussed in section 4.4, and it is the empirical counterpart to the review of definitions in section 2.3, and the conceptualisation and definition presented in section 3.2. *Level* is coded where the managers elaborate on the level and their aspiration level of the degree of autonomy (see section 2.3). *Capabilities* refer to sections of text where the managers elaborate on the specific scope of managerial autonomy, which I reviewed as operationalisations (section 2.4) and proposed as the scope of managerial autonomy in the conceptualisation in section 3.3. *De jure* and *de facto* codes refer to my proposed conceptual attributes as discussed in section 3.4, where de jure denotes an objective or formal defined degree of managerial autonomy, e.g., formal organisation, legal documents,

and policies. De facto managerial autonomy is subjectively perceived by the manager. *Autonomy to* refers to autonomy understood in terms of level of agency. *Autonomy from* code refers to interferences in managerial autonomy. Table 4.5 lists the number of cases in which a specific code is coded and total number code references.

Specifically, I split the coding in two phases. The first phase of coding was theme based, i.e., the themes of the data become the codes, and the coding is non-hierarchical. I started by indexing and sorting the material, asking "what belongs together" in accordance with my deductive start coding list (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 26; Spencer et al. 2014: 282) (see table 4.5). The attributes of the concept coded here are meaning units, i.e., themes I purposefully looked for in the data (Creswell, 2012: 186; Saldana, 2016: 119-120). In many cases, several themes were coded in the data, as the interviewees talked about several of the conceptual attributes at the same time.

In the second phase, I coded coding units, i.e., segments in the data in more narrow passages. These passages were decontextualised from their initial context in the coding process to balance the high degree of closeness (required to analyse contextualised experiences) to the data with a more distanced approach (Gilbert, 2002: 218-220; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 79). I specifically coded examples provided by the interviewed managers, and the segmentation criteria in this phase was at the level of the provided example in correspondence with the nature of the collected data (i.e., I asked the managers to provide examples) and the overall methodological phenomenologically informed approach (i.e., contextualised experiences). In some cases, this resulted in one coding unit (example provided by the manager) for one meaning unit (an attribute of the managerial autonomy concept); in others, it resulted in several coding units for the same meaning unit. Note that reliability, as in ensuring the same procedure will always produce the same results, is not directly transferable to the realist stance applied in the qualitative study since the basic epistemological assumption is that knowledge is constructed from our own perspectives.

Table 4.5: Coding frame

Code label	Description	Cases (n)	References (n)
Code phase 1: Meaning units (themes)			
Understanding	Managers' core understanding of the concept	17	17
Level	Managers elaborate on their current and aspiration level of managerial autonomy	17	31
Capabilities	Managers elaborate on the scope of managerial autonomy	17	73
De jure	Managers elaborate on de jure	7	14
De facto	Managers elaborate on de facto	7	19
Autonomy to	Managers explain autonomy to	17	62
Autonomy from	Managers explain autonomy from	15	56
Code phase 2: Coding units (examples)			
High managerial autonomy	Managers experience high autonomy	16	36
	Hiring and firing	*3*	*3*
	Budgeting	*6*	*7*
	Performance management	*2*	*3*
	Salary, rewards	*0*	*0*
	Organisational change	*9*	*10*
	Policies and goal setting	*4*	*5*
	Work organization	*6*	*7*
	Other	*1*	*1*
Low managerial autonomy	Examples provided by managers where they experience low autonomy	15	54
	Hiring and firing	*2*	*3*
	Budgeting	*9*	*10*
	Performance management	*2*	*3*
	Salary, rewards	*2*	*3*
	Organisational change	*12*	*23*
	Policies and goal setting	*4*	*5*
	Work organization	*4*	*4*
	Other	*3*	*3*

In sum, to support the analysis of the concept of managerial autonomy as contextualised experiences, I have chosen a deductive coding strategy that follows directly from the conceptualisation in chapter 3. In the data, I code both meaning units, i.e., themes in larger text passages, and coding units, i.e., examples given by the managers. In the next section, I present how I approach the analysis and pattern seeking in the coding

4.6. Seeking patterns

Seeking patterns in conceptualisation is useful because a purely semantic analysis of concepts, words, and their definition is never adequate by itself. We need to understand the *whys* (Goertz, 2006: 5; Spencer et al., 2014: 274). Data coding lays the groundwork for seeking patterns in the data and the analysis.

In the search for patterns in the individual interviews and patterns across interviews, there are two major validity threats, i.e., *researcher bias* and *reflexivity* (Maxwell, 2013: 123-124; Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2011: 158; see also Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 289-292). I therefore need to discuss how the analysis might have gone wrong, is susceptible to alternative explanations or interpretations. It is important in the coding and analysis to acknowledge things that run counter to the deductive reasoning and my role as researcher, and I have to be aware, and willing to amend, adapt, and amend to this (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 279).

Researcher bias entails that data has been selected and/or squeezed to fit existing theory, the researcher's goals, conceptualisation, and preconceptions (Barbour, 2014: 502-506; Maxwell, 2013: 123-124; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 289). This is a plausible threat in light of the deductive approach, and I might – knowingly or unknowingly – have looked exclusively for the patterns I discussed in chapter 3 on conceptualisation, or cherry-picked data that fits the deductive data-scheme (Barbour, 2014: 505). Furthermore, deductive approaches are, in general, not good at finding alternative explanations (Ashworth, McDermott, and Currie, 2019: 319). In general, this relates to the subjectivity of me as researcher (Maxwell, 2013: 124), and how my perceptual lens, my reading of the literature, and my beliefs on the matter of managerial autonomy have influenced the analysis. In line with this, *reactivity* refers to my influence, as a researcher, on the setting or the managers I interviewed. Epistemologically, the basic stance and approach of the interviews are that I as a researcher play a part and thus influence the participants I study (Barbour, 2014). The actual influence of a researcher in qualitative research, e.g., a semi-structured interview with managers, can be neither meaningfully eliminated nor "controlled for" (Maxwell, 1992: 283; 2013: 124).

To discuss how and to what extent potential biases affect the validity of analysis, I want to recapitulate the most important strategies I have applied and how they have manifested themselves in the analysis and its validity (Maxwell, 2012: 214). I follow the advice of Maxwell (2012: 124-135), Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2019: 273-304), and Coffey and Atkinson (1996), including looking for patterns, themes, regularities, irregularities, contrasts, and paradoxes by also weighting the evidence, following up on surprises, and looking for negative evidence. Furthermore, I have to some extent embraced and used my role as researcher actively in the interviews (see section 4.4) as minimising the interviewer's influence, in general, is not meaningful for qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013: 124). This includes, e.g., playing the part of "expert from a different knowledge culture" (Bogner and Menz, 2009: 68-69; see also section 4.5). Another example is continuously prompting the managers to give examples of high and low level of managerial autonomy, priming them to think of both negatives and positives. That being said, I consider the interviewed managers firm and true to what they believe, they are used to articulating their opinion, and in many cases, they explicitly corrected my understanding or interpretation if they did not agree. This makes me more confident of the descriptive and theoretical validity of the analysis.

The specific approach to seeking patterns consists of the following three steps. First, I retrieved all segments of data that shared a common meaning unit, e.g., by looking at all segments coded on a specific attribute. This resulted in long passages of text containing what the interviewed managers expressed concerning this attribute. The text portions were comprehensible by themselves and large enough to be meaningful (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), and they can be seen as composite descriptions of *what* the individuals experienced and *how* they experienced it (Creswell, 2012: 76). With this approach, I try to understand and analyse the conceptual attributes within the context and relationship to other points in the interviews, as I deemed it necessary to read and analyse large chunks of data to describe and interpret the contextualised experiences accurately and validly, and to "see processes and outcomes across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus to develop more sophisticated descriptions and powerful explanations" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 95). In this step, I specifically looked for correspondence and patterns of covariation where several managers point to the same themes (Stake, 2006: 28; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2019: 274-275). Reducing individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of "the universal essence" (Creswell, 2012: 76) is an important analytical step in phenomenological research. In this phase, in the analysis and in my final reporting, I relate the data to existing literature and the systematic review

in chapter 2 to increase the theoretical validity. Furthermore, I relate my qualitative findings to The Danish Management and Leadership Commission's (2017; 2018) representative survey of Danish managers in 2017, which asked many questions about the autonomy of managers, including influence from regulation, upper-level management, politicians, and employees. Thus, I actively use this rich quantitative material in my qualitative analysis, triangulating and qualifying the interpretation of the interviewed managers' experiences. The pattern seeking was inspired by a decontextualised segmentation analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 30; Tesch, 1990), and I have read the coding segments in their entirety many times to immerse myself in the details (Creswell, 2012: 183).

Second, I constructed a within-case display condensing how each of the 17 interviewed managers expressed themselves (Spencer et al., 2014; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019). The display includes case memos on my experiences of the interview. The within-analysis and displays are important because they expose important patterns expressed by each interviewed manager *in situ* (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 95) and expose what may be unique for each manager in their specific context (Stake, 2006: 39). This allows me to investigate how the managers' initial understandings of the concept correspond to the examples they provide, and improves my conditions for analysing and understanding why an individual manager understands a concept as they do in their bounded context (Creswell, 2012: 184). The within analyses were especially important in order to analyse the relationships between the attribute pairs of de jure/de facto managerial autonomy, and managerial autonomy to/from. Furthermore, it was useful in terms of ensuring descriptive validity, i.e., whether the analysis and reporting are of factual accuracy, and interpretative validity, i.e., whether I as a researcher make sense and interpret the experiences and examples provided by the managers correctly.

In sum, the correctness and credibility of the account have been a focal point in the choice of the methodological approach, the data coding, as well as the pattern seeking in the data. In the section, I demonstrate how I have uncovered, handled, and applied active strategies to acknowledge potential biases to validity within the methodological stance of the qualitative approach in the dissertation.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the qualitative methodological approach. The considerations in the research process are guided by the aim to optimise the conditions for investigating RQ1: *What is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?* My approach focuses on collecting experiences and

examples by public managers in the context of the Danish education and employment sector based on semi-structured interviews with 17 public managers. In the next chapter, I turn to the analysis of the data.

Chapter 5.
Managerial autonomy as experienced in public organisations

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the qualitative data. So far, I have reviewed the literature on managerial autonomy (chapter 2), discussed managerial autonomy conceptually (chapter 3), and presented a methodological approach to studying it (chapter 4). The analysis focuses on experiences and understandings of managerial autonomy based on the research question, RQ1: *What is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?* The chapter is the last contribution to RQ1 in the dissertation. In chapter 6, I focus on RQ2.

The chapter starts with an overview of how the concept is experienced and understood by the interviewed managers, and what they define as being within the scope of managerial autonomy. After that, I analyse the concept, first, with the attributes of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy and, second, with the attributes of managerial autonomy to and managerial autonomy from. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the clarity and goodness of the concept and conceptualisation.

5.1. The managers' initial understanding

In the first section of the chapter, I analyse the concept of managerial autonomy by focusing on the interviewed managers' initial and immediate understanding of the concept. The approach resembles an experienced-near account of concepts, i.e., what words the interviewees "naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on" (Geertz, 1974: 28; Maxwell, 1992). I analyse the variation in the answers to the first question in the interview guide, i.e., what the managers understand by the term (see also the discussion on the interview approach in section 4.4, and the interview guide in appendix E).

This section is the empirical counterpart to section 2.4, where I reviewed the definitions of managerial autonomy in the literature, and section 3.2, where I discuss the proposed conceptual definition in the dissertation. In chapter 2 and 3, I concluded that – as for most social concepts – there is a range of understandings of the concept (Gerring, 1999: 362). In section 2.3, I found that the definitions vary in terms of level of abstractness. Finally, there was a cluster of definitions in the medium-level category. This, among other things, led me to propose a relatively broad definition of managerial autonomy

as the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities in the dissertation.

In display 5.1, I select and present some key quotes that demonstrate the interviewed managers' understandings. The display is constructed in correspondence to the table in section 2.3, where the understandings are placed in "clusters of meaning", an analytical method in phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 2012: 82). I do this to condense the data and make it possible to analyse what the specific clusters of meaning have in common. I have selected six quotes as representative of the data, and the quotes correspond to "significant statements" in phenomenological analysis, i.e., "sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012: 82). Most of the empirical understandings gathered in the interviews with the public managers are relatively abstract, as they have a high degree of extension, and I therefore placed six in the high level of abstractness and eight in the medium cluster.

Display 5.1: Understandings of managerial autonomy in interviews

Abstraction	#	Understanding	Managers
High level	1	Well, it's my everyday function. Basically, I have to be the face of the school. I have to help set the course. I have to help navigate (PS2)	JC2 JC3 JC4 PS1 PS2 PS5
	2	I see my managerial autonomy as a framework … within which I operate. And I'm the one who leads within that framework. I'm the one with the responsibility. I'm the one who decides who gets to be inside that framework with me. That is my managerial autonomy (JC4)	
Medium	3	Well, it's the decisions I am able to make. That must be my managerial autonomy. And it can be staff-related, it can be economics, and it can be the teachers' approach to doing their job and anything you could imagine (HS4)	JC5 JC6 PS3 PS4 HS1 HS2 HS4 HS6
	4	It's about how I lead in the house. It's about personnel management on the one hand. How do you manage knowledge workers in a house like this with seven different educations? On the other hand, it's obviously also about my managerial autonomy in relation to the ongoing framework control (HS1)	
Low level	5	Well, offhand, one word in high schools pops into my head, which has also been used during my time, and that's self-governing in the high school (HS5)	JC1 HS3
	6	Well, I think I understand managerial autonomy in that way. It's both … well, my span of control; I have mid-level managers, commentators, staff (JC1)	HS5

The first I noted from the interviews, and from this very first question asked, is that there were a clear "cognitive click" of the term (Gerring, 1999: 370). It is demonstrated in the interviews, as the concept resonates well with the managers, they have an easy time discussing their understandings, and many of them explicitly note – as the very first thing – that it is a concept and label they use extensively, e.g., in discussions with their own manager:

> We talk a lot about managerial autonomy in the principals' group (PS5)

> It's actually something I've discussed quite a lot with my managing director … because I need to know which decision-making competences and which … normative competences I have within my autonomy (JC6)

Turning to the managers' specific understandings, the cluster of understandings with a high level of abstraction is exemplified by two managers (example 1 and 2 in display 5.1). The first manager responds to the question of what the concept entails by equating it broadly with their "everyday function", i.e., a maximal extension involving everything related to their daily function as public manager. The manager points to the need to set the course for the organisation and "navigate", using relatively abstract and metaphorical language. The second example demonstrates the high level of abstractness by referring to it as "a framework". The quote also illustrates how highly abstract understandings can be quite vague (Sartori, 1970). The frequent use of personal pronouns indicates that the two managers understand the concept as something individual.

This is corroborated in an interview with a primary school principal who explicitly notes the complexity of the concept, which I emphasised in the motivation for investigating RQ1, and which has been noted in the academic literature as well (e.g., Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014; Walker, Boyne, and Brewer, 2010):

> it is used indiscriminately, but very few actually attempt to define what they mean precisely by managerial autonomy. (...) I think managerial autonomy is a very complex notion overall because it encompasses everything that has to do with management, in the cross-pressure between politicians, citizens, staff and you as a manager with all the possibilities and constraints that entails (PS3)

On the one hand, the interviewed manager exposes the depth and vagueness of the concept in the quote. On the other hand, the manager qualifies the concept by pointing out that it relates to the cross-pressure between politicians, citizens, and employees, echoing public management descriptions from the literature such as Moore (1995), O'Toole, Meier, and Nicholson-Crotty (2005), O'Toole and Meier (2011), and T'Hart and Tummers (2020). Another manager focuses on autonomy as the exemption from predetermined decision:

But for me, managerial autonomy is having latitude to make an assessment and based on that assessment execute what I think is the right decision. But also important, that I have a space where all actions are not predetermined (PS 5)

Interference from stakeholders as part of the managerial autonomy concept corresponds to what I term *autonomy from*, as I will discuss in section 5.4. The comparison of definitions in the interviews also showed that for many managers, the concept relates directly to the primary task, goal attainment, or achieving organisational results:

It is the options or the framework I have available to execute and act out my management, and in reality the framework within which I can solve my core tasks and produce the results expected of me (PS1)

[it is] some strategic initiatives, some priorities regarding our efforts that … *I* can be permitted to make, you could say, where I think it makes sense professionally in terms of achieving some goals and some good results in my area, but of course also relatively satisfied citizens (JC2)

In these cases, the concept is understood more in terms of a requisite of leadership, i.e., leadership as "setting the course and creating results through, and with, others" (Danish Leadership and Management Commission, 2019: 3), and related to Moore's (1995: 10) definition of public leadership as "the task of creating public value". Another handful of managers within the cluster of medium-level understandings have an understanding related to classic principal-agent framework, where an upper-level principal delegates decision-making capabilities to a lower-level agent (Miller, 2005). I have grouped these understandings in the middle cluster because they typically have more narrow extensions, e.g., delegation, and refer to specific attributes, e.g., financial decision-making (see also example 3 and 4 in display 5.1):

… what kinds of decision-making competences you have. So, what is your mandate actually, defined as what can you actually decide to do out there decentrally? So managerial autonomy, when I hear people talking about it, it focuses a lot on: What is your scope of action to make decisions? (PS3)

Here illustrated by a manager who sees managerial autonomy as resting on the mandate given to them. Other examples are the words "delegation" and "allowance". A high school principal explicitly mentions the Ministry of Children and Education and the school board as influential stakeholders related to their managerial autonomy:

Well, managerial autonomy is about: "What options do I have to ensure that our core service is optimized?" So our core services are the students. The students have to be the best they can be. What is my scope of action to ensure that that happens? When am I wearing straitjackets as far as some … the ministry, which

tells us what to do, and the board as well? After all, that's our top management here. But also: "When do I have options?" (HS2)

Another manager connects managerial autonomy explicitly to the concept of power, repeating Dahl's (1957: 202-203) classic definition almost verbatim: "*A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do*":

> ... so it's often if somebody wants us to do something different than what we feel like doing (PS4)

I discuss this influence and power-related point in my discussion of the attributes of *autonomy to* and *autonomy from* in more detail in section 5.4. The analysis of the managers' understandings of the concept also shows examples of the specific capabilities within the scope of managerial autonomy, e.g., in terms of values, strategies, and financial matters. I discuss the scope of managerial autonomy as different kinds of decision-making capabilities in more detail in section 5.2.

The remaining understandings fall within the cluster of low level of abstraction, i.e., understandings with more narrow and fewer attributes. One manager in this cluster intuitively defines managerial autonomy as *span of control*, i.e., the number of employees the manager oversees. This stands in some contrast to the academic literature where span of control and managerial autonomy are differentiated concepts, thus indicating that the concept is perhaps not experienced as clearly differentiated from related concepts in practice. Nevertheless, span of control is a related concept that has also drawn significant attention in the public debate and public management literature (e.g., Bro, 2018; Danish Management and Leadership Commission, 2018). The following quote shows that the interviewed manager understands the concept as the capability to affect policy and policy implication, both at local and national level:

> Well, I think I understand managerial autonomy in that way. It's both ... well, it's the span of control I have in relation to ... I have middle managers, commentators, staff. So how many I cover. But I also think that, for me it's equally professional and political. In other words, what is the purview I've been left with? What is my scope of action? What can I personally do without asking permission ... and how can I influence ... the political – both national and local – approach to the field? That's more or less what I think I associate with managerial autonomy (JC4)

Comparing the three types of organisations, high school principals tend to have less abstract understandings and often refer to the high school's status as self-governing (see section 4.2.1), as also illustrated in display 5.1, example

5. I interpret this to indicate that self-governance is of vital contextual importance to the experience of managerial autonomy in high schools. However, I also note that the salience and political debate on self-governance, at the time of investigation of the interviews, may have had an influence on the managers' rationale and keenness to relate managerial autonomy and self-governance so closely. In the primary schools and job centres, which are locally governed by the municipalities, the initial understandings are, typically, more abstract. Thus, I gather that the variation in abstractness across the three types of organisations reinforces the analytical conclusions that the concept has several definitions, and that the different managers' understandings of the concept seem individualised. In comparison to the academic literature, their understandings, definitions, and how they draw attention to specific capabilities within the scope of managerial autonomy, e.g., financial decisions, human resources, values, and strategies (see section 2.4) share many similarities.

In sum, the data shows some variation in the interviewed managers' initial understandings of managerial autonomy. In line with the literature review, I conclude that the concept has many understandings and definitions, but that there is some overlap in how it is experienced and understood by public managers in practice. I propose a broad definition of *managerial autonomy as the relative level of decision-making capabilities*. In general, the definition seems to tally with the empirical understandings. Note that all data analysed in this section is from answers to the very first question in the interviews. My approach to the interviews (see section 4.4) was to use the answers to the first question as a point of departure for the rest of the interview, i.e., probing, asking for examples, and discussing with the managers more fine-grained clarifications of the concept. In the next section, I examine the scope of managerial autonomy as the specific decision-making capabilities the managers associate with the concept by analysing the examples of high and low managerial autonomy.

5.2. Scope of managerial autonomy

In this section, I aim to clarify what is within the scope of managerial autonomy by analysing the examples and experiences the managers refer to in the interviews (Creswell, 2012: 79; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020: 275-279; Spencer et al. 2014: 284). Whereas the initial understandings in the last section can be seen as the general understanding of the concept, i.e., the abstract background concept, this section provides insights to a more systematised concept and the specific indicators of the concept (Adcock and Collier, 2001; Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020: 96).

The specific scope of managerial autonomy is central to the clarification of the concept because it explicitly exposes "core features", and it advances a more practical and tangible understanding of "what we are talking about" when the concept is used (Gerring, 1999: 364, 368). Furthermore, managerial autonomy in different decision-making capabilities has been found in the empirical literature to have different associations with, e.g., organisational outcomes (see section 2.5.2), and it is therefore useful to examine whether the concept can be clarified by analysing it in different decision-making capabilities. The section is thus the empirical counterpart to the review of operationalisations in the literature in section 2.4 and the conceptual discussion in section 3.3.

To get an overview of the data, I have systematically coded all examples of high (54) and low (36) level of autonomy in decision-making provided by the interviewed managers (see section 4.5 re data coding). The examples are categorised based on the table I made in section 2.4.1 of how the survey-based literature has operationalised the different areas for managerial decisions. Some examples did not fit in the categorisation drawn from the contemporary literature and are added in the category "other". I will draw on and analyse the examples qualitatively in the remainder of the chapter as well.

In table 5.1, I have counted the number of interviewed managers who provide examples of the different capabilities of decision-making split by type of organisation. This gives a descriptive overview of the variation in data, makes it possible to identify themes and pattern in the data (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2019: 275-279), and gives an indication of the centrality of the different capabilities for the concept (Barbour, 2014: 505; Bernard and Ryan 2010: 127) by exposing whether some capabilities appear more often than others. In total, I interviewed five primary school principals, six job centre managers, and six high school principals as described in section 4.2.

Table 5.1: Number of interviewed managers giving specific examples, split by type of organisation

	PS		JC		HS	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Hiring, firing	1	0	1	1	1	0
Budgeting	2	1	1	2	3	4
Performance management	0	0	1	1	0	1
Rewards	0	0	0	0	0	2
Organisational change	2	2	3	3	3	6
Policies and goal setting	2	2	1	2	0	0
Work organisation	2	1	0	1	3	2
Other	1	0	0	0	0	2

The first thing I note is that the data substantiates the notion advanced in chapters 2 and 3 that managerial autonomy is multidimensional (e.g., Verhoest et al., 2004) and concerns different capabilities. This can be seen in table 5.1, where there are relatively many examples of managerial low/high autonomy in all seven predefined capabilities, except in rewards where only two high school principals give examples. The most central decision-making capabilities are budgeting and organisational change. In the previous section, some of the managers' initial understandings pointed explicitly to this, e.g., example 3 and 4 in display 5.1. One job centre manager underlines the multi-dimensionality of the concept and how one can have a high level of autonomy over some decision-making capabilities but less over others:

> ... but it also depends on the topic. In some areas you have a low ... a narrow scope of action and in other areas you have a wide scope of action (JC1)

A primary school principal elaborates on this and suggests that the different capabilities might be at odds with each other:

> That managerial autonomy, what does it consist of? Maybe it's a managerial house with different rooms you act in as manager. You enter the budget room now, and the bigger that room gets, somehow there's less space for other rooms in this house (PS3)

Second, in the review in chapter 2, I showed that contemporary academic literature focuses mainly on the relative level of managerial decision-making in management functions, e.g., POSDCORP (Gulick, 1937: 13) and less on leadership functions, as the capacity to establish a shared direction, align, motivate, and inspire people (Kotter, 2008: 4-5). In contrast, the experiences and

examples from the interviews focus more on capabilities closely connected to leadership functions, e.g., autonomy over organisational change, policies and goal setting, while the most prominent capability in the survey-based contemporary literature, hiring and firing, is relatively less emphasised by the interviewed managers.

Third, there are more examples and experiences of high (54) than of low (36) managerial autonomy (see also table 4.5, section 4.5, for a detailed overview of coded examples). Furthermore, when I asked the managers explicitly about their overall level of managerial autonomy, they *all* answered that they experience a high level. No one explicitly expressed that they were particularly constrained. This is noteworthy as the experience of the level of managerial autonomy stands in contrast to the general assertation that managerial autonomy is limited in public organisations compared to private management (e.g., Boye et al., 2021; Boye and Tummers, 2021; Boyne, 2002; Rainey, 2014). Additionally, the managers surveyed by the Leadership and Management Commission (2018: 155-156) reported relatively large variation in level of managerial autonomy, even managers in the same type of organisation. This finding raises some questions in terms of the case selection, where I strived to maximise variation in the level of managerial autonomy. However, as I will discuss in more detail in section 5.3, the assessment of their level of managerial autonomy could be interpreted as relative to social aspiration levels. Moreover, the experiences and examples of low autonomy are the richest qualitative examples and discussions, as my analysis in section 5.3 and 5.4 will show.

Comparing the scope of managerial autonomy between the three investigated types of organisations, there are some minor indications that the capability of decision-making in policy and goals is more referred to in the two municipality-governed organisations, i.e., primary schools and job centres. Nevertheless, in general, I find that the decision-making capabilities deduced from the literature are universally referred to. This indicates that the concept has a shared, multidimensional scope in capabilities in both leadership and management functions in the three types of organisations.

In sum, the data shows that the scope of managerial autonomy can be meaningfully analysed as multidimensional and in terms of different decision-making capabilities. In contrast to the academic literature, the interview data indicates that managers refer less to managerial autonomy in terms of management functions and more in terms of leadership functions. Furthermore, the experienced levels of managerial autonomy are higher than anticipated, and variation is lower. In the next sections, I analyse the managers' examples and quotes in terms of de jure/de facto managerial autonomy (section 5.3), and autonomy to/autonomy from (section 5.4).

5.3. De jure and de facto

In this section, I analyse how experiences of managerial autonomy can be approached with the attributes of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy. In section 3.4, I elaborate how de jure denotes an objective, formally defined side of managerial autonomy, e.g., formal organisation, legal documents, and policies. De facto managerial autonomy is the subjective side, the individual manager's perception. I further underline that the two attributes might not always be at odds, which has been noted in the literature (e.g., Ammons and Roenigk, 2020; Bach, 2018; Yesilkagit and Van Thiel, 2008; Van de Walle, 2019; Verhoest et al., 2010). The distinction and relationship between de jure and de facto managerial autonomy are important attributes of the concept as it may clarify it and inform puzzles in the literature, such as examples where formal grants of more managerial autonomy are seemingly not accompanied by perceived grant of autonomy by the individual manager (Hood, 2000; Vershuere and Barbieri, 2009), or managers in organisations with "similar degree of formal autonomy delegated display nontrivial degrees of variation in their actual autonomy" (Bach, 2018: 173).

Before turning to the analysis of how the qualitative data can be analysed with the de jure/de facto attributes, it must be noted that semi-structured interviewing with individual managers is an especially well-suited method to understand de facto managerial autonomy, as it explicitly focuses on individual managers' experiences and perceptions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). This is demonstrated in section 5.1, where the interviewed managers seem to understand the concept as something they experience or internalise. One manager notes that the question they have to ask themselves is "Which rules apply to me?" (PS4). In example 2, display 5.1, the self-reference and use of personal pronouns are noticeable in many of the examples.

In their seminal approach to the concept in the generic management literature, Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987: 371) stress that self-awareness is central to managerial autonomy, and that "in theory, it has no rigid bounds and is partly limited by self-awareness of constraints that may be untested rather than explicit" (see also section 3.4 for an elaboration on this). This notion is supported in my interviews, and a job centre manager highlights the explicit link between de jure and de facto managerial autonomy:

> At any rate, they have sold this well by saying that there isn't … I mean, that now they'll give you more freedom and more liberty of action, and that's all true, but it's still very small scale … And that's what they're saying … It's those process goals they say they've relaxed a bit, but it's small scale and you kind of wish they would set us SOMEWHAT more free (JC3).

This is an interesting point as it relates to findings in one of few qualitative studies in the literature (see chapter 2). Karlsson (2019) interviewed Swedish managers and found that managerialism as an embedded ideological stance influences how managers experience their managerial autonomy. Managers rationalise "a perceived need for increased managerial autonomy" in the context of a growing management culture (Karlsson, 2019: 317). Likewise, in the Danish case analysed here, the increased use of performance management in all three types of organisations (see section 4.4) may have given rise to a need for increased managerial autonomy. However, the above quote might be the odd one out, as the interviewed managers almost exclusively answered that they are satisfied with their current level of managerial autonomy when I asked them explicitly.

In a similar vein, it seems the understanding and level of managerial autonomy are experienced in relation to social aspiration levels and the public discourse. When analysing the qualitative material, I found a pattern of managers actively using comparisons to make sense or assess their level of managerial autonomy. For instance, one manager uses their own manager as frame of reference:

> Well, I think my basic view is that my managerial room to manoeuvre is EXTREMELY large. And I think that if you ask my boss, well of course I don't know what she's going to say, but I think she would say that her managerial room to manoeuvre is small or narrow (PS4)

Other managers compare their type of organisation with other areas, or the private sector, to rationalise their degree of managerial autonomy.

> And then I think that the labour market area as such is special because it's so centrally governed, which means that there are a lot of things, if I compare myself to some of my colleagues, that I already don't have control over (JC2)

> ... well, I usually put it this way: fundamentally in the public sector, we have a board that always per definition disagrees. And I think that's a pretty good picture of what it is like to be a manager in the public sector. My partner, she works at [big Danish private company]. When their board makes a decision, well, then it's 7-0 every time. I mean, at least that's what they say. In our system, it's 13-12 EVERY time (PS4)

A high school principal, in the type of organisation I categorised with the lowest level of publicness in the case selection, has a contrasting view on the difference between public and private management, with the only qualification that public managers work under more legal and regulative constraints:

> Well, I don't think my managerial role is that different from that of a CEO in a private company. I mean, I do the same things. I'm just subjected to more rules,

maybe. Because, I mean, the CEO can kind of decide what should be produced and done, right? I have to produce some specific things. There are rules for that. But basically, I can still do a lot internally, but also externally (HS1)

The private sector comparison is interesting as it came up in several of the interviews. The comparison between the autonomy of private and public managers has been key in the doctrine of New Public Management (e.g., Hood, 1991), and the differences in managerial autonomy between private and public managers have often been studied in the literature (Boye et al., 2021; Boyne, 2002; Rainey 2014). It seems to be an anchor point in the understanding of managerial autonomy and the discussion of it. Another example of social comparison is to relate one's own understanding and level of managerial autonomy with colleagues in the same sector:

I think I have a fairly large and high-ceilinged room to manoeuvre. I also know from our sector that there are principals who defend that view (HS6)

I have a lot of influence where I am right now. That's not to be sneezed at. I can't be sure that I would have that in another municipality ... in a managing director position (JC1)

The use of aspiration levels attests to the subjective nature of the concept, i.e., it is also perceived in terms of comparison in order to obtain self-awareness (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987). Turning to the relationship between de facto/de jure managerial autonomy, a high school principal uses an example of how national regulation restricting the possibility to amalgamate high schools has had very negative consequences for their managerial autonomy:

And some of it, for example the policy, is the halt on amalgamations that was introduced. That's another thing where you can say that it's a huge infringement on self-governance. I mean, because we had specific plans to amalgamate with the local business college and become one institution to the benefit of the young people here in [name of city] (HS4)

This is obviously relevant for the specific high school principal, as it directly interferes with plans for the future of the organisation. However, the fact that none of the other interviewed high school principals brought the specific policy limiting amalgamation up highlights that what some managers experience as having a wide influence might not be experienced by others, depending on the specific managerial context. A primary school principal explicitly relates the concept to the *feeling* of autonomy, here in a situation with a non-thriving child as an example of limited managerial autonomy:

An example of where my managerial autonomy ends is when we have a family with non-thriving children. In those cases, we need a family section. We write a notification that we want an intervention in the family. I can't personally request

a family intervention. And in such cases, my managerial autonomy is too restricted, or the FEELING is too restricted (PS4)

A job centre manager has a more practical approach to how changing regulation and policy affect the experience of managerial autonomy:

No, I don't as such feel like a poor public manager who has no influence or is subjected to all kinds of things. … Well, I think that's how the employment area IS. And I think that it's another one of those frameworks. That if I as a manager sat around and whined about all the changes and all the things they imply, then I should probably be somewhere else (JC5)

The manager also brings up how the job centres are used to being subject to political authority, which I explicitly used as a criterion for selecting the job centres. The quote illustrates that you become used to working with influence from politicians and other stakeholders (Van de Walle, 2019), and if you cannot get used to it, the manager argues, maybe you should not be a manager in a public organisation. In line with section 5.2, a manger notes the need to address the correspondence between de jure and de facto aspects of managerial autonomy on various capabilities:

And how much can I use, for example, our personnel policy? How much can I use the guidelines we have for sickness absence, for example? How much can I personally form and define my direction in it? I've had a lot of talks with our director about that. (…) And then I get some, you could say hints about "how far can I go in terms of implementing their policy so that they still think they can see their footprints in it?" And I do that, among other things, when we prepare the annual employment plan. The way I deliver results, the oral meetings I have with them and present it, you can say that I test my managerial autonomy and become increasingly aware of it (JC6)

This underlines the point from the literature, and section 5.2, that it may have analytical value to specify the concept in terms of managerial autonomy over different capabilities, because the level in autonomy on the different capabilities varies. In the same vein, a manager reflects on how some elements and restrictions of managerial autonomy are not up for bargaining or bending, for instance, questions of financial resources and the Educational Act:

Yes, but then it's probably more in relation to the economy. I mean, sometimes you think that there are not enough resources to do what you want. But that's also just a political condition that you have the money you have (PS1)

OK, well, it's not everything you can bend. Nor do I think you SHOULD be able to bend everything. In the current act, there's not much to bend (HS6)

Again, this points to the fact that some capabilities of managerial autonomy are up for bending, alignment, and a degree of bargaining, while others are

more fixed, or at least experienced as fixed. This is a key theme in Hood and Lodge's (2006: 6-9) theory of public service bargains, as public managers trade political loyalty or the right to blame or express opposition for managerial autonomy. This indicates that managers give up the possibility to challenge specific things, e.g., political decisions on overall organisational goals. The manager who expressed that not everything is up for debate goes on to argue that the educational act is an example of a stable *frame* of possible managerial decisions, whereas managerial autonomy is how you work *within* that:

> It's obvious that in an educational context, you are subject to different educational acts and government orders, and they kind of constitute the framework. In my mind, it's not related to managerial autonomy as such. Of course, it's something you use within your managerial capacity, but the way you work with it within a specific institution, THAT'S where you have the managerial autonomy (HS6)

In section 3.4, I discussed the alignment between de jure and facto. The argument is that levels in de jure and de facto managerial autonomy can be combined and aligned. For example, when both levels are low, the manager is effectively *restricted*, and when both levels are high, there is alignment, and the manager is *empowered*. The capability in managing the Education Act can, thus, be categorised in the *restricted* manager cell in display 5.2, as it is here an example of a capability with a formally low degree of managerial autonomy (de jure), and the manager's perception of the level is also low (de facto).

Display 5.2: Level of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy

		Level of *de facto*	
		Low	High
Level of *de jure*	Low	Restricted:	Determined-despite-the-odds managers:
		OK, well, it's not everything you can bend. Nor do I think you SHOULD be able to bend everything. In the current act, there's not much to bend (HS6)	… but anyway, there was a bit of civil disobedience because WE didn't think it made sense (PS1)
			And in that way, you could say that you step out of your managerial space, beyond your authority, outside it, launch some actions, and then the trap falls (PS4)
	High	Ready-with-an-alibi:	Empowered:
		Not identified in data	I actually think I'm pretty good at using the frame that's defined for us, and maybe also use it to the limit. So therefore, I don't necessarily think that I'm in any way restricted in my managerial autonomy (JC3)

Furthermore, the other cells can be used to analyse the relationship between the conceptual attributes. In section 3.4, I discussed how focusing on alignment between the two attributes can be useful analytically. The two corner cases with dealignment are expressed as either "ready-with-an-alibi" (low level de facto, high level de jure) and "determined-despite-the-odds" (high level de facto, low level de jure). The "determined-despite-the-odds" manager is most dominant in the interviews, and in many of the interviews, I interpret this as the interviewees' main self-understanding as opportunistic and taking the initiative, based on their statements, experiences, and examples. It also seems to depend on the specific decision-making capability, i.e., some capabilities are subject to the "determined-despite-the-odds" category, while other are not.

The alignment process between what is managerial autonomy in a legal sense (de jure) and what this means for perceived managerial autonomy (de facto) is something the interviewed managers also raise in the interviews:

I constantly align with my surroundings. If it's HR, then I have an HR department. If it's economics, then I have an economics department. If it's managerial questions, then I have a boss. If it's educational in relation to something legislative, then it may be educational-psychological counselling. If it's something about the social services act, then it's the family department. If it's … These are the legal issues, you might say. Then I also coordinate my managerial autonomy with my school board, for instance (PS4)

The quote shows that for some capabilities, some actors are more important than others. I discuss actors and stakeholders more in detail in section 5.4. The same manager reflects more on this and argues that the level of managerial autonomy is perhaps not as important as the alignment process:

> I've always said to myself that as long as I know my managerial autonomy, I can be enterprising and agile and create results. In reality, I think that's the biggest challenge, if you don't know your managerial autonomy. That's in reality what, that is, it means that if you become unsure about where the limit is, what the rules are (PS4)

A job centre manager qualifies this:

> Well, I think that those areas where I am occasionally challenged and think: "Wow, where is my managerial autonomy in this?", are those areas where I lose some sense, and I get lost in strategy, where I think: "Why on earth is she saying that we need to go right when I think that we need to go left?" But I don't even think about my managerial autonomy as long as we agree on which way we're going (JC4)

The quote underlines how the dealignment of de jure/de facto is especially important in understanding managerial autonomy, as this is the only area where the manager experiences the significance of their autonomy. This point aligns with Lipksy (1980: 17-18; 25), who notes that discretion occurs in a context of conflict between workers and their managers: Between a desire for top-down control and local opposition to it (Evans, 2011: 370). It could also be seen as an explanation for why the examples of low managerial autonomy are the most elaborated and empirically rich, as I mentioned in section 5.2. When you feel constrained as a manager, or there is some conflict or dealignment, the concept becomes salient, significant, and "you pay attention to it", as expressed in the quote. The intricacies of the attitudes of de jure and de facto are also exposed when managers must adjust to both formal and informal culture in terms of work organisation, exemplified by when a manager first started working in the organisation.

> So when I came here, there was no … There was a backroom deal in the sense that hours were defined on the smallest things. I can give you an example of what it meant for my managerial autonomy. For example, we had these pretty tough conditions at the school, and then I wanted to have a kind of emergency two-hour staff meeting where we could talk about: "OK, this and that just happened. What do we do?" And I call the meeting, and then the union rep says that time has not been reserved for that (HS3)

The quote and the full interview indicate that the manager is "determined-despite-the-odds", and according to their own reflections, they did overcome

informal agreements (de jure) on the capability in work organisation. Another manager is able to gain support from upper-level management to circumvent or "transcend the boundaries" of the level of de jure managerial autonomy:

> Because there were just SOME cases where it didn't make sense. Then I say: "Then we'll get a auditor's report because we actually HAVE TO." But where they've said: "Yeah but if it doesn't make sense for the citizens, and it doesn't make sense for our task solution, then we don't do it, and then we'll just take that audit report." So that's a very concrete example where you could say that my managerial autonomy has been expanded beyond what the legislation says" (JC3)

In section 5.4, I further discuss how the relationship to the upper-level management is a key factor in understanding managerial autonomy, as the quote also illustrates. Job centre managers explain how they actively seek out where the (de jure) managerial autonomy ends, illustrating a manager in the "empowered" cell in display 5.2:

> I actually think I'm pretty good at using the frame that's defined for us, and maybe also use it to the limit. So therefore, I don't necessarily think that I'm in any way restricted in my managerial autonomy (JC3)

A primary school principal provides an example where it makes sense to be more brave, to be the "determined-despite-the-odds" manager, i.e., when implementing the working hour regulation – again with some support from upper-level managers and "upwards":

> (...) but anyway, there was a bit of civil disobedience because WE didn't think it made sense. And then we communicated what we were doing, and we were not ordered to comply with what they actually said we had to do. So when we said we were doing it a bit different, then it was also accepted. So it was civil disobedience but communicated disobedience with tacit acceptance from my bosses and upwards (PS1)

In the interview, "civil disobedience" is rationalised, because it makes sense for the organisation. In general, the sense making between de jure and de facto is a recurring theme in interviews, illustrated here by a manager paraphrasing a conversation he had with one of his colleagues:

> "Well, [the interviewed manager's name], you're not the type who does everything the boss says," and then I said: "What do you mean by that?" Because I'm thinking that I do everything I'm asked to do. But he has a point that I make it my own and that also means ... OK, I'm not one of those one-to-one solution when the boss says this or that, and then I have to go out and do exactly what he said. No, because this is where I use my managerial autonomy, and that's where I use the filter in relation to my organisation and say: "We need to make this

make sense because otherwise it doesn't make a difference. Then we might as well not do it" (PS2)

In another example where influence places the manager in the "determined-despite-the-odds" case, a job centre manager describes working in a municipality with an organisational vision that explicitly expects the manager to be "determined-despite-the-odds":

> In [name of municipality], we are what you call a mentally derestricted municipality, and that means that politicians and the top management expect that we take everything to the limit, which means that we challenge the managerial autonomy or challenge the boundaries in order to, you might say, solve our task in the best possible way (JC3)

A primary school principal argues that is "healthy" to reach the limits of the managerial autonomy but that it may have organisational consequences if one is too opportunistic:

> Well, in reality I have this image in my head that you are standing with an elastic band around you and rush to the edge and are pulled back again, right? And that's really healthy, but you shouldn't just break through, I mean, it's not good for me, us as an organisation if my managerial autonomy is violated that much. I mean, then we'll get into trouble, right? (PS4)

Comparing findings in the three investigated types of organisations, I find no clear patterns of differences or findings specific to one type of organisation. In general, the examples and points I present in this section seem to be similar in the three types of organisations, and I take this as strengthening the validity and generalisability of the findings.

In this section, I have discussed several experiences and examples from the interviews in light of the attributes of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy. The interviews show that the level of managerial autonomy is often rationalised with reference to social aspirations, and that there is an alignment or bargaining process between what is formally defined as the level of managerial autonomy (de jure), and what is perceived in practice (de facto). Most of the interviewees make sense of their managerial autonomy in terms of taking the initiative and being opportunistic, i.e., the determined-despite-the-odds manager. In the next section, I focus on the attributes of managerial autonomy to and managerial autonomy from.

5.4. Autonomy to and from

In this section, I analyse how experiences of managerial autonomy can be approached as relative decision-making capabilities with the attributes of *autonomy to* and *autonomy from*. Based on my discussion in section 3.5, *managerial autonomy to* concerns the agency managers have in decision-making, and

managerial autonomy from concerns the exemption of interferences in decision-making. The section is the most elaborate analytical section, and I start by analysing some overall points relating to the two attributes. In line with my discussion of de jure/de facto attributes, the section shows how managerial autonomy is continuously bargained and relative to stakeholders in public organisations. In the data, I identified five areas where this is manifested, i.e., the role of regulation (section 5.4.1), the role of performance management (section 5.4.2), the role of politicians (section 5.4.3), the role upper-level management (section 5.4.4), and the role of employees (section 5.4.5).

The main conceptual idea is that managerial autonomy concerns the *relative* decision-making capabilities, and the relativity lies in the *cross-pressure* and *bargain* of being able to influence or having agency in decision-making, and at same time being subject to interferences. Here, corroborated by a quote from a school principal, also presented in section 5.1:

> I think managerial autonomy is a very complex notion overall because it encompasses everything that has to do with management, in the cross-pressure between politicians, citizens, staff and then you as a manager with all the possibilities and constraints that entails (PS3)

A job centre manager pinpoints the attributes of autonomy to and autonomy from. Managerial autonomy is about affecting but also being affected:

> But it's just as much about … within the space where I can affect and let myself be affected (JC5)

Several interviewees reflected on the (missing) consistency in *managerial autonomy to* and *managerial autonomy from*. A primary school principal notes the discourse of more autonomy but experiences more interference or influence. They relate it to a possible unintended consequence of the way of governing:

> The paradox between wanting to govern on the one hand and talking about liberating on the other. I mean, what's situated in the management paradigm. And then you actually somehow, perhaps very inadvertently, restrict the managerial autonomy (PS3)

In section 3.5, I described how levels in autonomy to/autonomy from could be expressed in four managerial cases, i.e., the restricted manager, administrator, fifth-wheel, and empowered manager. The quote exemplifies what I mean by the fifth-wheel manager, namely a manager who has agency in managerial decision-making but faces strong interference in decision-making, here the degree of central governing. In display 5.3, I have inserted some illustrative quotes from the interviews to show the different management cases for combination of autonomy to/autonomy from.

Display 5.3: Managerial autonomy to and from

| | | Level of *autonomy from* | |
		Low	High
Level of *autonomy to*	Low	**Restricted:** So here, the managerial autonomy is narrowed down to the point where not everything is in play. Some things are more important than others, and that's obviously also a premise in a politically governed organisation like [name of municipality] (PS3)	**Administrator:** So you could say that my managerial autonomy in reality has been somewhat restricted in terms of solving our core tasks during Corona because the employment … well, the employment effort has been suspended (JC3)
	High	**Fifth-wheel:** And then you can say that we navigate based on that. Because who wants to be in the red zone and be placed under administration if you don't do it. So I kind of feel that sometimes, you give out with one hand and take it back with the other. And then we're back at square one (JC1)	**Empowered:** I don't feel that there that many restrictions, because I basically think that what comes down from the political level is so broad that we have an opportunity to tone it (PS1)

The same manager elaborates on this and argues that interferences can effectively remove some options in decision making (what I term autonomy to), thus illustrating the interrelationship between the two attributes. In terms of the cases in display 5.3, this brings the managers' experience closer to what I term a restricted manager:

> Well, the individual principal is sitting out there right now saying: "But please listen. I may have wanted this school to work with something else, but now a direction has been dictated for this." So here, the managerial autonomy is narrowed down to the point where not everything is in play. Some things are more important than others, and that's obviously a premise in a politically governed organisation like [name of municipality], but that just means that it may be more difficult to navigate in because the room is simply narrowed down even more now (PS3)

The manager concludes that interference is a premise of public management in politically governed organisation, e.g., public managers can be influenced by the upper or political level, more or less *ad hoc* (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016: 139-140). It makes the job more difficult, and in practice, influence from the political level will limit the relative level of their decision-making capabilities.

The experience of having agency (managerial autonomy to) but becoming increasingly subject to external interferences (managerial autonomy from) is a recurring theme in the interviews. Again, they reflect primarily on how interferences have negative effects on the level of managerial autonomy, as it takes away possibilities or work time, often related to regulation, requirements of documentation, or benchmarking. Thus, it does not seem to be experienced as examples of "making managers manage", i.e., changing managers' incentives by subjecting them to market forces, contracts, performance-related pay, or competition (Kettl, 1997: 448). However, performance management as a "making managers manage" device is mentioned (see section 5.4.1), for example in these three quotes:

> How much time do we spend on teaching, and how much time do we spend on other things? I think that is unequivocally negative, because it has been a way of kind of benchmarking the schools (...) so I may be saying that my managerial autonomy is huge, but they will come after me if they see something that sticks out (HS1)

> They have ... followed up on a benchmark of the municipalities on their efforts. If their effort is not adequate, they will be measured on whether they hold timely dialogue meetings, and what else is measured? (...) And then you can say that we navigate based on that. Because who wants to be in the red zone and be placed under administration if you don't do it. So I kind of feel that sometimes, you give out with one hand and take it back with the other. And then we're back at square one (JC1)

> We have just been ordered to save on marketing costs, for example, under the finance bill. And you can say that's also an area where they, on the one hand, want young people to hear about our youth educations. On the other hand, they don't want us to advertise them. So that's a bit [SNORTS] (HS5)

Based on the interviews, it is my clear conclusion that this frustrates the managers as clearly expressed by the demonstrative nonverbal cue of the last quoted manager to end his account of interferences from the political level. I interpret these examples as cases of *fifth-wheel* managers, because the managers do not seem to experience low autonomy in their agency and scope of decisions; rather, it is the influence from benchmarking that limits them. The *administrator* is also found in the data, exemplified by a job centre manager who, under the COVID-19-restrictions, have had some agency in managerial decision-making removed:

> So you could say that my managerial autonomy in reality has been somewhat restricted in terms of solving our core tasks during Corona because the employment ... well, the employment effort has been suspended (...) Of course, sometimes it's legislation that trips you up (JC3)

Other managers do not directly relate this to the level of managerial autonomy; nevertheless, the burden of administrative duties seems to hinder the manager's possibilities to some extent:

> We have a lot of administrative requirements. Then we have to report how many minutes the teachers stand among the students, and then they have to report … things like that. That doesn't restrict my managerial autonomy, but it eats my managerial time. I mean, it eats my managerial time, and I think it's incredibly exhausting … In reality, it's more the administrative burden than the fact that I feel pressured by it (HS3)

Empowered managers seemingly experience no limitations in their agency or interferences in their decision-making:

> I don't feel that there that many restrictions, because I basically think that what comes down from the political level is so broad that we have an opportunity to tone it (…) It becomes a little difficult for the overall level in the administration to argue for something different than what makes sense locally here (…) I say it very explicitly, if he trudges into my managerial space. Then I say … I might say, both to politicians and to my boss: "I'm not going to do that because that's not how I want to lead." And there's not a lot they can do about it (PS1)

In sum, the analysis of the data illustrates that the attributes of managerial autonomy to/from are useful in understanding managerial autonomy. The overall finding is that managerial autonomy is continuously bargained and involves alignment between manager and administrative and political stakeholders. In the next sections, I focus on how the attributes of autonomy to/autonomy from can be used in understanding the concept of managerial autonomy by focusing on the specific experiences in five areas that emerged as themes in the interviews, i.e., the role of regulation, performance management, politicians, upper-level management and employees.

5.4.1. The role of regulation

In this section, I analyse the role of regulation with the attributes of autonomy to and autonomy from. I explicitly questioned the managers on the role of policy and regulation, first because regulation is a recurring theme in the academic literature on managerial autonomy, but it is rarely studied empirically, which motivated me to investigate the role of regulation in manuscript B and C (see chapter 6). Second, The Danish Management and Leadership Commission surveyed a representative sample of Danish managers in 2017, asking them about the influence from regulation. 79% of the surveyed primary school principals, 84% of the high school principals, and 89% of the managers in the employment sector reported a high or very high influence. Third, the number

of rules has increased recently in the three types of organisations studied (Jakobsen and Mortensen, 2014; 2016).

The managers' experiences were often related to regulation in some capacity, even when I did not ask about it explicitly. A high school principal elaborates on how rules have affected their managerial autonomy:

> [INTERRUPTS] Lots of rules. Then they introduce rigid rules about how to register something regarding the students. And then there are … Right now a bunch of rules are coming on how to ensure personnel management. That's for state institutions in general. We cannot give the teachers too much. That goes without saying, somehow. There are rules about how we can and cannot raise loans, which puts us under detailed regulation. Sometimes I think that it chips away at our managerial autonomy, but then again, deep down I think it's just ripples in the water (HS2)

The managers' experiences aligns with the administrator case, as introduced in section 3.5 and discussed in last section. The general impression of increasing rules and regulations confirms Jakobsen and Mortensen's (2014; 2016) finding that the number of production rules in the Danish public sector have increased following the implementation of performance management systems. The manager does not experience it as a major constraint on their autonomy but merely as "ripples in the water", indicating that the constraint is perhaps limited in practice. This is a relevant finding, because it also illustrates the differences in de jure (e.g., number of rules and formal autonomy) and de facto (how it is perceived – "ripples in the water"). Another high school principal explains how rules with good intentions can be problematic if they do not make sense in the local context and effectively become red tape:

> Sometimes, the ministry issues rules made by some very, very smart people, along with government orders and so on. But some of those things have never been applied in real life. So sometimes we have to follow rules that don't make any sense (HS5)

The restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic in autumn 2020 when the interviews with the managers were conducted came up in almost all interviews. The managers extensively referred to the restrictions as examples of limitation of and influence on their managerial autonomy. One manager expresses frustrations with the repeated implementation of restrictions and how the interference effectively limits their decision-making capabilities:

> I clearly feel that the last six months have been much worse than the preceding year. And that's just corona. There were constantly new guidelines. It has JUST … There hasn't been … well, cognitive space to do the things I really wanted to do because I've constantly been implementing other agendas that I also had to think about (HS2)

The quote further underlines the argument for the term decision-making *capabilities*, as advanced in section 3.2. The manager explicitly mentions cognitive capacity as a restraining factor for autonomy, thus illustrating how the level of managerial autonomy can be approached with reference to bounded rationality as well (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016; March and Simon, 1958). Another high school principal calls for more consistency in COVID-19 restrictions, as the interferences, experienced as changing and vague, are frustrating to work with – a point raised by several interviewees:

> Well, one example from the corona period is that we don't get to go on excursions. I mean, what we get is that they RECOMMEND that we don't go on excursions. Then you have to ask: "OK, but is that an order?" After extended radio silence in the ministry: "No, it's a recommendation." But then when you talk to someone: "No, it's probably not a good idea to go on that excursion." "OK, but is it illegal?" "No, it's not" (HS5)

A primary school principal explains how the frustration might stem from this being a new situation for the managers where they have a very limited autonomy, i.e., restrictions are "very clear", putting them in the role of administrator with relatively low agency in managerial decision-making. It could also be interpreted as opposing managers' self-image as challenging what comes from above, i.e., the determined-despite-the-odds manager, as discussed in section 5.3:

> (...) one of the major things right now with corona. Many principals find that it's a different way to be manager because there are so many very clear guidelines: "This is how it HAS to be" (PS5)

These examples illustrate that managerial autonomy rests on the notion of having influence when things come from "above", e.g., in implementing restrictions at the local level. If there is no leeway or possibility to challenge the regulation, or the regulation seems pointless and burdensome, it can be a source of frustration. Worst case, it alienates the managers (Dehart-Davis and Pandey, 2005). Furthermore, the COVID-19-restrictions put the managers in a dilemma, as they have to comply with the restrictions but have to imagine a not-too-distant future where, presumably, the restrictions are abolished, and they have to argue for "going back to normal". One job centre manager explains this with reference to the suspension of physical meetings with job seekers during COVID-19, and how it will be an important managerial task to communicate this to the employees:

> And in no time, we may be back to me standing there explaining, "it makes a lot of sense to conduct the meetings every four weeks. You understand that. Now we're going back to that. It just makes so much sense." Now, I have this gigantic

task as manager because I have to be loyal to whatever is going on and at the same time make it comprehensible to my staff and the citizens who are ultimately out there. So I think that I'm at work when I have to translate and interpret the policy, when deep down I know very well that it doesn't make any sense whatsoever (JC6)

Politically decided regulation and reforms can limit managerial autonomy because they bind the agency in managers' decisions regarding, e.g., financial matters:

You could say that when the primary school is subject to reforms (...) then it sometimes binds some economy. For example, the rule that 95% of all teachers had to teach main subjects forced us to, we had to go out and find, there was no money attached to it. We had to go out and find several million kroner to upgrade teachers. And then all of a sudden it became, definitely a limitation, an economic and legislative path, as principal, because those two or three years I had pretty much tied all my development funds to one thing, and I didn't make that decision. It just came from outside, boom! Get on it! (PS4)

The frequency of regulative changes and reforms is a common theme as a potential source of external interference that affects the level of managerial autonomy. The discussions are most pronounced in the interviews with the job centre managers. One of them argues that it is demanding for both manager and employees:

I think that in the municipal political world, and I may be biased here, but especially in the employment area, there are a lot of changes and a lot of legislative reforms, and they're coming at a pretty tight pace, which means that the adaptability and readiness for change in the individual employee has to be extremely large (JC1)

An example from the primary schools is the public-school reform in 2013 and the new working hour rules for teachers:

There was an INSANE amount of logistics work in that period. How should the schedule look? Pedagogues who had to come in and do supporting teaching, and when would that be scheduled? Opening hours of after-school care were cut back. I mean, there wasn't a lot of didactic talk in that period at all, and that's, deep down, the intension (PS3)

This is mainly experienced as constraining the managers' decision-making capabilities in the interviews. However, there are also experiences of regulative changes opening a window of opportunity for the manager, i.e., enabling their managerial autonomy. Here, exemplified by a quote by the same manager I used to illustrate the empowered manager case in section 5.4:

> In terms of management technique, it was actually something all of us just wanted to do ANYWAY, but sometimes, you know, if there's something you want to implement, you need an occasion to … a timing or a momentum, that now is the right time, and therefore, we used that moment to introduce something completely different than what the reform was really about, but in other words, to increase focus and activities intended to reinforce professional learning communities (PS1)

An example of a relatively large external regulative change that opened a window of opportunity is Act no. 409, which I also study in manuscript A (see chapter 6), and which regulated the de jure autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees (Andersen, Boye, and Laursen, 2018; Houlberg et al., 2016). The Act is also something the interviewed managers explicitly point to:

> When there was, when they introduced a working hour reform for teachers (…) it was the best thing that had ever happened to the primary school. Because it gave us an opportunity to create a new culture. And it has settled at a reasonable level today. And it was really healthy. And it means that we have a different work culture, I think, in the Danish primary school today. And it's fine that it's not as rigid as it was in '14; it's fine for me as manager, but it shook things up in the sense that a rule, and change, actually gave me a managerial room to manoeuvre that suddenly got much bigger. I kind of felt that I now had a third more resources (PS4)

The principal expresses how Act no. 409 changed the decision-making capability in work organisation significantly and enabled the development of a new "work culture" at the school, thus indicating that managerial autonomy can affect organisational culture (Wynen et al., 2014; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). Another principal does not agree that Act. 409 was a fundamental change:

> Well, there were some requirements about change that we had to implement, and we did, but I mean, I don't think it was that big of a change. I think that the municipal amalgamations in 2007 were a big change. I mean, more professional management was a requirement, whereas the manager until 2007 was kind of defined by being the best among equals (PS1)

This principal compares it to the municipal reform of 2007 that reduced the number of Danish municipalities from 271 to 98, which they experienced as having a much greater influence on their autonomy. Another school manager experienced the change in working hour regulation more as a task of implementing something they did not necessarily agree with, and how this can constrain them as manager:

> I don't think a lot of managers agreed completely with Act 409. I don't necessarily think so. But it became our task, loyally for sure, to implement it at

the schools, you might say. So I think that put us in kind of a difficult situation (PS3)

The same change in working hour rules was implemented at the high schools but *not* following a national conflict, which may have made implementation easier (Andersen, Boye, and Laursen, 2018):

> Well, it's for instance the collective agreement for high school teachers that has made everything easier for us, because we can treat the teachers equally by treating them differently. We have an option not to simply rate "one lesson is one lesson" etcetera but have a dialogue with the teachers about: "Where do you prefer to work? Where do you perform best? How do we make sure that your workday is good for you but that we get the most out of you as well?" And we couldn't have that dialogue before, because it was always: "One lesson costs 2.54" or something about preparation for lessons. So in that sense, I think we have a lot of autonomy (HS2)

The principal explains how the change in regulation increased managerial autonomy in decisions on work organisation and more individual management of employees. Another manager agrees and notes how this autonomy came with responsibility as well.

> It improved our options. I mean, there is no doubt that I found it necessary to break away from the national agreements and actually give something … I mean, it DID GIVE more managerial autonomy at the schools. There is no doubt in my mind. It also implied a responsibility to solve the tasks in a good way (HS5)

The discussions with the managers, the interviews and the examples illustrate how the concept is relative to rules, reforms, and regulation. Regulative changes are often experienced as interference in managerial autonomy. However, regulation is not, per se, a restricting factor; it can enable managers and create windows of opportunity. In manuscript A (see chapter 6), I investigate the relationship between local regulation and de facto managerial autonomy quantitatively and show that, e.g., the regulative process and how regulation comes about affect the degree of managerial autonomy primarily school principals experience. In the next section, I focus specifically on performance management and its role for managerial autonomy.

5.4.2. The role of performance management

Many of the managers explain how performance management and increasing focus on results can limit their decision-making capabilities, as I briefly introduced in the start of section 5.4. Again, illustrating the relationship between

the two attributes – when managers experience less autonomy from as a product of increased use of performance goals and targets, it can be manifested in their experience of their level of managerial autonomy to:

> OK, we have also been able to do a lot of development here and things like that, and we will probably have less of that, and I see again that we will have less managerial autonomy, because it will all be about us complying with things (JC2)

This manager explicitly refers to performance goals set at superjacent levels as constraining their possibility to develop their organisation. Other elements of performance management were discussed in the interviews with explicit reference to managerial autonomy. In one interview, the number of goals were related to managerial autonomy as well. The manager argues that a high number of goals will be impossible to handle meaningfully:

> 40 outcome goals are overkill in my mind, because nobody can do that much at one time. I mean, nobody at all can handle that (PS2)

Elsewhere in the interview, the same manager supports the main idea of the focus on results in performance management systems to increase efficiency of public organisations. The trick is to find and strike the happy medium:

> Yeah, but I mean, this thing about managerial autonomy, and are there going to be requirements from above, or are there not going to be requirements from above? Should we just have free reins? Yes, I would like to have free reins, but I actually don't think that it would be the best thing for the primary school overall. I actually don't think so, because shamefully I have to inform you that there are colleagues who wouldn't deliver the goods (PS2)

This overlaps somewhat with the performance management of "making managers manage" (Kettl, 1997: 448; see also section 5.4). A job centre manager shares this assertion and argues that strong focus and pressure on results will lead to the best solutions at the local level:

> So no, I'm not going to be … and I don't think I would succeed as my own little master, because I need the input, and the input … both the restrictions and the opportunities contribute to creating the solutions … We need some guidelines. We need something that somehow pressures us to find good solutions (JC5)

In manuscript C, I quantitatively test this argument by investigating whether the level of managerial autonomy (reported by primary school principals) and the extent of performance goals at the municipal level (reported by municipal directors) affect organisational performance. I find evidence that managerial autonomy coupled with high focus on performance goals leads to increased performance (see discussion in chapter 6). Another job centre manager to

some extent experiences the focus on results as enabling managers' and employees' approach to citizen:

> And of course, if you have an outcome track you can follow, then ... legislation may help you, because that also means that we have some possibilities to make the citizens show up and do something with them, because we have some legislation. So we can also move them in relation to many of our other areas, which are much more dependent on the citizens agreeing to participate in what they ask of them. So we have that right and obligation, which also means that we can actually do some things (JC2)

This quote illustrates that regulation and performance management do not always entail constraints of managerial autonomy – rules can create possibilities. This point echoes findings in the literature on street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Evans and Harris, 2004: 883) but is far less investigated in the literature on public management, where the assumption often is that rules, *per se,* restrict managerial autonomy (e.g., Jakobsen and Mortensen, 2016: 302; see also discussion in manuscript A).

In their survey, the Danish Management and Leadership Commission (2018: 131) asked to what extent performance management affects the managers' work. 50% in primary schools, 48% in high schools 48%, and 65% in the employment area experienced that it to some or a very high extent affects their work. Even though the experiences in the qualitative data often point to performance management as constraining, like the survey data (Danish Management and Leadership Commission, 2018: 132-133), it can also enable managers.

Performance management systems also imply the presence of performance information and use of this information in managerial decision-making. This is argued to be a mechanism of how performance management may enable decision-making capabilities as a means to overcome information asymmetry and a foster accountability vis-à-vis employees:

> (…) you can say that that whole thing about lifting capacity as a tool was actually a way of expanding managerial autonomy. I mean, gaining insight into an area that we didn't really know much about created some opportunities at the schools to say: "Well, OK, we may have a good GPA, but it's just not good ENOUGH. There ARE actually some things we can do." So I actually think that, now that I'm reflecting on it … Well, in reality, it was an expansion of the managerial autonomy (HS1)

The relationship between managerial autonomy and the use of performance information has been examined in several studies in the contemporary literature (e.g., Moynihan and Pandey, 2010; Verhoest and Wynen, 2018; see sec-

tion 2.5.1). The quote and logic of the interviewed manager are somewhat different from the argument in the literature, where the relationship is mainly studied as managerial autonomy, as independent variable, affecting the use of performance information, as the dependent variable. Nonetheless, the argument seems to resonate with Nielsen and Jacobsen's (2018) finding that employees' accept of their manager (as a measure of managerial autonomy) is higher when the employees are exposed to performance information showing that organisational performance deviates from expected performance.

In a similar vein, the interviews point to performance management and organisational performance as important for their managerial autonomy. Recall that the organisations were selected based on the level of organisational performance in order to maximise the variation in managerial autonomy (section 4.2). This resonates well with the managers' experiences. Several managers mention that if you attain the organisational results required, you are largely "left alone" by administrative and political interference from the outside:

> But other than that, there's nobody who limits me in that way. If I obtain the required results, if we have a good reputation, then they basically leave you alone (JC4)

This manager's use of the word "reputation" is interesting because it calls to mind the reputation management literature, which mainly focuses empirically on government agency top-level managers, like much of the contemporary managerial autonomy literature (see chapter 2). The basic premise is that public managers can actually manage their reputation to the benefit of organisational autonomy, and reputation is connected to different dimensions, most importantly, the organisation's performance and reputational history (Carpenter, 2001; Grøn and Salomonsen, 2019; Salomonsen, Boye, and Boon, 2021). Another job centre manager talks about interference from their own manager in this regard, contextualised within the performance management system:

> You can say that we have a very clear strategy and have some clear outcome measures and have quite a lot of management information. As long as it looks good, I'm pretty much ... off the hook. And can do what I want ... but I think that my managerial autonomy is much larger when things are going well. So when things are not going well, I have a manager who feels a need to interfere and a need to control (JC5)

The manager describes that if performance drops, the upper-level manager has a need to interfere, an example of decreased autonomy from. However, the manager sees this as supportive rather than a negative thing:

> And the question is whether it is a need to govern and control, or whether it is ultimately also about helping, and I think it is. Or it IS. I know. (…) And that's a clear restriction of my managerial autonomy when she suddenly steps in and interferes. But after all, it's just as much about helping me succeed (JC5)

Another job centre manager describes that if the influence seems random or exogenous to their activity and organisational performance, it is perceived negatively in terms of their autonomy:

> It's simply about that when the outside perception of us changes, and we suddenly experience … what could we say? A negative perception of us although we haven't done anything, then that also makes us look elsewhere in terms of managing. So it has definitely been restricted, the managerial autonomy, so we've definitely felt it there (JC2)

Thus, I find a clear pattern of organisational performance influencing the level of managerial autonomy through how it affects the managers' bargaining process relative to upper-level management. The interviews also indicate that this can actually be proactively managed to some extent (e.g., Huber, 2007; O'Toole, Meier, and Nicholson-Crotty, 2005), e.g., by keeping upper-level managers "in the loop".

Comparing the three investigated types of organisations in terms of the role of regulation and performance management, it seems the COVID-19 restrictions and regulative changes are experienced as more intrusive in the high schools than at the job centres and to some extent primary schools. One interpretation is that the more managers are exposed to external interferences, the more they get used to it (Van de Walle, 2019). The high schools' status as self-governing seems to have shielded them from interferences previously, whereas the COVID-19 restrictions are universally implemented in the public sector. In the job centres, introduction of new regulation and changes is to a higher extent experienced as something that occasionally can create new possibilities. I interpret this to mean that exposure to political authority, here in the form of magnitude and frequency of regulative changes, is higher in the locally governed organisations, i.e., job centres and primary schools, making them more used to the influence. This is interesting because it links to the conceptual discussion in section 3.5 and the analytical conclusion for de jure and de facto managerial autonomy in section 5.3: Even though organisations and managers may be formally exposed to less interference (de jure), they may subjectively experience it as more (de facto).

In sum, the analysis of the interviews in terms of performance management overlaps with the conclusion regarding the role of regulation. Performance management is often experienced as negative external interference in the managers' autonomy. However, the analysis reveals that performance

management can also enable managers. Regulation and performance management are closely connected to the role of politicians, which is discussed in the next section.

5.4.3. The role of politicians

In this section, I focus on managerial autonomy relative to the political level, which has already been mentioned several times in the chapter. In general, politicians play a relatively big role in terms of the autonomy of the public managers in all three investigated types of organisations. This is manifested in different ways. Several managers mention that interest from politicians at all levels (central, regional, and local) can have *negative* consequences for their managerial autonomy:

> I feel that I often experience that our regional politicians are also parish council politicians. They are elected in specific locations, and so what they bring is more than a helicopter view (...) Especially in the distribution of students. They participate in that. And I also experience them here in the local area (HS2)

> I think that is idea about self-governing, as I started by saying, is under pressure, because the politicians apparently have a desire for more governance in some specific areas. And I experience that they come in as politicians and interfere more and more in some specific areas (HS4)

> And it's especially in those periods leading up to an election, where they have to draw attention to themselves [LAUGHS]. And of course, that's an inevitable premise. Of course, you have to be aware of that (...) those pistol-politicians are just everywhere, and they just need to put their fingerprint somewhere. And that's ... I mean, if you get a crazy political idea, then there's a risk that it's one we have to work with at the schools (PS3)

The three quotes underline a well-described point in the public management literature. In Hansen and Ejersbo's words (2002: 738), politicians have an "inductive logic of actions", i.e., they approach issues case by case and focus on the competing interests in these cases. However, managers use a "deductive logic of action" and handle problems more by focusing on goals and strategy within the hierarchy of their organisations. This leads to a potential for disharmony, and the interviewed managers experience this as limiting their managerial autonomy. Two job centre managers connect this more broadly to politicians having less trust:

> So we have noticed that lack of trust in politicians. At least ... or from the politicians ... It has restricted the managerial autonomy significantly ... We have been pretty disappointed in our politicians, because we think we've done a good

job and made some good deals and trusted that … We have trusted them and vice versa. And all that is gone (JC2)

We have a politician … Who wants to come in and dictate how … the business is run. And he tries to influence that in the political space. He tries to influence that in … the space with the citizens and us and especially in the public space, in letters to the editor, etc. On Facebook not least. I think it's a challenge to be in that field, because he's in there all the time, and I constantly have to throw him out because he has … well, as I've said to him: "That's what you hired me to do. It's nice of you to offer to help me. But no thanks" (JC4)

Both managers see interference by politicians as decreasing their managerial autonomy, and their frustration seems to stem from experiences of politicians overstepping boundaries, e.g., by not sticking to agreements or intruding in the manager's affairs. The second quote underlines that influence from the political level can be very varied, e.g., mediated by citizens, letters to the local newspaper, and on social media. This indicates that interference by politicians can be manifested outside the typical political-administrative hierarchy, and that this makes it harder to perform conventional, administrative management. A third job centre manager has the opposite experience in terms of managerial autonomy over policy development. The manager has experienced very little political interest and interference and is effectively left with very wide possibilities:

And you could say that if local politicians don't grab that political room to manoeuvre, then I will, and it fluctuates a bit, here in this confidential room, how much they grab it (…) In principle, I'm the one who defines the employment policy in [name of municipality] to put it in appropriately humble terms. But because nobody … grabs even a bit of the room available, I get to fill it (JC1)

Here, the politics-administration distinction is *not* experienced as overstepped – it is effectively dispersed: The administrative manager has, seemingly, taken over the development of the vision and policy in the municipality completely, a task normally "reserved" for the politicians (Hansen and Ejersbo, 2002), indicating a very high level of managerial autonomy over the policy decision-capability. Five of the six job centre managers explicitly point out that employment is of little interest to politicians, thus giving the managers wider possibilities. One job centre manager summarises it:

A lot of them say that the labour market area is no fun for politicians because it's so controlled and regulated already, so the political room to manoeuvre is quite limited (…) I actually don't think I have experienced that someone in local politics has tried to limit me. Actually maybe more expanded my managerial autonomy (JC3)

The Danish Management and Leadership Commission (2018: 121) asked a representative sample of Danish public managers "to what extent political interest affects their work as manager?" 63% of managers in primary schools, 53% in high schools, and 66% in the employment sector answered to a high or a very high extent. This overlaps somewhat with the interviewed managers' experiences, although the job centre managers seem to experience less influence from the political level compared to the findings in the survey. The survey data does not – as the qualitative data analysed here – give much indication of *how* the influence is experienced or manifests itself.

As an example, political interference can be more discursive, e.g., national politicians are influential stakeholders who affect the manager:

> OK, so maybe [the minister of employment] Peter Hummelgaard says that they are just so stupid at the job centres. They don't understand anything, they do everything wrong. That's the type of rhetoric they use about us that's really hard to tolerate (…) But I find myself in situations where I have to defend something, I'm thinking, "what are you saying about us, little buddy? You are actually our father, couldn't you, it's not helpful when you say such nasty things about us" (JC6)

The manager relates this to how it makes their relationship with the employees more difficult, as how they must loyally implement the policies decided by politicians at central level. Discursive interference from national politicians can also open some (de facto) possibilities for managers even as the regulation is still in place (de jure), here discussed by a job centre manager:

> It's maybe not so much the legislation It's more the political articulation of a focus area that has created the possibilities, because the legislation is still there, but it has been softened quite a bit (JC2)

With the political focus on specific areas, the manager experiences that politicians open new, de facto possibilities. Other managers see politicians as less influential because what comes from the political level is experienced as having broad intentions:

> I don't feel that there are that many restrictions, because I basically think that what comes down from the political level is so broad that we have an opportunity to tone it (…) It becomes a little difficult for the overall level in the administration to argue for something different than what makes sense locally here (…) I say it very explicitly, if he trudges into my managerial space. Then I say … I might say, both to politicians and to my boss: "I'm not going to do that because that's not how I want to lead." And there's not a lot they can do about it (PS1)

I used the same quote to illustrate the empowered manager in section 5.4. It overlaps with Karlsson's (2019) notion of a "brave" manager with wide managerial autonomy, who explicitly averts influence from both politicians and upper-level management. I also interpret this as an example of what Carpenter (2001: 17) has termed *bureaucratic* autonomy, i.e., "a politically differentiated agency takes self-consistent action that neither politicians nor organized interests prefer but that they neither cannot or will not overturn or constrain in the future". At the high schools, which I argue enjoy the least exposure to political and economic authority (section 4.2), the influence is experienced more indirectly and perhaps sometimes as an unanticipated effect, e.g., in the form of political reforms and policies:

> Well, it's rare that they meddle in HOW we teach, but at least more general things like the supply of specific courses, and there's something about how bigger tasks proceed and interdisciplinary courses and things like that. That's also something they inform about in ministerial orders (HS4)

This quote echoes the high school principal who characterised regulative interference as "ripples in the water" in section 5.4.1. The comments in the interviews about the role of and interference by politicians generally corroborates Van de Walle's (2019) finding, as discussed in section 5.3, that politicisation is experienced as higher at the *lower* levels of management. One reason could be that lower levels of management have more principals and stakeholders potentially limiting the level of *autonomy from*. In other words, managers closer to the frontline are more likely to become "victims" of interference, interruption and external intervention from both upper-level managers and politicians (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016: 39). Victimisation can occur due to political conflict, as several of the managers refer to. One primary school principal argues:

> [it] also creates a limitation in the managerial autonomy because there is no agreement in the system. I mean, that latent competitive platform is constantly there (…) But we feel that as well. And we also feel the insecurity, the competitive platform that is constantly brought into play, right? And that limits the managerial autonomy as well (PS4)

A manager at a job centre has similar experiences with how political conflict can influence managerial autonomy:

> But there is no doubt that the fact that we have a chairman who is in opposition has made things much worse for us, because she has been aware of it and has used it to question majority decisions earlier. And we're looking at an upcoming election (…) There is a battle going on, so it has been difficult for us to make any alliances politically (JC2)

The quote also underlines how political conflict can make it harder to form alliances and build trust with politicians, which has been termed "managing upwards" in the public management literature (e.g., Moore, 1995; O'Toole, Meier and Nicholson-Crotty, 2005). On the one hand, the point stands in some contradiction to the existing literature on multiple principals with conflicting interest, where *increased* managerial autonomy has been demonstrated (see e.g., Voorn, van Genugten, and van Thiel, 2019, for a review of the multiple principal literature). On the other hand, it is in line with, e.g., Meier et al. (2015: 133), who argue that concentrated political power and consensus seeking will make the task of public management easier. In a related point, a primary school principal points to the importance of alliances and political acumen in handling "pistol politicians" (as the manager termed them in the quote I presented in the beginning of the section):

> (...) you have to have an unusual amount of political acumen, in the sense that you have to be able to interact with politicians (...) You have to be able to do that and form the right alliances so that you do not become enemies, to be blunt, because that also creates too much noise. It creates insecurity, and that can lead to mistrust (PS3)

This is interesting, because in practice, primary school principals have one, two, and sometimes three levels of management between them and the politicians (see section 4.2.2 for a description of the primary schools, including the management structure). Nevertheless, handling of and managing upwards to politicians is emphasised and experienced as important in terms of managerial autonomy by the interviewed manager. A high school principal offers a concrete example of how they manage politicians and the political discourse in practice:

> I have actually been granted an audience with the local council next week, because I see some challenges in the way they talk about us running the vocational schools and vocational educations above all. I actually think we should be here, both teams. And they have to remember that (HS2)

Furthermore, it illustrates how the manager also prioritises managing the broader political environment. Notably, this same high school principal emphasised the workload and pressure on the cognitive capacity in section 5.4.1, thus speaking to how important the task of managing politicians is. In principle, the local municipal council has no formal authority over the high schools, but indirectly, decisions made by local politicians affect high school principals' autonomy through what they decide and prioritise in terms of the technical colleges that compete with the high schools for students. The manager acknowledges this and prioritises investing their limited resources in managing it as well.

The Danish Management and Leadership Commission (2018: 122) asked public managers to what extent they experience that political interest affects their possibilities for attaining organisational results. In the primary schools, 26% of the principals experience it as a limiting factor and 54% as enabling. In high schools, 26% as limiting and 44% as enabling. In the employment sector, 20% as limiting and 55% as enabling. The survey finding and the qualitative data in the section underline that the relationship between politicians and managers, political interest, and trust between politicians and managers thus seem to have a significant impact on the managers' autonomy, and that it varies to a relatively high extent whether the impact is experienced as limiting the managers.

If we compare the types of organisations, there are some similarities and some differences in the role of politicians. In all interviews, experiences of politicians playing a major role for managerial autonomy are pronounced. In the analysis, I demonstrate that it can be useful to understand the influence within the attribute of autonomy from and autonomy to, e.g., political conflict is, in general, experienced as having a negative influence on the managers' level of autonomy. However, the influence from politicians in the high schools, and to some extent the job centres, seems to be more indirect and discursive than direct, tangible, and coercive in terms of their relative decision-making capabilities. Likewise, the experience that political influence can to some extent be cultivated and used as a window of opportunity to increase the managers' autonomy is recurring in all interviews. I gather from the comparison between the types of organisations that even as governance and exposure to political authority vary, there are some major similarities in terms of how the political inductive logic influences the public managers' autonomy.

In sum, the managers' experiences of the role of politicians have been analysed in terms of managerial autonomy from, i.e., how interferences in the form of interaction, interventions, and interruptions from the political level affect the agency of managers, i.e., the attribute of managerial autonomy to. In conclusion, politicians play a major role in this regard, and their influence is experienced as a factor for managers' autonomy in decision-making, mostly as a constraining factor, but also to some extent as an enabling factor.

5.4.4. The role upper-level management

In this section, I analyse the role of and the interviewed managers' experiences with upper-level management. Interference by, influence from and interaction with upper-level managers (primary schools and job centres) and the board (high schools) were prominent themes in the interviews. The board is not directly upper-level management of high school principals (see section 4.2), but

I analyse the role of boards in this section, as the comparison to the upper-level management in primary schools and job centres illustrates how managerial autonomy is experienced somewhat differently in the two types of municipally governed organisations and the high schools in this regard.

Related to the discussion of de jure and de facto managerial autonomy (see section 5.3), a manager points to the relationship with the upper-level manager as an important context for their managerial autonomy, i.e., one can make a deal about the degree of interference the upper-level manager exercises on one's autonomy:

> It also depends on the type of management you have, managing director … I had one in another job, a managing director who was very detail oriented and really needed to know what was going on. And then you can say that, in principle, my managerial autonomy is that much smaller, because I had to pass on information and in principle ask permission. I currently have a managing director who somehow has entered a deal that as long as everything is quiet, that's good news, and things are going well, but of course I try to keep him informed, because I also need him to be thoroughly briefed.

A job centre manager has similar experiences, again with reference to changes in personality and personal relationship to the upper-level manager:

> (…) my former managing director … who is still managing director in the municipality, but no longer in this area. He was very humble in terms of not overstepping my managerial autonomy beyond what we had agreed on beforehand. And if he said it was necessary, then he talked to me about it and said, "what do you think about it? And how can we do it as a team?" Our partnership was really awesome, and I think it was so elegant and professional. Now I have a new temporary managing director … our new municipal chief executive, and he is the opposite. He takes what he wants. Then … I may object. And other times I don't object (JC4)

The manager discusses the experience of working with yet another upper-level manager, explaining that it can be very uncomfortable to be bypassed by them.

> I worked under a managing director before who could not respect my managerial autonomy and who also bypassed me. Pipeline couldn't, wasn't intact, right? So he bypassed me and went down and got this and that and got something, some information from the staff, and I wasn't told about it, and it was super unpleasant. And when he overstepped my managerial autonomy, it, it wasn't … elegant (JC4)

No influence and presence of upper-level management does not necessarily mean more managerial autonomy, as the upper-level management can function as professional back-and-forth for the manager to manage interference from the political level as well. A job centre manager describes how they are

"left alone" in interactions with politicians, which has negative influence on their autonomy:

> Instead, we have a management that is ... I mean IN NO WAY there. They only focus on governing and only in terms of economics. And that actually means ... No, we actually know that that's how it is, so we know that we can't really expect anything from them, so of course we take the managerial autonomy over there. But it's clear that when we encounter resistance, or if we take this thing we've had with our politicians and such, then it's clear that we would like our managerial autonomy to be more aligned in relation to our management. But now we just know that they're not coming. We're alone (JC2)

Another job centre manager likewise expresses the importance of keeping the upper-level manager in the loop and aligned in terms of the interaction with the political level:

> Another big thing is alignment with our managing director, because my director who is also a member of the committee, and who services the political system, is also really important in relation to the upper management level, and mayor, and whatever else. Alignment in relation to what is actually doable and what it is we represent ... So (JC6)

A similar point is made by a primary school principal who emphasises the importance of networks in the municipal administration:

> It's about being able to act and be agile (...) it's also about relations, networks really. I have, because I've been there, in the same position some years, etc. etc., so I have an incredibly strong network. That means that when I need something done at our school, I know the people who are sitting in the different divisions, I can call them. These are not favours, but relations mean something if you want things done (PS4)

High school principals have no upper-level managers in the same way as the primary schools and the job centres (see section 4.2 for a description of the governance and management structures of the investigated types of organisations). However, the role of and interaction with the board in terms of managerial autonomy is a recurring example of how to understand managerial autonomy in the interviews. Ejersbo and Jacobsen (2021) propose four main roles of the boards: *network facilitator*, *advisor*, *control*, and *representation of interests*. In my analysis of the qualitative data, I found that these roles are useful in understanding how the principals experience their managerial autonomy relative to the boards, as well. A manager characterises the board's role as *control*, i.e., as limiting their managerial autonomy, but also says that this not "a big problem":

It is a control. The ministry clearly states that the board is there to control management. And I wholeheartedly disagree with them, because a professional board has to hire the manager who will lead the institution and in addition define the strategy with that manager or ... define the strategy that will guide the manager. They are not supposed to exercise control. And in that regard, I think the minister is a bit indecisive, and it kind of locks us in our dialogue with the ministry. But in everyday practice, I don't see it as a big problem (HS2)

The manager also seems to prefer a board that is more active in developing the strategy, thus, to a higher degree enabling the manager's decision-making capabilities through the advisory role. Another high school principal likewise sees potential in the role of the boards as *advisors*:

In reality, the idea of a board is really good if it consisted of people who actually knew something about education and who could be sounding boards. Here, you could say that I have a board I have to meet with. And I do that because I have to. But I don't have a board that's proactive or that I can bounce ideas off (...) It becomes kind of hollow. But I'm actually OK with that, because then we get to do what we want (HS1)

The principal concludes that this is "okay", because the exemption of interference from the board, i.e., autonomy from, leaves them with more managerial autonomy to "do what they want":

But [it is] not a place where I can get new ideas or where someone can take me down a peg or two ... just give me a little bit of resistance. I really need that (...) No, they do not restrict my managerial autonomy. Nor do they enrich me, you might say (HS1)

The board's role as *representation of interests* and *network facilitator* can open some doors for managers, as illustrated by the high school principal who has tried actively to influence the local council, as analysed section 5.4.3:

Yeah, so, in this whole discussion about vocational schools and so on, I have contacted the board, and the local politician is the person who has paved the way in some areas. And collaboration with higher education, which is pretty important ... that we ensure that transition. It is the chairman of the board, who sits in [big Danish organisation], and I am in close dialogue with him as well about: "What do we do? Which initiatives should we focus on so that we ensure this and that?" (...) So I think I'm using them. They have their individual competences, and I take advantage of them all in each their area (HS2)

Another principal notes how the board's role as *representative of interests* and *advisor* can actually be an enabling factor in terms of managerial autonomy:

In that sense, I think it's nice that you as top manager, where you don't necessarily have anyone in your staff or in the management who has ... either the courage or the ability or the competences to offer anything extra besides what concerns the school or sector knowledge ... So the fact that you have a broad board that comprises many different areas of society, both employers and food chain, but also society at large and can propose some topics for discussion, that I find enriching (HS6)

Finally, a fifth role outside the framework of Ejersbo and Jacobsen (2021), which could be termed a "rubber stamp" role of the boards, is also highlighted in the interviews, here by a principal indicating that a non-active board equals more managerial autonomy, at least in "running" the school:

Well, I have a very, very high level of managerial autonomy in relation to the board. They simply expect me to give them a broad outline at the meetings, and should something come up along the way, for example when two students were infected with corona, then the board obviously wants me to tell them about it. But otherwise, just a broad outline. Day-to-day operation is left to us here at the school, and they have said explicitly several times that ... I think he said that if they didn't trust me to run this business on my own, they would find someone else to do it, implying that they don't interfere (HS4)

In line with the findings from upper-level management in primary schools and job centres, trust and alignment on *when* the board interferes or influences the manager are key as this can be experienced as mistrust, here with reference to a board the same manager had previously worked with:

(...) the trust I encounter is a basic human thing. How safe are you in your job and in your workday? And the trust the board extends to me means a lot for my way of managing and my way of putting myself into my daily management. And what I sometimes experienced was bordering on mistrust. It probably wasn't meant that way, but that's how you perceive it, I think, if something comes in and messes with your range of competences. Then you think: "Hey, what's going on? What are you doing here?" It had a negative effect on my work (HS4)

In general, the role of the boards seems to be a salient and ongoing discussion in the high schools, here exemplified by a manager who works well with the board, which he thinks is relatively weak. The manager concludes, in line with others in this section, that the board is very rarely a major limiting factor:

I have a board that is genuinely concerned with the life of the school, and that offers support and then especially looks at the economic aspects and larger changes regarding buildings and things like that. Having said that, we don't have a professional board that plays a strong and active role. And I don't think that works in our sector. And you can see that it doesn't work when principals are allowed to remain, who over many years don't manage to create a good school

> (…) I mean, I think it is rarely seen that a board literally obstructs possibilities to do things as a manager, that is, managerial autonomy (HS3)

Comparing the types of organisations there are some differences in the role of the upper-level management. In high schools, the board's role is more diffuse and varying. In general, the high school principals indicate that the board is not really a key stakeholder in terms of restricting their managerial autonomy, nor is it an enabling factor. Nevertheless, the high school principals explicitly see some potential in boards as more active and enabling in terms of managerial autonomy. In the two types of organisations governed by local councils, the upper-level management plays a big role in making sense of managerial autonomy at the frontline, both as direct influence on managerial autonomy and as mediator to the political level, which can be useful for the managers. Thus, it seems the relative influence of upper-level management in the three types of organisations differs somewhat based on the governance and management structures.

In sum, the analysis of experiences with upper-level management can usefully be analysed with attributes of managerial autonomy to and managerial autonomy from. It shows variation in the experience of the influence from the upper-level management as both constraining and enabling. As in the discussion on de jure and de facto managerial autonomy, the managers experience interaction, bargaining, and trust as vital components of upper-level management influence on managerial autonomy.

5.4.5. The role of employees

The final theme in the analysis is the role of employees. In chapter 2 and 3, I discussed how employees' acceptance of their manager might play a role in how we can understand managerial autonomy. The idea is that managerial autonomy can emanate from the lower echelons (e.g., Carpenter and Krause, 2015; Nielsen and Jacobsen, 2018; Simon, 1997) as well as from above, as primarily demonstrated in section 5.4.1 to 5.4.4. In their very first account of their understanding of managerial autonomy, one primary school principal emphasises that one must clarify to employees what is within the manager's purview, and what the employees can expect from the manager:

> Well, I first and foremost think that I, you know, locally to the employees have to define my own managerial autonomy. Let them know what I think management is about and explicitly state how I want to manage and what they can expect (PS1)

In general, the interviewed managers seem to agree that motivation, trust, and relationship to the employees are elements relevant for their managerial autonomy:

> How do you create ownership for them of something that maybe doesn't make much sense in a local context because there was something else you found more interesting? But you have to try to convince them. So, yeah … (PS3)

> Basically, I can't manage anyone. I can't go up and say: "Now you're doing this." We constantly, and it's such a trite cliché, but we have to create followers. We just have to. We are managing knowledge workers … You've probably read Helle Hein as well. I mean that prima donna, it's totally spot on in terms of how our teachers are. So yeah, that's the most important thing. We have to motivate. We have to make people realise their potentials (…) We can't pay them a lot of money for what they do, but we can support them and motivate them (HS1)

The two quotes illustrate how public managers make sense of their relative level of decision-making capabilities in terms of the employees' accept of their management. From the quote by the high school principal, I draw three points. First, the principal explicitly refers to the employees' high degree of professionalism, and how that has important implications for the principal's managerial autonomy (see section 4.2.1). Second, the principal gives an explicit, however rare, example of managerial capability (use of pecuniary rewards), which I presented in section 5.2 regarding scope of managerial autonomy. Third, the managers explicitly take into account my role as interviewer, as an expert from another knowledge field (section 4.4), here by expecting that I am familiar with the management literature (*Primadonnaledelse*, a popular Danish management book by Helle Hein from 2013). A primary school principal argues that employees have an "extremely high influence" on their managerial autonomy, and that managerial autonomy is contingent on a "growth mindset" and "mental balance" in the organisation:

> Because you could say that my managerial autonomy is also dependent on, for instance, the mental balance in the organisation. Mental balance … Or a mentally high sense of security and a growth mindset and things like that. That increases the spectrum of possibilities considerably for what we can do as managers, and what we can do as an organisation. So the employees have EXTREMELY great influence on, really the managerial autonomy. Not the formal, but perhaps in reality, I don't know if you can talk about informal managerial autonomy (PS4)

The approach to managerial autonomy as emanating from the lower levels of the organisation, e.g., employees, is strongly influenced by classics such as Barnard (1938) and Simon (1997) (see also Thynne and Wettenhall (2004) and Favero et al. (2018) for a discussion of the classic literature). Interestingly the quotes resonate well with Barnard's (1938: 173-174) notion that managers

must have "superior ability" to persuade employees. Advancing this point, Simon (1997: 217) relates it to de jure/de facto managerial autonomy as well: "in some cases formal authority may be a sufficient inducement of the subordinate to comply; but usually, communication must reason, plead, and persuade, as well as order, if it is to be effective". A high school principal illustrates this point:

> That is the element in management I feel that you cannot, in any way, study for. I mean, it's all about the relation (...) I usually have an idea about where I want to go, when I start a process, but I think it's important to give people time to speak up and become involved and heard and then explain, while involving people, that: "This part you have influence on in the sense that we are discussing it, and ultimately I as the principal make the decision. And it may be that my decision is HIGHLY coloured by what you as employees have said, it may be that it is SOMEWHAT coloured by it, and it may be that it is NOT AT ALL coloured by anything you've said, because I, based on the overall picture I saw, because I am aware of more aspects of it in my role, assess that it is best to do it the way I think it should be done, even though some of you think differently." Then we can disagree about whether it's good or bad, but it is important that you, when you are in that process where you involve the employees, make it clear what the employees can expect, and that you as manager are capable of justifying you decisions. And there's nothing worse than a manager who makes decisions that are perceived as random (HS6)

A job centre manager echoes this and argues that the use of power is the last resort:

> I mean, I applaud if we can somehow get as far as possible in agreement instead of using my power position to make some decisions and say, "then you can stay or not. That's how it's going to be." But ... (JC4)

Bro (2018: 48) argues that managers need to distance themselves somewhat from the employees in order to uphold a leadership identity, but not to the point where the manager no longer is seen as a group member. One of the organisational characteristics that comes up in the discussion of managerial autonomy, leadership identity, and the role of employees is span of control. Here, explained by the same manager who in the beginning of the interview associated managerial autonomy very closely with span of control (section 5.1):

> Heads of department have a lot of staff, and that can present some challenges in terms of being both visible and accessible, but also discussing with the employees where are we going and why? I think this is something we will focus on in the years to come. I mean that, no so much me, but my heads of department, they have to be close, in terms of management, close in a different way. They don't

necessarily have to memorise all sections in the legislation. But they have to be close and accessible in terms of management. If we, if we want to succeed. And I think that's a different approach to management than the one that was practiced 10 years ago or just 5 years ago (JC1)

Other managers also mention how self-initiated involvement by the employees in managerial decision-making can increase their managerial autonomy:

I mean, making employees take responsibility. Getting employees to suggest improvements and so on. And then you have to listen to them and try to facilitate it, what they propose. Otherwise, they'll stop making suggestions, you could say. But if you can keep that pot boiling, then we end up in a situation where the employees suggest improvements rather than us driving the employees in one direction or the other. So yes, it's clearly a huge resource (PS1)

The primary school principal who argued for the benefits of a "healthy mental balance in the organisation" explains how this can be manifested in teachers taking the initiative:

Then the teachers say, because I feel that we have a healthy mental balance in the organisation, then they say: "We would like to take a course, we'll pay for the time, if you pay the course." That actually expands my managerial autonomy. Some of my staff get training, their competences are expanded, because we have a good dialogue and a healthy culture around it, or whatever you call it. And that's an example of us expanding, out of the box, right? I don't know if it gives … Well, it definitely gives that, and that's why some opportunities arise, right? Those informal ones, could you call it that? (PS4)

The role of employees as enabling the managers' decision-making capabilities is continuously emphasised in the interviews. A high school principal gives an example of employees' direct involvement in the leadership of the school, an example of distributed leadership (Jakobsen, Kjeldsen, and Pallesen, 2016), as a way to increase their autonomy:

Nothing happens without the employees. I mean zero. So nothing works if we don't work closely together. (…) It's not because I'm a super great manager as such, but I was faced with a management when I came in where nobody had management training (…) So I had to go out there and find the strongest elements in the staff room, and then we formed a committee, and then we took charge of school development. And you could say that it was tough not having a management that is capable of that. They have worked hard on it and have taken courses, and we have really worked hard on: "What is management actually?" and so on. I had teachers who were far ahead, if I can say that, without it … It's hopefully confidential. But I had some teachers who were 100 times more development oriented, so in a way, it turned into a really good thing. I thought it

was difficult, but it turned into a good thing. Because it meant that all the difficult decisions were made by me and the teachers (HS3)

Several managers emphasise how communication and visionary leadership can provide the basis for more managerial autonomy, or, in a sense, how leadership can create the autonomy to exercise more leadership:

> Yes, and then I really think that this thing about … I mean communication. In any way and at any time, but also in big changes, that you can get the employees on board as far as WHY are we going in that direction? Or what is it calling for, and what do we have to become good at? So I kind of think that this thing about inspiring and motivating employees and creating the vision about a direction, where we are headed and so on … I mean, most of them feel like GOING THERE. I think that's … Because then you can say that if you, if you've got that in place, then I think that afterwards, the room to delegate to the managers so that they get some interesting tasks and run with us that support the direction we've decided on, that also leaves some room to manoeuvre (JC3)

When discussing the role of employees, the interview often turns to how union representatives mediate the relationship between employees and manager, and how the personal relationship with the representatives is important in order to understand managerial autonomy. A high school principal experiences the union representative as a constraining factor in terms of taking managerial decisions on the use of pecuniary rewards:

> I can really get in trouble with the union rep if I do something that rewards only some. And it's just remunerations, really. They are not interested in that. It bothers me sometimes. I would have liked to remunerate some … Of course, I could just do that, but it would be exciting to remunerate someone who made a special effort (HS2)

This is an example of the union representative's influence on the relative managerial decision capabilities and of how confrontation with employees (and their union) is not deemed viable in terms of increasing managerial autonomy (Christensen and Mortensen, 2016: 141). The same manager notes that the union and employees have a general interest in curbing the high school principal's autonomy:

> A little complicated. But deep down, the teachers appreciate but also fear that the manager will make the decisions. I mean, there is a … Their union is strong in that way and wants everyone to be treated equally. And they also have a strong position in the teaching staff. No doubt about that (HS2)

Again, the qualitative data can be supplemented by the survey data published by the Danish Management and Leadership Commission (2018: 126). Questioned about the extent of influence from professional associations, 49% of the

primary school principals, 43% of the high schools principals, and 45% of the job centre managers reported high or very high influence. A job centre manager notes that co-optation of the union representative can increase their autonomy (Christensen and Mortensen 2016: 141; O'Toole and Meier, 2004), here with reference to hiring new employees:

> (…) of course, it requires cooperation with the union rep. And there's no doubt that job centres have a tradition of hiring either social workers or clerical workers, but I challenge that relatively. So we have academics and healthcare workers and many others employed, and I basically think that our union rep plays along with that quite well (JC3)

Co-optation as opposed to confrontation as a strategy in terms of managerial autonomy seems to be experienced as more viable in the interviews. Here, also exemplified by how involvement of employees mediated by the union representatives ensures support and accept from the employees:

> Often, I may think that if you want good managerial autonomy, then it requires that you can work with a lot of people, and of course that you somehow can convey understanding and meaning for your intention (…) But I think it requires that you are good at communicating and maybe also good at involving employees early on in what you're thinking and so on. I have had informal meetings with my union reps in this house, and it's just something we call "What's happening on the grapevine?" where we inform each other about how it looks from MY perspective and what are THEY hearing? (JC3)

In general, the insights on the role of union representatives and the union resonate with the Danish Management and Leadership Commission's survey findings, where 61% assess that corporations with professional organisations support their work as managers in primary schools, 53% in high schools, and 59% in the employment sector (Danish Management and Leadership Commission, 2018: 127).

Comparing the three types of organisations, there is no indication that the role of employees is more important in any particular organisational type. In all three types, the interviewed managers point to employees playing a role in how to understand managerial autonomy. Note that the employees in the three types of organisations were characterised as somewhat similar in section 4.2, indicating that this is an area where we would expect managerial autonomy to be experienced more alike. In comparison to the role of regulation, the upper-level management, and the role of politicians, however, the interviewed managers are a little less reticent to use examples and experiences in the discussions revolving around this theme. The managers simply talked less about the role of employees, and in many of the interviews, I was the one to explicitly

bring the theme up to a higher extent than, e.g., the role of regulation and politicians (cf. the interview guide presented in appendix E). This could indicate that the role of employees is perhaps more peripheral, or implicit, to the concept of managerial autonomy than I suggested in the conceptualisation in chapter 3.
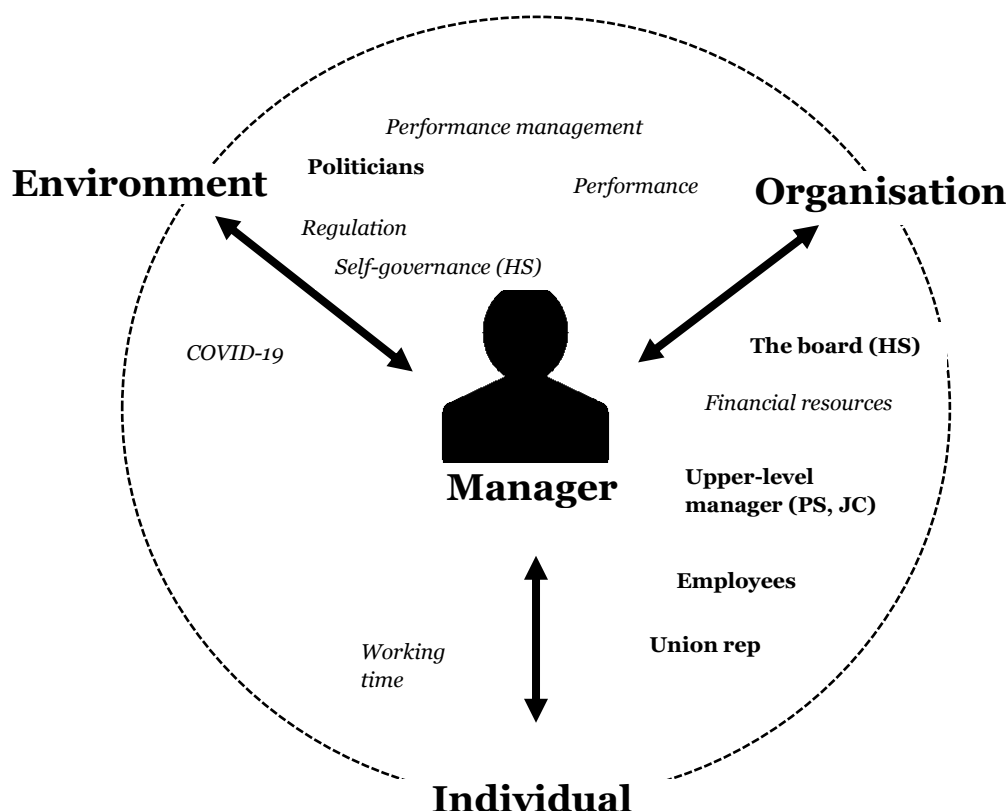
In sum, the role, and experiences of employees in understanding managerial autonomy can be analysed with the attributes of autonomy to and autonomy from. The sections show that the experience of managerial autonomy of public managers is to some extent in bargain with the employees and susceptible to the employees' good graces or their accept of the manager. The employees in the three investigated types of organisations, with high degree of discretion, professionalism, and high degree of unionisation, put them in the position to have some influence or initiative in terms of the managers' decision-making capabilities. I do not interpret this it as a central theme in interviews as the role of regulation, performance management, upper-level management, and politicians.

Concluding on section 5.4, analysing the experience of managerial autonomy with the attributes of managerial autonomy to and managerial autonomy from, the section shows that in order to understand the autonomy of public managers, one can approach it is as interferences (i.e., autonomy from) and decision-making agency (i.e., autonomy to) and how the two attributes interact. In practice, the interviews demonstrate that there is continued bargaining, and that inconsistency between the two attributes, e.g., ad hoc interventions, causes managerial frustrations. The most pronounced examples are within performance management systems, benchmarking and focus on results that in many instances are experienced as constraining the managers and their decision-making capabilities. Upper-level management (primary schools and job centres) and the board (high schools) play a relatively large role in the autonomy experienced by the public managers, including the many different effects upper-level management can have on the managerial autonomy of the public managers – both restricting and enabling. The inductive political logic of ad hoc intervention and political discourse is continuously referred to as important in order to make sense of managerial autonomy. The last theme was the role of employees and union representatives, where employees' accept of managers and co-optation and cooperation with union representative and employees to some extent contribute to how managers make sense of their managerial autonomy.

Figure 5.1 summarises the key stakeholders and examples in this section of managerial autonomy to and autonomy from. The figure is presented in section 3.6 and inspired by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) and Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015). Here, I have filled it out with the key insights

from this section on the interviewed managers' experiences in environment, organisation, and individual. Primary stakeholders are marked with bold (politicians, upper-level management/board, and employees), and the specific key examples discussed throughout the section with italic (e.g., performance management, regulation, performance, self-governance, financial resources, and working time).

Figure 5.1: Illustration of findings in autonomy to and autonomy from

Performance management

Politicians

Environment

Performance

Organisation

Regulation

Self-governance (HS)

COVID-19

The board (HS)

Financial resources

Manager

Upper-level manager (PS, JC)

Employees

Union rep

Working time

Individual

Note: Inspired by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987), Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015)

5.5. Discussion: A good concept?

The chapter set out to analyse managerial autonomy as experienced by public managers based on the proposed conceptualisation from chapter 3, and I will now discuss the goodness of the conceptualisation. The four analytical sections on the managers' initial understanding (section 5.1), scope (section 5.2), de jure/de facto (section 5.3), and autonomy to/autonomy from (section 5.4) have revealed three main findings. I draw on Gerring's (1999, 2012a) criteria for conceptual goodness: *familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiation, depth, theoretical utility*, and *field utility*.

First, I find that the concept has a clear cognitive click, and public managers intuitively have a vivid understanding of it as demonstrated by their elaborate experiences and examples. This relates to two of Gerring's (1999: 36, 2012a) criteria: familiarity, i.e., "how familiar is the concept to a lay or academic audience", and resonance, i.e., "does the chosen term ring (resonate)". Furthermore, I find good *depth* of the concept due to the many examples and instances that meaningfully can be analysed within the conceptualisation, thus indicating that the concept is good in "a way to group instances/characteristics that are commonly found together so that we can use the concept's label as shorthand for those instances/characteristics" (Gerring, 1999: 379-380). On the one hand, I see these as the major assets of the concept, e.g., the term is used widely and does not require specialised knowledge or education within public administration, unlike other terms in the field, e.g., public service motivation (Bozeman and Su, 2015: 703) or red tape.

On the other hand, the cognitive click, associations, and the depth of the concept differ in the interviews. The interviews indicate that the concept brings up relatively many definitions, also from the perspective and experience of public managers, just as concluded in the literature review (see chapter 2). In my interviews in the three types of organisations, I thus find some indications that the concept, or parts of the conceptual attributes proposed, is context dependent, which raises some questions about how, when, and to whom the analytical conclusion can be generalised, internally and externally. Furthermore, the analysis has shown some weaknesses in terms of conceptual *parsimony,* i.e., "having a short list of definition attributes" (Gerring, 1999: 367), as the concept is quite complex. Finally, the analysis has raised questions about the *differentiation* of the concept to most-similar concepts, such as power and delegation.

The last two of Gerring's (1999: 367) criteria for good concepts are *theoretical utility*, i.e., "how useful is the concept within a wider field of inferences?", and *field utility*, i.e., "how useful is the concept within a field of related instances and attributes?" Both criteria relate to the goodness of the concept more broadly in the academic literature as building blocks of theories, and how the concept ultimately relates to other concepts in the field: Good concepts should do as little "damage as possible – to the utility of neighbouring concepts" (Gerring, 1999: 382). The qualitative data collected is perhaps not the best to assess these criteria. However, I note that the concept is at the core of many theories or frameworks in public management, including principal-agent frameworks, the public-administration dichotomy, public service bargains, and performance management, to mention the ones I use analytically in the chapter. I also note that the concept is located in what Gerring (1999: 382) terms a "semantically crowded field", something I discussed in

section 2.1, where three main labels have been applied to the seemingly same core concept, i.e., autonomy, authority, and discretion. This indicates that the concept has *theoretical utility*, but also that it overlaps, in terms of *field utility*, with neighbouring concepts in the field because of the weak differentiation from most-similar concepts. It is not realistic to expect concept goodness on all the evaluative criteria (Gerring, 1999: 370), and I conclude from the analysis of the interview data that the different criteria seem to be at odds with each other. The concept has its strengths in *familiarity, resonance, coherence, depth*, and *theoretical utility* and its weaknesses in *parsimony*, *differentiation,* and *field utility*. The implications – for both academics and practitioners – is to be more explicitly aware of the conceptual strengths and weaknesses and concisely define "managerial autonomy".

Second, the analysis echoes the literature (e.g., Verhoest et al., 2004), as I conclude from the empirical data that the concept is multidimensional, i.e., it spans several, what I have termed, capabilities. On the one hand, this may further accentuate the depth and complexity of the concept. On the other hand, if one acknowledges the different capabilities as part of the concept, it could provide some conceptual clarity. I propose, as a way forward, to handle some of the complexity and vagueness, to acknowledge the multidimensionality of the concept even more, both academically and in real-world discussions about public management. In chapter 2, I note that many articles do exactly this, e.g., by operationalising financial managerial autonomy, policy managerial autonomy, and other capabilities. The implication of this finding is that in order to clarify the concept and the concept's applicability, it would be important to include *over what?*, in the conceptualisation of managerial autonomy. Adcock and Collier (2001: 533) call this "friendly amendments" to conceptualisation, i.e., the researcher suggests small refinements to conceptualisations out of concern for validity to capture the ideas contained in it. For example, for the interviewed managers, the relevant discussions seem closer connected to autonomy in *leadership* functions than autonomy in *management* functions.

Third, and related to the *coherence* of the concept, as "how internally consistent (logically related) are the instances and attributes" (Gerring, 1999: 367), I have proposed and investigated the conceptual attributes of de jure/de facto, and autonomy to/autonomy from. The analysis shows that experiences of managerial autonomy can be understood with help from the conceptual attributes. Attributes have their analytical usefulness in the ability to understand managerial autonomy in the "corner-cases", e.g., by investing how a high degree of de jure managerial autonomy may not necessarily entail a high degree of de facto managerial autonomy. For the attributes of managerial autonomy to and autonomy from, the analysis has demonstrated that managers'

autonomy is dependent on the influence exercised on them and the influence they are able to exercise. However, I have not been able to thoroughly analyse how the two pairs of attributes (de jure/de facto vs. autonomy to/autonomy from) are related, which points to weaknesses in conceptual coherence. The implication of the findings in this regard is that when studying managerial autonomy, it can be useful to take into account the attributes proposed here to achieve a more coherent and clearer conceptualisation of managerial autonomy.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed the concept of managerial autonomy based on the interviewed public managers' experiences. The chapter demonstrates that experiences and understandings from the interviews can be analysed meaningfully within the proposed conceptualisation. Thus, I conclude that the conceptualisation has strengths in terms of especially resonance and depth and weaknesses in terms of differentiation from other concepts and not being parsimonious.

Chapter 6.
Manuscripts on antecedents and consequences

In this chapter, I address the research question, *what are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy*, by presenting the three manuscripts from the dissertation. In manuscript A (Regulation), regulative stakeholders, involvement, and content are studied as antecedents of managerial autonomy. In manuscript B (Work organisation), the association between work organisation and organisational performance is studied. In manuscript C (Performance goals), I study how the interaction between managerial autonomy and use of performance goals is associated with organisational performance. Figure 6.1 gives an overview of the three manuscripts.

Figure 6.1: Overview of the three manuscripts in the dissertation
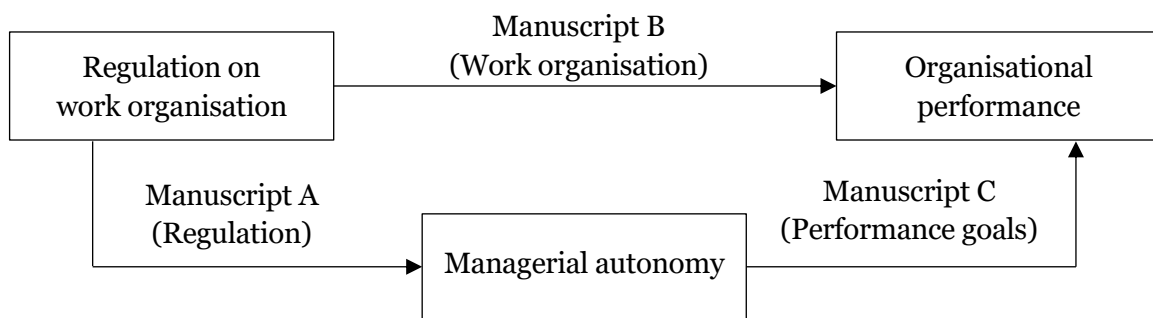
First, I present the theoretical arguments in the manuscripts in section 6.1. In section 6.2, I introduce the research designs applied in the manuscripts. In 6.3, I present the main findings, and in section 6.4, I conclude on the chapter.

6.1. Theoretical expectations

The three manuscripts address different sub-questions as shown in table 6.1. In this section, I will elaborate on the theoretical expectations proposed in the three manuscripts.

Table 6.1: Short titles and sub-question addressed in the manuscripts

Manuscript	Short title	Sub-question addressed in the manuscript
A	Regulation (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Nana Wesley Hansen)	How does the content of regulation, how stakeholders have been involved in the regulation, and the degree of formalisation of the regulation affect subjective managerial autonomy?
B	Work organisation	What is the relationship between work organisation regulating the autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees and organisational performance?
C	Performance goals (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Maria Falk Mikkelsen)	How do performance goals defined at superjacent level affect the relationship between managerial autonomy at the frontline and organisational performance?

In manuscript A (Regulation), "The influence of regulative contents, stakeholders, and formalization on managerial autonomy perceived at the front line" (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Nana Wesley Hansen), we investigate the research question: *How do the content of regulation, how stakeholders have been involved in the regulation, and the degree of formalisation of the regulation affect subjective managerial autonomy?*

We incorporate the argument from de jure/de facto managerial autonomy (see section 3.4) and the qualitative analysis (see section 5.3) that managerial autonomy as perceived and reported by managers does not necessarily correspond to the degree of managerial autonomy granted formally, e.g., in regulation. With inspiration in neo-institutional theory, we theorise that regulation is more than just formalised rules; the environment and the regulatory process also influence the effect of regulation on managerial autonomy. The line of argumentation likewise follows the autonomy to/autonomy from attributes (see section 3.5 and section 5.4), as we argue that interferences and influences manifested in the regulative process affect perceived managerial autonomy. We draw theoretically on Scott's (2014) three pillars of institutions (see table 6.2) and use these pillars to tease out three expectations to how 1) the contents of regulation, 2) the involvement of stakeholders, and 3) the degree of formalisation affect managerial autonomy.

Table 6.2: Three pillars of institutions: regulative, cognitive, and cultural-cognitive

	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-cognitive
Basis of compliance	Experience	Social obligation	Taken-for-grantedness
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible

Note: Reprint from manuscript A (Regulation).
Source: Scott (2014: 60).

First, we expect that the effect of regulation on managerial autonomy depends on the specific contents of the regulation, i.e., based on the coercive nature of regulative rules as outlined in the *regulative* pillar in table 6.2. In the workplace, regulative rules concern, for instance, managers' range of autonomy and decision rights over staffing and the organisation of work (Bloom and Reenen, 2011). The contents of such regulation are often zero-sum, i.e., more autonomy to managers means less autonomy to employees or vice versa (Hill et al., 2008; Marsden, 1999). In the manuscript, we expect that regulation that formally limits the managerial prerogative has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.

Second, we argue that it is important to pay attention to the role and involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the regulative process (Christensen and Lægreid, 2006; Freeman et al., 2010; Moore, 1995), as it underlines the binding expectations and normative mechanisms of regulation. This relates to the *normative* pillar in table 6.2. Work organisation regulation is often created through processes of *joint regulation*, i.e., employers and employees come together to regulate their relationship through collective bargaining, or through *unilateral regulation*, i.e., one-sided creation and enforcement of employment rules (Flanders, 1970). The argument in the manuscript is that stakeholders' influence will manifest itself in the effect of regulation on managerial autonomy normatively if important stakeholders partake in the regulative process. Thus, we expect that unilateral regulation has a negative effect on de facto managerial autonomy.

Third, we theorise that regulation can be characterised by the degree of legality and formal structure, i.e., how "hard" the regulation is, and to what degree stakeholders have committed to regulation. This corresponds to the *regulative* pillar in table 6.2. Thus, we expect that formalised regulation signals mutual dependency, joint investment, and partnership between stakeholders. When stakeholders commit to regulation, it has a greater (Bray,

Budd, and Macneil, 2020: 16; Flanders, 1970) and negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.

In manuscript B (Work organisation), "Decentralizing autonomy in work organization and the relationship to organizational performance", I investigate the research question: *What is the relationship between work organisation regulating the autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees and organisational performance?*

I study how flexible work organisation in terms of when (flexitime) and where to work (flexplace) affects organisational performance. The manuscript focuses on the de jure, relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis managers in work organisation. First, the arguments are that flexitime and flexplace allow employees to react more swift to challenges and demands in everyday work and private life, e.g., work-life balance (Bloom and Reenen, 2011; Feeney and Stritch, 2016). Second, I expect it to increase the employees' basic need for autonomy and thus their satisfaction and productivity (Deci and Ryan, 2004; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Third, I theorise that it signals mutual trust and respect between employer and employee (Hill et al., 2008). However, the manuscript also argues that greater flexibility may decrease managerial autonomy (cf. manuscript A (Regulation), e.g., limit managerial decision-making capabilities to manage, lead, and coordinate employees in order to foster extra-role performance (Andersen et al., 2021; Boyne, 2003; Kelliher and de Menezes, 2019; Walker and Andrews, 2015; Walker, Boyne, and Brewer, 2010).

To add to the existing literature, the manuscript identifies a need to study the relationship between work organisation on *organisational* – rather than individual-level – performance and to acknowledge that previous empirical findings in private organisations might not be transferable to public organisations. First, organisational performance might be a more suitable outcome to evaluate the effects of work organisation, as it incorporates potentially conflicting individual-level motivational mechanisms and mechanisms stemming for managerial autonomy in an aggregate outcome. Second, public organisations might differ in terms of the motivational base of employees, goal ambiguity, and the degree of formalisation (Boye et al., 2021; Blom et al., 2020). The expectations in the manuscript are that flexitime and flexplace have positive associations with organisational performance.

In manuscript C (Performance goals), "The Dangers of Half-hearted Managerialism: A Panel Study of the Link between Managerial Autonomy, Performance Goals, and Organizational Performance" (co-authored with Bente Bjørnholt and Maria Falk Mikkelsen), we investigate the research question:

How do performance goals defined at superjacent levels affect the relationship between managerial autonomy at the frontline and organisational performance?

We test the central notion from the performance management doctrine that widespread use of performance goals coupled with high level of managerial autonomy results in higher organisational performance (Moynihan, 2008; Nielsen, 2014). The theoretical argument is that managerial autonomy is not sufficient to improve organisational performance (Ammons and Roenigk, 2015; 2020; Verhoest and Lægreid, 2010) but must be accompanied by ex post control of the manager. One way to control managers ex post is by placing a demand in accordance with what stakeholders decide is good organisational performance by setting specific goals and evaluating achievement of the goals (Krause and van Thiel, 2019). Performance goals are expected to steer managers to internalise what is expected of them and to focus on operations that enhance organisational performance, as defined by the stakeholders (de Bruijn, 2010; Moynihan, 2006; Van Dooren, Bouckaert, and Halligan, 2015).

In table 6.3, the mix of managerial autonomy and the use of performance goals is illustrated with inspiration from Moynihan (2006: 84; 2008: 33) and Nielsen (2014: 435). The performance management ideal, where the positive effect on organisational performance is expected, is high managerial autonomy and widespread use of performance goals. We expect that the extent of performance goals positively moderates the association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance.

Table 6.3: Performance management, performance goals and managerial autonomy

		Use of performance goals	
		Low	High
Level of managerial autonomy	Low	Bureaucratic system	Pressure for performance
	High	Pre-bureaucratic system	Performance management

Note: With inspiration from Moynihan (2006: 84; 2008: 33), and Nielsen (2014: 435).

Table 6.4 summarises the specific hypotheses proposed in the manuscripts. In the next section, I elaborate on the research designs of the three manuscripts.

Table 6.4: Overview over tested hypotheses in the three manuscripts

	Short title	Hypotheses
A	Regulation	H_1: Regulation limiting the managerial prerogative has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.
		H_2: Regulation decided unilaterally has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.
		H_3: Regulation with high formalisation has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.
B	Work organisation	H_1: Flexplace has a positive association with organisational performance
		H_2: Flexitime has a positive association with organisational performance
C	Performance goals	H_1: The extent of performance goals positively moderates the association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance.

6.2. Research designs

All three manuscripts are investigated in the context of Danish public schools. The setting is also described in section 4.2.2 as part of the qualitative approach to conducting interviews. Three characteristics of the studied area are emphasised in the manuscripts as advantageous for investigating the research question of what the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy are.

First, in the public-school area there has recently been great focus on managerial autonomy, which peaked with the major reform of the public schools, the abolishment of the working hour agreements in 2013, and the subsequent adoption of local regulation (Andersen, Boye, and Laursen, 2018; Houlberg et al., 2016). In manuscript A and B, I utilise the variation in the adoption of local regulation, while in manuscript C, I rely on variance in self-reported measures of managerial autonomy during the period following the reform. Second, the large number of schools that produce similar services (approximately 1,312, according to Houlberg et al., 2016) and the municipal structure (with its variance in governance of the schools) provide good opportunities to conduct quantitative analyses with a relatively high number of observations, i.e., municipalities, schools, school principals, and students. Third, public schools are one of the most common types of public organisations (Fjendbo, 2021: 37; Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015: 833, O'Toole and Meier, 2011: 45) and play a large role in the public sector in most countries. The management and leadership of schools have many similarities with general management in public organisa-

tions, as school managers must manage both internal and external stakeholders, are subject to strict accountability demands from, e.g., politicians and citizens, must prioritise and manage specific public values, and face changing and ambiguous goals (Boye et al., 2021; Rainey, 2014).

Thus, the context of Danish public schools offers spatial and temporal variance in managerial autonomy, a large number of units to analyse quantitatively, and reasonable similarities with public management in general, providing some basis for external generalisations. In the next section, I will elaborate on how data and methods are used to take advantage of the variance and the large number of observations.

6.2.1. Data and methods

Most quantitative studies in the contemporary literature (see review in section 2.6) are based on cross-sectional data and have a relatively limited capacity to draw causal inferences. The data and methods used in the three manuscript in the dissertation add to the contemporary literature by studying managerial autonomy in time-series analyses and with a large number of observations.

The three manuscripts draw from three sources of data: i) content coding of local regulation, ii) panel surveys of school principals and municipal directors, and iii) population-based data of student achievements in final exams and self-reported student self-efficacy. The methodological design of all three studies relies on temporal and spatial variation, i.e., fixed effects panel analyses and difference-in-difference analyses of repeated cross-sections. Table 6.5 provides an overview of the data, samples, and designs in the manuscripts.

Table 6.5: Overview of data, sample, and design in the three manuscripts.

Manuscript	Short title	Independent variable(s)	Dependent variable(s)	Data	Design
A	Regulation	Local regulation	Managerial autonomy	Content coding of local regulation, survey of school principals	Panel analysis, fixed effects
B	Work organisation	Local regulation	Final exam scores in math and Danish	Content coding of local regulation, population-based student achievements	Generalised difference-in-difference of repeated cross-sections
C	Performance goals	Managerial autonomy, use of performance goals	Final exam scores in math and Danish; student self-efficacy	Survey of primary school principals, population-based student achievements	Panel analysis, fixed effects

In manuscript A (Regulation) and B (Work organisation), adoption of local regulation is used as independent variable. Following the government intervention in 2013, the Danish municipalities adopted local regulation of the work organisation regulating the autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees in public schools. To capture the variation in the regulation, all documents on this from the school year 2014/2015 to 2017/2018 have been collected (N = 279) and coded in terms of type of regulation, degree of formalisation, and specific policies. Documents were collected and coded in collaboration with Bente Bjørnholt and Nana Wesley Hansen, who are co-authors of manuscript A.

In manuscript B (Work organisation) and C (Performance goals) I use survey data of school principals. In manuscript C, surveys of municipal directors overseeing public schools are also included. The school principal survey data was collected in five survey waves (in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017) by the Danish Ministry of Education (described in detail in Bjørnholt et al., 2019).

The main items of interest in the surveys administrated to the school principals measure managerial autonomy. Three items are asked in all survey waves measuring managerial autonomy: on a 5-point Likert scale, "to what extent do you have influence over i) hiring of teachers, ii) setting the curricular goals for students, and iii) determining how teaching is organised". In manuscript A (Regulation), all five panel waves are used, and items ii and iii are used to construct the index measuring managerial autonomy. When all three items are included for the years 2011 and 2013, reliability is too low if item i is left out.

The measurement of self-reported, de facto managerial autonomy used in the articles in general corresponds to how it is usually done in the contemporary literature (e.g., Boon and Wynen, 2017; Krause and van Thiele, 2019; Nielsen, 2014; Wynen and Verhoest, 2016; Wynen et al., 2014). However, the measurement is more restricted in terms of the number of items and specific measurement of different dimensions of managerial autonomy as also found in the literature (see my discussion of survey operationalisations in the contemporary literature in section 2.4.1). The strength of the operationalisation used in the manuscripts is the opportunity to follow reporting on the same items over several years in panel analyses, as I will elaborate on in the next section. The low number of items used to measure the complex concept for managerial autonomy is, however, a weakness and a potential problem in terms of the validity and reliability of the measurement.

In manuscript B (Work organisation) and C (Performance goals), student achievements in final exams in math and Danish are used as a measure of organisational performance. In manuscript C, student self-efficacy is included

as an additional operationalisation of organisational performance. The argument in manuscript B and C is that organisational performance to a higher extent captures the holistic, aggregate effort at a school rather than, e.g., the individual teacher's or manager's job performance. Yet, it may be reasonable to assume that organisational performance (such as student achievements) is agreed upon both by internal and external stakeholders to be a very important and "good" dimension of performance (Andersen, Boesen, and Pedersen, 2016; Andersen and Mortensen, 2010).

Student grade point average (GPA) in standardised written exams in Danish and math is used in the manuscripts. The tests in Danish and math are administered at the ninth-grade exit level when students are typically 15-16 years old, and approximately 95% of all students complete the tests (Andersen and Mortensen, 2010; Nielsen, 2014). In manuscript C (Performance goals), self-reported student self-efficacy is also used as a measure of organisational performance. Student self-efficacy can be defined as the students' assessment of their own capabilities to reach a desired level of performance in school (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 1992). All questions are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, and the measure of self-efficacy is constructed by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education.

The three measures of organisational performance, i.e., students' achievements in math, students' achievements in Danish, and student self-efficacy, are all at individual student level and population based. This allows for estimations with a relatively high level of observations. In manuscript B (Work organisation), 412,371 observations across nine years are included (i.e., the complete population of students finishing primary school in 2010 to 2018), and in manuscript C (Performance goals), 29,667 to 165,282 observations are included in the analyses. This strengthens the internal generalisability of the results to the public school sector, as the data in manuscript A (Regulation) almost resembles the population of Danish primary school students, and in manuscript B and C, the samples are roughly representative of the studied population. Furthermore, the availability of repeated cross-sections of the populations allows for methodological designs that take the spatial and temporal variation into account. In the next section, I discuss the estimation strategies in the three manuscripts.

6.2.2. Estimation strategies

All three manuscripts in the dissertation are studies of relationships between variables and have an ambition to provide causal inferences by utilising variance in the level of managerial autonomy following the public school reform and the government intervention on working hour rules.

In manuscript A (Regulation), the adoption of local regulation on work organisation and de facto managerial autonomy is studied. Panel analysis with school and year fixed effects is used to mitigate threats of endogeneity in terms of time-invariant heterogeneity, including individual characteristics of the school principals. Figure 6.2 illustrates the panel waves, the timing of the government intervention, and the adoption of local regulation. Two of the survey panel waves (2011 and 2013) serve as baseline, pre-reform measures of managerial autonomy, while the post-reform measures of managerial autonomy are done in 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Figure 6.2: Timeline, national regulation, adoption of local regulation, and survey data collections
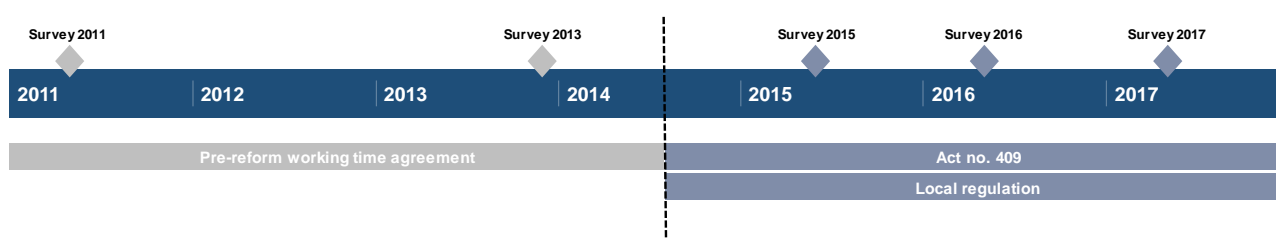
Source: Manuscript A (Regulation).

In manuscript B (Work organisation), the content coding of local regulation is merged with a data set consisting of nine years of repeated cross-sectional data of the student population's exam results (N = 412,371). Here, the adoption of local policies of flexitime and flexplace are studied post-reform. The generalised difference-in-difference estimator is applied (Angrist and Pischke, 2008; Wooldridge, 2018). Figure 6.3 illustrates the timing and the data points. Again, a fixed effects strategy is employed in the analysis, controlling for group-level (school and municipality fixed effects) and time (year fixed effects) heterogeneity.

Figure 6.3: Timeline, national regulation, adoption of local regulation, and student achievement data collections
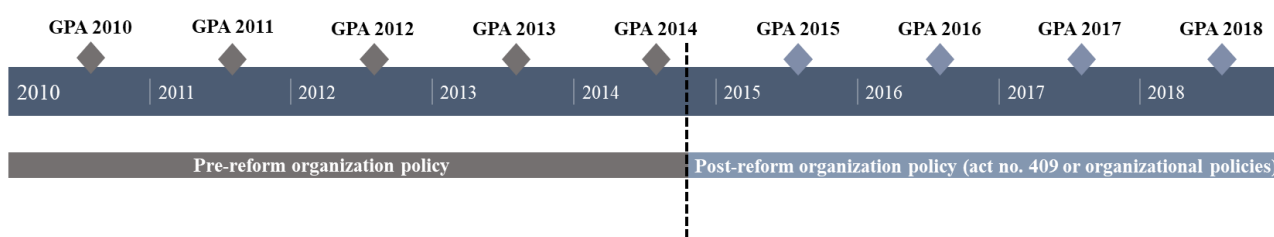
Note: Manuscript B (Work organisation).

In manuscript C (Performance goals), survey data on managerial autonomy (self-reported by school principals) and on the use of performance goals (reported by municipal managing directors) is used in panel analyses of the association with student achievements in the final exam and student self-efficacy. The analysis addresses omitted variable bias by including school fixed effects and a comprehensive set of control variables at the municipal and student level (e.g., socio-economic background characteristics).

To sum up, the strengths of the data and methods applied in the three manuscripts are, first, the ability to study spatial and temporal variance in managerial autonomy following the reform of the Danish public school. Second, the articles have a high number of observations in terms of municipalities, schools, and students, strengthening the power of the statistical analyses and the representativeness of the data. This makes the method suited for internal generalisations, especially in Danish public schools. However, the methods and data are limited by being in one specific setting at specific time, albeit the setting has a list of characteristics that are typical for public organisations in general. Furthermore, the analyses are not free from threats of endogeneity, e.g., omitted variable bias, reverse causality, and measurement error (Antonakis et al., 2010). In terms of measurement error, especially the survey measurement of managerial autonomy leaves some room for improvements, as the measurement is ill equipped to incorporate the full scope of managerial autonomy, as other studies in the literature have done (see section 2.4.1), and as analysed qualitatively in section 5.2.

6.3. Main findings

In this section, I outline the main findings of the three manuscripts, emphasising their main contributions to the dissertation's research questions and to the literature on managerial autonomy.

In manuscript A (Regulation), we first expected the content of the local regulation to affect de facto managerial autonomy. We find very limited support for the hypothesis, as the variables measuring the contents of the regulation in terms of flexplace, flexitime, and maximum number of teaching hours do not seem to affect de facto managerial autonomy. Second, we expected unilateral regulation to affect managerial autonomy negatively. We find some indication that unilateral regulation has a negative impact on de facto managerial autonomy, while joint regulation does not affect de facto managerial autonomy compared to national regulation. Third, we expected formal regulation to decrease the de facto level of managerial autonomy. We find support for this in the analysis, and substantially, the finding shows that stakeholders

committing to the local regulation by their signature have a negative effect on frontline managers' de facto managerial autonomy.

Manuscript A (Regulation) adds to our knowledge of how regulation, as an antecedent, is associated with de facto managerial autonomy. It illustrates the attributes of de jure managerial autonomy and de facto managerial autonomy (as conceptualised in section 3.4). The findings show that the specific content of the regulation does not seem to substantially affect the perceived managerial autonomy among school managers in Danish public schools. This is in line with the empirical literature suggesting that despite reforms aimed to increase managerial autonomy, this does not manifest itself in the managerial autonomy perceived by the managers (e.g., Krause and Van Thiel, 2019; Van de Walle, 2019). However, the regulative stakeholders and formalisation seem to matter. This finding has implications for studies using regulative elements or policies as a direct measure of managerial autonomy. It also underlines the argument of paying attention to the informal legitimacy and influence of regulation as well as the formal aspects (Scott, 2014).

In manuscript B (Work organisation), the association between work organisation and organisational performance is tested. Changes in work organisation are studied as the adoption of flexplace and flexitime. The analysis supports that flexplace is positively associated with organisational performance, although the effect size is substantially small and seemingly restricted to math test sores. In the interpretation of the results, one must note that the estimated association with organisational performance concerns changes in work organisation for a single school year. Moreover, there is no indication that adopting flexitime or flexplace has negative effects on organisational performance.

Manuscript B (Work organisation) adds to a sparse literature on work organisation in public organisations. The manuscript argues for studying the association between the relative autonomy of employees vis-à-vis managers on organisational performance rather than individual performance. Thus, there are potentially different theoretical mechanisms in place when adopting policies that regulate work organisation and the relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees. The studied policies – flexitime and flexplace – give employees more flexibility, but it may come at the expense of managers' autonomy.

In manuscript C (Performance goals), the association between managerial autonomy, performance goals, and organisational performance is tested on three dependent variables (test scores in math, Danish, and student self-efficacy). In terms of math scores and student self-efficacy, we find support for a positive interaction between school principals' perceptions of managerial autonomy and the municipalities' use of performance goals. The interaction term implies that managerial autonomy, coupled with a high use of performance

goals at suprajacent levels, is associated positively with organisational performance. We find no support for a direct association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance or for an interaction effect for test scores in Danish.

Given that the association between managerial autonomy on organisational performance depends on the extent of the use of performance goals, the calculated marginal effects of autonomy for high use and low use of performance goals on math scores (panel A) and self-efficacy (panel B) are plotted in figure 6.4. The figure shows positive association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance for high levels of autonomy when the use of performance goals is also high. In contrast, the figure shows a tendency for negative associations with organisational performance of the combination of high use of performance goals and low degree of managerial autonomy ("Pressure for performance", as illustrated in table 6.3). We also find that high managerial autonomy and low use of performance goals ("Prebureaucratic systems" in table 6.3) significantly reduces organisational performance.
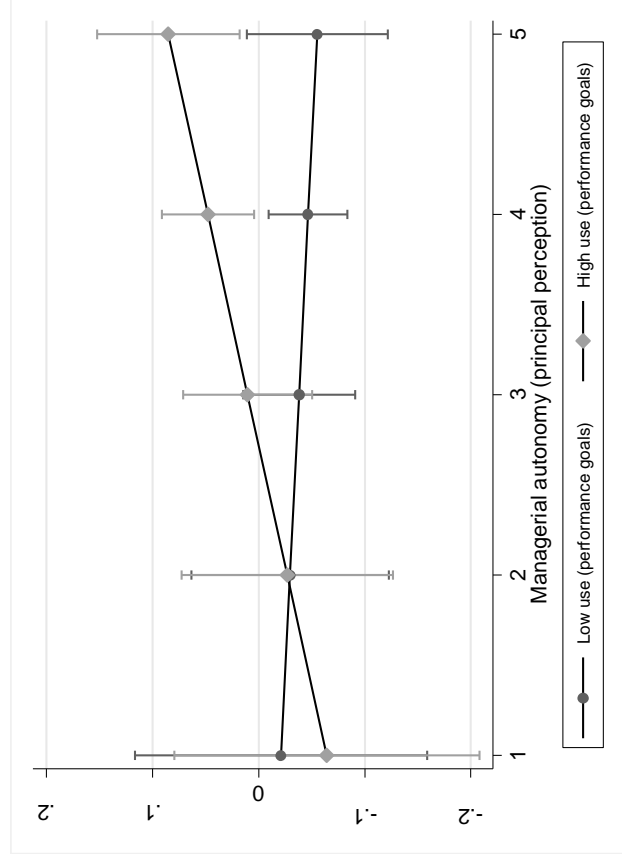
Manuscript C (Performance goals) contributes to the literature by investigating how the association between managerial autonomy and organisational performance is contingent on the use of performance goals at the upper level. The analysis supports the general expectation that managerial autonomy needs to be accompanied by some kind of hierarchical direction or control (Ammons and Roenigk, 2015; Moynihan, 2008; Moynihan and Pandey, 2006; Nielsen, 2014; Van Dooren, Bouckaert, and Halligan, 2015). The analyses also point out the dangers of "half-hearted managerialism" (Hood, 2000: 15), illustrated here in the case when managerial autonomy and performance goals do not go hand in hand. The findings suggest that if municipalities use performance goals to a large extent but fail to induce high levels of managerial autonomy perceived by school principals, organisational performance may even suffer.

Figure 6.4: Marginal effect of managerial autonomy for low and high levels of performance goals

Math scores (a)
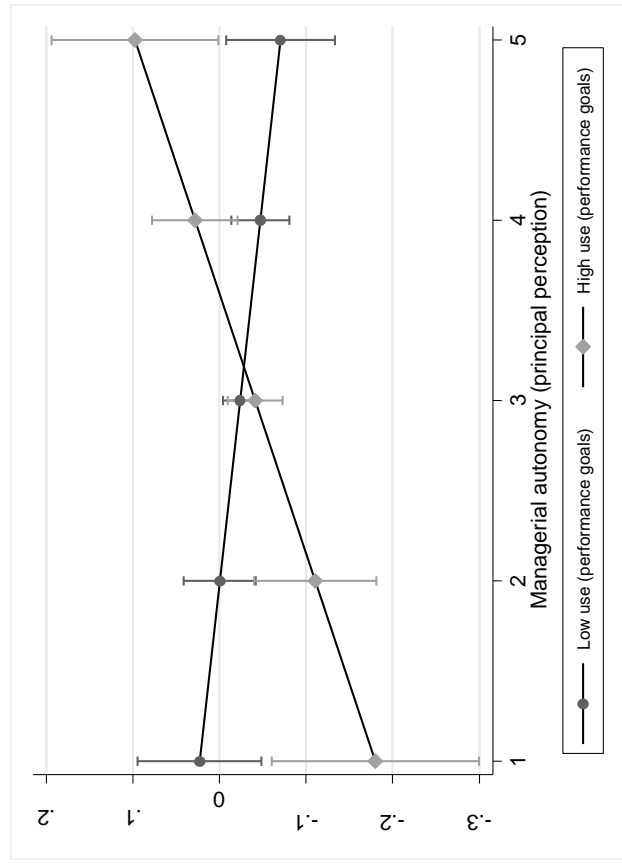
Student self-efficacy (b)

Source: Manuscript C (Performance goals).

6.4. Conclusion

In the chapter, I have presented the three manuscript in the dissertation, which relate to the re-search question of antecedents (manuscript A, Regulation) and consequences (manuscript B, Work organisation, and manuscript C, Performance goals) of managerial autonomy posed in the dissertation. The manuscripts show that the involvement of stakeholders and formalisation play a role as antecedents of managerial autonomy. Furthermore, the content of the regulation of work organisation and autonomy of employees vis-à-vis managers, e.g., flexitime and flexplace, seems to be positively associated with organisational performance. Finally, managerial autonomy, coupled with a high focus on performance goals, seems to relate positively to organisational performance. Table 6.6 summarises the findings in accordance with the hypotheses tested in the three manuscripts.

Table 6.6: Overview over findings in the three manuscripts

	Short title	Hypotheses	Key finding
A	Regulation	H_1: Regulation limiting the managerial prerogative has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.	Limited support for an association between the specific regulative content and de facto managerial autonomy.
		H_2: Regulation decided unilaterally has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.	Support for negative association between unilaterally decided and formalised regulation and de facto managerial autonomy.
		H_3: Regulation with high formalization has a negative effect on perceived managerial autonomy.	
B	Work organisation	H_1: Flexplace has a positive association with organizational performance	Some support that adoption of work organisations policies regulating the relative autonomy of managers vis-à-vis employees has a positive association with organisational performance
		H_2: Flexitime has a positive association with organizational performance	
C	Performance goals	H_1: The extent of performance goals positively moderates the association between managerial autonomy and organizational performance.	Support for positive moderation by the use of performance goals at municipal level on the association between de facto managerial autonomy and organisational performance

Chapter 7.
Conclusion and discussion

The dissertation set out to answer two research questions:

RQ1   What is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?

RQ2   What are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy?

To examine the research questions, I have applied different approaches in the dissertation, including a systematic literature review, a proposed conceptualisation, and interviews with public managers with focus on RQ1. The three manuscripts in the dissertation focus on RQ2 by studying antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy with quantitative methodological designs using content coding of regulative documents, survey data, and register data in Danish primary schools. In this final chapter, I will discuss and conclude on the research questions, the main contribution of the dissertation, its limitations, the extent of generalisation of the findings, and the potentials for future research. Finally, I will assess the practical and policy implications of the findings.

7.1. Conceptualisation (RQ1)

RQ1 asked, *what is managerial autonomy, and how can it be conceptualised?* To answer the research question, I systematically reviewed 63 articles published in contemporary public management literature on managerial autonomy in chapter 2. Based on this, I developed a conceptualisation, presented in chapter 3. Managerial autonomy is defined in the dissertation as *the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities*. I suggest that the scope of the concept can be approached in terms of decision-making capabilities over different management and leadership functions. Furthermore, I argue that the concept can be approached as *de jure* managerial autonomy, i.e., objectively as defined in regulation, and *de facto* managerial autonomy, i.e., subjectively as perceived by the individual manager. Finally, I discuss how managerial autonomy can be approached as *autonomy to*, i.e., agency in decision-making, and *autonomy from*, i.e., exemption of interferences in decision-making. In chapter 5, I analyse, using the conceptualisation, interviews with public managers about how they experience their managerial autonomy. I find that the proposed conceptualisation is well suited to understand and clarify these ex-

periences, and the main conclusion in the chapter is that public managers experience managerial autonomy in continued alignment and bargaining processes with various stakeholders in their organisations.

The dissertation contributes with a conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in public management, which serves several purposes. First, it contributes building blocks for theories and development of expectations and hypotheses. For instance, I draw on the conceptualisation to develop hypotheses that I test in manuscript A (Regulation), manuscript B (Work organisation), and manuscript C (Performance goals). Second, the conceptualisation provides common ground and a shared language for a continued discussion on public management. The ambition has been to advance a definition and conceptualisation that tally with both the public management academic field and public managers. Third, the conceptualisation has the potential to provide unitary grounds for cumulation of scientific knowledge, as the contemporary literature uses many different labels and definitions as exposed in the systematic review in the dissertation. However, the proposed conceptualisation, including the measurement and qualitative analysis using it, are not without limitations. In the following, I will highlight and discuss three of them.

First, as discussed in chapter 5, the conceptualisation of managerial autonomy shows weaknesses in terms of especially differentiation from related concepts and complexity of the concept (Gerring, 1999). An example from the qualitative and quantitative findings in the dissertation illustrates this limitation. One of the main insights of the dissertation is that managerial autonomy is not found to be directly linked with higher organisational performance. In manuscript B (Work organisation), *employee* autonomy over work organisation – possibly at the expense of managerial autonomy – is linked with organisational performance. In manuscript C (Performance goals), I show that the link to organisational performance of managerial autonomy is contingent on the use of performance goals set at higher level. However, when investigated qualitatively, the interviewed managers explicitly point to the use performance goals, benchmarking, and performance evaluations from higher-level principals as restraining them. Managerial autonomy as conceptualised in the dissertation thus to some extent crowds together with, e.g., the use of performance goals, muddling the differentiation of two key concepts of performance management (Moynihan, 2008). On the one hand, this points to an important and delicate balance in performance regimes of placing sufficiently strong demands on performance but at the same time ensuring that managers do not experience it as a major constraint on their autonomy (Jakobsen et al., 2018). On the other hand, it could indicate a limitation in terms of potential overlap with related concepts. Consequently, it may be necessary to acknowledge that a concept such as managerial autonomy, with its high degree of familiarity and

resonance, overlaps with other concepts' attributes (Gerring, 1999: 361). Yet, the danger is that the conceptualisation still will be too vague, amorphous, and elusive to be used in, e.g., comparative analyses (Gerring, 1999; Sartori, 1970), or as a building block in theories such as performance management (Moynihan, 2008).

Second, the concept is defined in the dissertation as *the relative level of managerial decision-making capabilities*, and I qualified the scope of the concept to management and leadership functions. However, especially the quantitative approaches applied in the manuscripts in the dissertation have limitations in this regard, as they narrowly focus on a specific set of capabilities, i.e., work organisation. Furthermore, the quantitative measurements of managerial autonomy have some weaknesses in terms of both measurement validity and reliability. For instance, it is questionable whether the relatively few survey items used in manuscript A (Regulation) and manuscript C (Performance goals) are sufficient to accurately measure the concept as defined in the conceptualisation. On the one hand, there is a deliberate trade-off here, as I have prioritised in the survey analyses in the dissertation to investigate spatial and temporal variation over collecting new survey data and/or develop a survey instrument. On the other hand, the proposed definition, the high degree of complexity, and the contextuality found in the qualitative data, indicate that the simple measurement in the quantitative material used in the dissertation is a potential limitation.

Third, the methodological approach with interviews of managers in primary schools, high schools, and job centres is to some extent limited in terms of the internal and external generalisability of the findings with possible implications for the applicability of the conceptualisation on a more diverse set of public organisations. For one thing, the limitation in the generalisability surfaces in the qualitative study where all managers expressed a high overall degree of managerial autonomy when asked about it explicitly. This raises the question whether the sample of interviewed managers differs from the population of managers in the three types of organisations, where one could expect that at least some managers experience a low degree of autonomy. For another thing, one of the conclusions from the interview study is that there is a degree of contextuality in the managers' experience of their managerial autonomy. However, even as I have strived to maximise variation in the degree of publicness and organisational performance, the study still only covers three types of public organisations, and the quantitative studies are further limited to public primary schools. Thus, it is still somewhat uncertain whether contextual specificity in different types of public organisations, e.g., with variance in environmental and organisational characteristics, has a major impact on how to conceptualise managerial autonomy here, or the conceptualisation is truly generic

or universal for public management (Adcock and Collier, 2001: 534; Barbour, 2014: 507; Maxwell, 2012: 135).

Future research could naturally tie up some of the loose ends and qualify the findings in the dissertation. I see at least two prospective avenues for research of the conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in public organisations, i.e., more detailed work on conceptualisation and better measurement. First, future studies could continue the (re)conceptualisation of managerial autonomy and investigate the potential for disaggregating the concept (Adcock and Collier, 2001: 533). For instance, one of the points advanced in the dissertation is that managerial autonomy has a specific scope, i.e., it relates to different capabilities within management and leadership functions. On the one hand, this is a strategy I have applied to make the conceptualisation clearer. On the other hand, it preserves the breadth of the concept, as it covers the level of decision-making in many different areas subject to managerial influence. Future research on the conceptualisation of managerial autonomy could focus even more explicitly on *specific* capabilities of managerial autonomy. An example is to focus specifically on managerial autonomy in terms of the level of decision-making managers have in leadership functions, such as transformational leadership. The interview study thus demonstrated that public managers' experiences of managerial autonomy are closer connected to leadership functions than described in the contemporary literature. Transformational leadership is "a set of behaviors that seek to develop, share, and sustain a vision intended to encourage employees to transcend their own self-interest and achieve organizational goals" (Nielsen et al., 2019: 417). I see this as a potential fruitful area of study, given transformational leadership well-documented, positive effects on organisational performance (Andersen et al., 2021, Jacobsen et al., 2021). However, I also note that the literature seems somewhat conflicted about how managerial autonomy affects the use and effectiveness of transformational leadership in public organisations. Currie et al. (2005: 265) and Ferlie et al. (2003: 9) argue that transformational leadership is harder to enact in public organisations due to legal, regulatory rules and public demands. However, meta-analytical findings suggest that the level of transformational leadership is higher in public than in private organisations (Lowe et al., 1996). Future research could examine what specifically constrains or enables managers to exercise leadership behaviours such as transformational leadership, and how it relates to organisational performance.

Second, in terms of measurement of managerial autonomy, there are potentials for future research both quantitatively and qualitatively. Future studies could aim for validating a survey measurement scale, either by analysing one from the existing literature or by developing a new one with inspiration in the 42 studies identified in the literature that rely on a survey measurement of

managerial autonomy. Specifically, the multidimensionality of the concept and the potential measurement invariance between different types of public managers at different organisational levels could be very useful to uncover in order to develop a good measurement of the concept (Jilke, Meuleman, and Van de Walle, 2015). Qualitatively, the measurement of managerial autonomy in the dissertation is inspired by a phenomenological approach where I ask explicitly about examples from the public managers' workday. However, this is obviously not the only way to approach a qualitative investigation of managerial autonomy. To advance an understanding of the concept informed by many different methodologies, future qualitative inquiries into conceptualisation and measurement could draw inspiration from approaches that are well suited for conceptualisation, description, and explanations, such as narrative, ethnographical, or grounded theory approaches (Blaikie, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

7.2. Antecedents and consequences (RQ2)

RQ2 asked, *what are the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy?* To answer the research question, I systematically reviewed, in chapter 2, the empirical findings in the contemporary public management literature on managerial autonomy. The review showed that the empirical literature focuses on autonomy in management functions of top-level agency managers, and the most studied relationships are with antecedents in the political environment and on the consequence of managerial autonomy for organisational performance. Following this, I have investigated regulation as an antecedent of managerial autonomy at the frontline and the consequences of managerial autonomy for organisational performance in three manuscripts. In manuscript A (Regulation), I found that the involvement of stakeholders and formalisation play a role as regulative antecedent to managerial autonomy. In manuscript B (Work organisation), on the content of the work organisation regulation, e.g., flexitime and flexplace, I find that employees' autonomy vis-à-vis managers is positively associated with organisational performance. In manuscript C (Performance goals), de facto managerial autonomy coupled with a high focus on performance goals is found to be positively associated with organisational performance.

The dissertation contributes to the public management literature with a systematic overview of the empirical findings related to managerial autonomy in the contemporary literature. The review makes sense of a relatively large and to some extent fragmented literature exposing the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. By identifying and categorising the empirical findings in the literature, the dissertation communicates "what works

and what does not" to both academics and practice (Pettigrew and Roberts, 2006: 2; 11-15). I actively use the systematic review to situate my own contributions in terms antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in the literature. Theoretically, the main contribution of the three manuscripts is that regulation as antecedent of managerial autonomy can be approached as more than just coercive and formalised rules. The regulative processes and the influence from the organisational environment in terms of the normative and morally governed legitimacy play an important role as regulative antecedents (Christensen and Lægreid, 2007; Scott, 2014). Empirically, the manuscripts contribute to the managerial autonomy literature by introducing analyses of frontline managers with time-series data of content coding of local regulation, population-based surveys, and data on student achievements.

However, the dissertation has some limitations in terms of uncovering antecedents and consequences. First, the systematic review is limited in scope to provide a definitive overview of findings of antecedents and consequences. Practical limitation in the number of years covered, the exclusive focus on journal articles, and the exhaustiveness of the search string may have missed potentially important findings in the literature. Furthermore, the review focuses explicitly on *public* management on the assumption that managerial autonomy in public organisations differs from managerial autonomy in private organisations (Boye et al., 2021, Boye and Tummers, 2021; Rainey, 2014). However, even as it seems reasonable to conclude that managerial autonomy is higher in private organisations (e.g., Boye et al., 2021; Boyne, 2002), it is more unclear to what extent it is reasonable to draw conclusions on the antecedents and consequences found in the literature on managerial autonomy in private management (Mikkelsen, 2016; Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker, 2015; Wülferth, 2013).

Second, RQ2, on the questions of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy, relates to causality. There are limitations in terms of drawing causal inferences from the contemporary literatures, as few of the reviewed studies actually apply research designs that allow for causal interpretation. The three manuscripts, which all aim to produce causal claims to some extent, have limitations in this regard as well. The independent variables in the three studies are not exogenously manipulated, and to draw causal inference, the manuscripts rely on statistical adjustment and quasi-experimentation to handle threats of endogeneity (Antonakis et al., 2010). For instance, the direction of causality between managerial autonomy and organisational performance has been noted in the literature. However, in manuscript B (Work organisation) and manuscript C (Performance goals), the threat cannot be dismissed by applying lags in the measurement of the dependent variable

or by relying on difference-in-difference estimates (Antonakis et al., 2010; Boye and Tummers, 2021), which are the approaches in the manuscripts.

Third, the internal generalisability of the findings on antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy in the three manuscript is potentially quite good, i.e., the ability to infer conclusions *within* Danish public primary schools between observed and unobserved cases, such as schools and school principals. However, the external generalisability, i.e., generalisability beyond the case of public primary schools (Maxwell, 2012: 135), is potentially limited. I have made a case for primary schools as representative of public organisations in general. Nevertheless, the introduced variation in managerial autonomy (stemming from changes to work organisation, regulation, and the school reform), is rather unique to the studied case and relates primarily to managerial autonomy in work organisation. In addition, compared to the international context, the NPM-inspired reform in terms of increasing managerial autonomy for public organisations in Denmark has been classified as extensive compared to other countries (Bezes and Jeannot, 2018). Whether the empirical findings regarding antecedents and consequences can be generalised fully to other areas of the public sector remains an open question for future research.

Thus, to no surprise, I encourage future research to continue working with the findings and limitations of the dissertation. Exploring exogenous variation in antecedents or managerial autonomy itself would allow future research to a higher extent to uncover *causal* antecedents and consequences. I have identified one study in the literature review with exogenous variation in managerial autonomy (Andersen and Moynihan, 2016). The study exemplifies the great potential of exogenously manipulating managerial autonomy in, e.g., hiring of employees, and demonstrates the practical limitations and the extreme expenses in applying such a research design with its budget of US$ 6 million dollars (approximately DKK 35 million) (Andersen and Moynihan, 2016: 1038). More feasible experimental designs could be survey vignette experiments in which different managerial scenarios with varying levels of managerial autonomy are presented to public managers. In the literature on the private sector, there are some examples of the use of vignettes in the study of autonomy of managers (e.g., Key, 1997). In the public management literature, future studies could draw inspiration from Nielsen and Jacobsen (2018), who use survey experiments to measure employees' acceptance of their manager. Furthermore, in my interviews with the public managers, I did not focus explicitly on potential antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. It came up in some interviews, but I did not develop any expectations or probe for it systematically. Future research could put more emphasis on this and deductively investigate causal mechanisms related to managerial autonomy – also in qualitative methodological approaches or case studies. For instance,

future research could address some of the findings in the dissertation more systematically and deductively, such as how individual antecedents like personality traits, leadership identity, and personal relations with upper-level managers/politicians affect the decision-making capabilities of public managers (e.g., Bro, 2018; Grøn, Bro, and Andersen, 2020).

Finally, future studies of antecedents and consequences could broaden the empirical setting beyond primary schools. For instance, the qualitative study in the dissertation showed that the role of regulation, upper-level management, politicians, and employees for managerial autonomy to some extent differs between the three types of organisations studied. This indicates that antecedents of managerial autonomy in one type of public organisation may not be generalisable to other settings. The reviewed literature focuses primarily on government agencies and on public schools, just as the empirical data in the dissertation primarily focuses on schools. Future studies could broaden the scope to better understand the scope conditions of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy.

7.3. Practical and policy implications

The dissertation has some important implications for practice and policy. I want to emphasise three implications. First, the starting point of the dissertation was an observation of increased focus on managerial autonomy, and that the concept was perhaps not clear enough. Thus, I have developed a conceptualisation and used it in my analysis of the interviewed public managers' experiences. The implication for practice is that the public debate and the conversation about public management need to be aware of the use of labels such as managerial autonomy and managerial room for manoeuvre. It is not always clear what is meant when the label is applied, nor is it certain that people necessarily talk about the same thing or at the same level of abstractness. I recommend that academics and practitioners alike to higher degree use the ideas presented in the conceptualisation and the attributes in the dissertation. This will potentially foster more precision in communication within and between the two fields. This could be achieved by specifying in more detail the scope of managerial autonomy, e.g., is it autonomy in leadership functions, such as setting goals for the organisations, or is it management functions such as hiring and firing? Another conceptual idea is to emphasise whether one refers to autonomy to, i.e., the agency to make decisions, or to autonomy from, i.e., the absence of constraints, influence, or intervention from, e.g., upper-level management or politicians. Finally, I recommend being explicitly aware of the distinction between de jure managerial autonomy and de facto managerial autonomy.

Second, I have defined managerial autonomy as *capabilities* in order to stress the assumption that the concept lies in the intersection between public managers' capacity and ability. For instance, the qualitative material pointed to public managers rationalising a need to push or challenge the level of managerial autonomy to its de jure limits. This is related to skills in leadership and management, and it implies that managers who are more skilled potentially have more managerial autonomy. A policy implication of the dissertation in this regard is that if the political focus is on increasing de facto managerial autonomy in public organisations, managers should have the training to utilise and seize de jure managerial autonomy.

Third, one indication of the political focus on increased managerial autonomy that I emphasised in the introduction is the welfare agreements implemented in seven municipalities in day care, elderly care, and primary schools from May 2021 to September 2024 (Act no. 879; Act no. 880; The Prime Minister's Office, 2020). The dissertation has implications for the implementation of policies such as welfare agreements, where the goal of the policy is to give managerial autonomy in order to increase organisational performance. I find that managerial autonomy in itself does not seem to lead to organisational performance. It is a not a panacea. For instance, when managerial autonomy is coupled with high use of performance goals, there are positive associations with organisational performance. Municipalities relying on managerial autonomy, as part of policy such as the welfare agreements, should keep this in mind. However, it should be acknowledged that, e.g., performance goals and demands for higher performance can easily be experienced as a constraining factor for individual public managers, as the interviews in the dissertation attest to. Thus, there is a delicate balance to strike between the use of performance goals and managerial autonomy.

Appendix

Appendix A: PRISMA checklist

Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported in section(s)
Title			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	2.1
Abstract			
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	2.5
Introduction			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	2.1.
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	2.1.
Methods			
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and, if available, provide registration information including registration number.	N/A
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	2.1.1. Appendix B
Information sources	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	2.1.1.
Search	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.	2.1.1.
Study selection	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	2.1.2.
Data collection process	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from	2.1.4. Appendix C

Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported in section(s)
		investigators.	
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.	2.1.4. Apendix C
Risk of bias in individual studies	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	N/A
Summary measures	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).	N/A
Synthesis of results	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., I^2) for each meta-analysis.	N/A
Risk of bias across studies	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., publication bias, selective reporting within studies).	N/A
Additional analyses	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	N/A
Results			
Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	2.1.2
Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, PICOS, follow-up period) and provide the citations.	N/A
Risk of bias within studies	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessment (see item 12).	N/A
Results of individual studies	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple summary data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	N/A
Synthesis of results	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measures of consistency.	N/A
Risk of bias across studies	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	N/A
Additional analysis	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).	N/A

		Discussion	
Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; consider their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	2.5 2.6
Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	N/A
Conclusions	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	2.7
		Funding	
Funding	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data); role of funders for the systematic review.	N/A

Note: Moher et al. (2009). N/A: Not relevant for the review in the dissertation.

Appendix B: Included journals in systematic review

1. *Administration and Society*
2. *Administrative Science Quarterly*
3. *American Review of Public Administration*
4. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*
5. *Canadian Public Administration*
6. *Governance*
7. *International Public Management Journal*
8. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*
9. *Journal of European Public Policy*
10. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*
11. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*
12. *Local Government Studies*
13. *Policy Studies Journal*
14. *Public Administration*
15. *Public Administration Review*
16. *Public Management Review*
17. *Public Organization Review*
18. *Public Performance and Management Review*
19. *Regulation and Governance*
20. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*

Appendix C: Codebook used in systematic review

Variable	Description
Background	
ID	Unique ID applied for identification
Title	Title of the article
Journal	Journal article is published in
Year	2000 to 2020
Number of citations	Number of citations according to Scopus
Authors	Author(s) of the article
Method	Categorization of the methodological approach in the article
Sample	Description of empirical sample (if any); number of participants; area of study
Level of management	Four categories, mutually exclusive: i) not explicit, ii) top level, iii) frontline/middle management, and iv) various
Conceptualization	
Definition and label	Copy of exact, explicit definition (if any) in the article
Operationalization	Copy of exact operationalization (if any) in the article or description of operationalization, including e.g., exact wording of survey items
Antecedents and consequences	
Study focus	Five categories, not mutually exclusive: i) antecedents (studies with managerial autonomy as dependent variable), ii) consequences (studies with managerial autonomy as independent variable), iii) mediator (studies with managerial autonomy as mediator variable), iv) moderator (studies with managerial autonomy as moderating variable), and v) not investigating relationship
Factor	Three categories, not mutually exclusive: i) individual factor(s), ii) organizational factor(s), and iii) environmental factor(s)
Findings	Description of the main findings in relation to managerial autonomy in the article

Appendix D: Letter of invitation

Dear [the manager's full name],
I am a PhD student at Crown Prince Frederik Center for Public Leadership at Aarhus University. My research projects examines managerial autonomy in public organization based on interviews. For that purpose I am looking for a [head of a job center/elementary school principal/high school principal] who might be interested in contributing to the project, and I hope you will be interested.
As a scholar of public leadership, I can only produce knowledge for development of an even better public sector by creating, sharing and applying research-based knowledge. Cooperation and reflection for practice are crucial for the success of this endeavor.

Background of the project
Managerial autonomy for public leaders has been the topic of a broad and lengthy debate. However, it remains relatively unclear what exactly the term covers and what specific conditions, e.g., restricts managerial autonomy. In my project, I seek to understand these questions by conducting interviews with heads of job centers and principals of elementary schools and high schools.

What is required of you?
I imagine that I visit you and conduct the interview with you at your place of work. The interview will last about one hour. Day and time are up to you.

Anonymity and consent
All participants will be anonymous in the dissertation. The interview will be described as taking place at a [job center/elementary school/high school] in the dissertation. Any descriptions that make it possible to identify [job center/elementary school/high school] or you will not be included.
If you have further questions, you are more than welcome to contact me. I am of course prepared to enter a dialogue about sharing the results with you. If I do not hear from you, I will try to contact you by phone.

Best regards
Stefan Boye
PhD student

Cell: +45 60 61 86 93
Mail: sboye@ps.au.dk
Web: http://au.dk/sboye@ps

Crown Prince Frederik Center for Public Leadership
Department of Political Science
Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University
Bartholins Allé 7,
Building 1340, room 340
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Follow our activities here:

Appendix E: Interview guide

Theme	Questions and probes
Intro /briefing	Consent First, I want to ask you to sign the declaration of consent. The declaration of consent specifies the purpose of the study and my project, how the interview data will be used, and your options to withdraw consent and data. Project My PhD project is about understanding public managers' managerial autonomy, public managers' limitations and possibilities. One method is to conduct interviews like this one with you today, because who is better at describing this than public managers, who are the topic of the project? I am curious about examples from your daily work as manager. Question guide I will strive to give you ample room to make your points. It is important for me that your own examples and experiences are uncovered. As we get further into the interview, I will attempt to ask more specifically about some conditions of special interest to me.
Background information	First, please say something about … • Where you are a manager • How long you have been manager • Your education and career path
Theme 1: Understanding of "managerial autonomy"	To start with, I would like to hear how you understand "managerial autonomy"? • Can you mention examples from your workday when the concept was relevant? • How is the concept useful in terms of understanding how it is for you to be a public manager?
Theme 2: Examples of possibilities and limitations	When do you have good possibilities to exercise leadership? • Can you mention a specific example of when you managerial autonomy gave you good possibilities to exercise leadership? When are your leadership possibilities limited? • Can you mention a specific example of when your managerial autonomy was limited?
Theme 3: Adjusted managerial autonomy	What can you personally do to create your desired level of managerial autonomy? Which advantages do you see in greater managerial autonomy? Which disadvantages do you see in greater managerial autonomy?

Theme	Questions and probes
Theme 4: Regulation, politics and politicians	Rules, collective agreements and politics are often highlighted in connection with managerial autonomy. Can you describe how rules affect your managerial autonomy? • Can you mention an example of rule changes affecting your perception of your managerial autonomy? • Can you mention an example of politics or politicians affecting your managerial autonomy? • Can you mention an example where politics or rule changes have aimed to increase your managerial autonomy but you have not felt any real change as manager?
Theme 5: Own manager and staff	As personnel manager, you have your own manager and a relation to your own staff. Can you describe your own manager's role in relation to your managerial autonomy? Are you engaged in ongoing discussions with your manager/board about what your managerial autonomy comprises (and what it does not)? Can you describe your staff's role in relation to your managerial autonomy? How do you communicate to your staff hat your managerial autonomy comprises? • Can you mention an example when your staff felt that you acted outside your managerial autonomy?
Closing	Thank you very much for your input! [Repeat appointments and hand out business card] We have covered a lot of ground, but do you want to add anything?

Appendix F: Transcription guide

Transcription method:

Start by downloading the software "Express scribe" or similar or transcribe the interview in NVivo.

Procedure:

1. Read this transcription guide thoroughly so that you know how to transcribe

2. You may listen to the audio file at high speed to familiarize yourself with the content

3. Spend a few minutes to find the transcription speed that is best for you and decide which short-cut keys work best for you in "Express scribe" when you need to use the "start" and "stop" key, and when you want to rewind slowly.

4. If you have a pedal, you can use it to stop and restart.

5. Start transcription.

6. When you stop transcribing, always remember to insert "time" – which you'll find under "Typing" and "insert". That makes it easier to resume.

Guide	Examples
Interviewer. Called "IW"	IW: Please start by telling me how you understanding the concept "managerial autonomy"
Respondenter called R	R: OK … Well, it's about what you can do as a manager, rules and things like that.
Note the interview question in accordance with the interview guide (as often as you can) Noter interviewspørgsmålet i overensstemmelse med interviewguiden (så ofte, som du kan)	Question 18) IW: What advantages do you see in greater or smaller managerial autonomy? R: It motivates me to be able to influence …
Start a new line when a new person speaks	IW: What advantages do you see in greater or smaller managerial autonomy? R: It motivates be to be able to influence … IW: Influence what specifically? R: Well, how we do our work around here

Ignore "uhm" and interpret them instead as pauses written as … Ignore laughter, coughing etc. completely	IW: What advantages do you see in greater or smaller managerial autonomy? R: It motivates be to be able to influence min organisation. IW: Influence what specifically? R: Well, how we do our work around here … It's about you as a manager being able to plan the staff's work.
Interruptions (e.g. if a respondent/interviewer interrupts the other) written as – Other comments to the transcription are written in brackets. For instance if someone interrupts the interview or if something goes on that cannot be written into the transcription	IW: What advantages do you see in greater or smaller managerial autonomy? R: It motivates be to be able to influence my organisation. Is that what you're ask – IW: I mean, what are you specifically influencing? [Interviewet briefly interrupted by telephone call/someone entering the room etc.]
Use comma if the respondent/interviewer does not finish a sentence but uses new words	IW: Can you tell me a bit about what a normal day for you ,comprises? R: Yes, but … A normal day starts with, that
Capitalise emphasised words	R: Sometimes being a manager becomes SO complicated
If an interviewer says, for instance, "yes", "no", "ah", "mhh" or otherwise expresses that she is listening to the interviewee when the person answers questions, just leave such utterances out of the transcription	
If something is unintelligible, write: UNINTELLIGIBLE and time in the interview in brackets Hvis der er noget, som er så utydeligt, at du ikke kan høre det, så skriv: UTYDELIG TALE samt tidspunkt i interviewet i kantede parenteser.	IW: Can you clarify that? R: Yes, [UNINTELLIGIBLE 00:04:03], it's probably about …
If you hear a word that you don't understand, write: FOREIGN WORD and time in the interview in brackets	IW: Can you clarify that? R: Yes, [FOREIGN WORD 00:04:03], it's probably about …

Other comments in the transcription are written in brackets. For instance, if someone interrupts the interview or if something happens that cannot be written in the transcription	

References

Aberbach, Joel, Robert D. Putnam, and Bert Rockman (1981). *Politicians and Bureaucrats in Western Democracies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Act no. 409 of April 26, 2013. *Lov om forlængelse og fornyelse af kollektive overenskomster og aftaler for visse grupper af ansatte på det offentlige område*. Retrieved June 24, 2021 from: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2013/409

Act no. 823 of August 15, 2019. *Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen* (The Danish Folkeskole Act). Retrieved June 24, 2021 from: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/823

Act no. 879 of May 12, 2021. *Lov om velfærdsaftaler på ældreområdet*. Retrieved July 7, 2021 from: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2021/879

Act no. 880 of May 12, 2021. *Lov om velfærdsaftaler på dagtilbudsområdet og folkeskoleområdet*. Retrieved July 7, 2021 from https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2021/880

Act no. 1482 of December 23, 2014. *Lov om organisering og understøttelse af beskæftigelsesindsatsen m.v.* Retrieved June 24, 2021 from: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2014/1482

Adcock, Robert, and David Collier (2001). Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research. *The American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529–46. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055401003100

Alkadry, Mohamad G., and Leslie E. Tower (2011). Covert Pay Discrimination: How Authority Predicts Pay Differences between Women and Men. *Public Administration Review* 71(5): 740–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02413.x.

Ammons, David N., and Dale J. Roenigk (2015). Benchmarking and Interorganizational Learning in Local Government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (1): 309–35. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu014.

Ammons, David N., and Dale J. Roenigk (2020). Exploring Devolved Decision Authority in Performance Management Regimes: The Relevance of Perceived and Actual Decision Authority as Elements of Performance Management Success. *Public Performance & Management Review* 43 (1): 28–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2019.1657918.

Andersen, Lotte B., and Lene H. Pedersen (2012). Public Service Motivation and Professionalism. *International Journal of Public Administration* 35 (1): 46–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2011.635278.

Andersen, Lotte B., Andreas Boesen, and Lene H. Pedersen (2016) Performance in Public Organizations: Clarifying the Conceptual Space. *Public Administration Review* 76 (6): 852–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12578.

Andersen, Lotte B., Christian B. Jacobsen, Ulrich T. Jensen, and Heidi H. Salomonsen (2021). Public Managers' Contribution to Public Service Performance, pp.

85-103 In Peter Leisink, Lotte B. Andersen, Gene A. Brewer, Christian B. Jacobsen, Eva Knies, and Wouter Vandenabeele (Eds.) *Managing For Public Service Performance: How People and Values Make a Difference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Andersen, Lotte B., Lasse Laustsen, and Mathilde Cecchini (2020). Forskningskriterier (pp. 97-121) in Lotte B. Andersen, Kaper M. Hansen, and Sune W. Hansen. *Metoder i Statskundskab*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Andersen, Lotte B., Stefan Boye, and Ronni Laursen (2018). Building Support? The Importance of Verbal Rewards for Employee Perceptions of Governance Initiatives. *International Public Management Journal* 21 (1): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2017.1329761.

Andersen, Lotte B., Stefan Boye, Martin Bækgaard, Christian B. Jacobsen, and Asbjørn S. Nørgaard (2018). *Politisk og administrative ledelse*. Copenhagen: Djøfs forlag

Andersen, Simon C., and Donald P. Moynihan (2016). Bureaucratic Investments in Expertise: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Field Trial. *The Journal of Politics 78*(4): 1032–1044. https://doi.org/10.1086/686029

Andersen, Simon C., and Peter B. Mortensen (2010). Policy Stability and Organizational Performance: Is There a Relationship? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mup005.

Andrews, Christina W., and Michiel S. de Vries (2007). High Expectations, Varying Outcomes: Decentralization and Participation in Brazil, Japan, Russia and Sweden. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 73(3): 424–51. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0020852307081151

Andrews, Rhys, George Boyne, Jennifer Law, and Richard Walker (eds.) (2012). *Strategic Management and Public Service Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Andrews, Rhys, Gene. A. Boyne, Jennifer Law, and Richard M. Walker (2007). Centralization, Organizational Strategy, and Public Service Performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19 (1): 57–80. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum039.

Angrist, Joshua. D., and Jorn-Steffen Pischke (2008). *Mostly harmless econometrics: An empiricist's companion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Antonakis, John, and Leanne Atwater (2002). Leader distance: A review and a proposed theory. *The Leadership Quarterly 13* (6): 673–704. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(02)00155-8

Antonakis, John, Samuel Bendahan, Philippe Jacquart, and Rafael Lalive. 2010. On Making Causal Claims: A Review and Recommendations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, Leadership Quarterly Yearly Review, 21 (6): 1086–1120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.10.010.

Antonsen, Marianne, and Torben B. Jørgensen (1997). The 'Publicness' of Public Organizations. *Public Administration* 75 (2): 337–57. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00064.

Ashworth, Rachel E., Aoife M. McDermott, and Graeme Currie (2019). Theorizing from Qualitative Research in Public Administration: Plurality through a Combination of Rigor and Richness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 29 (2): 318–33. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy057.

Aubert, Benoit A., and Simon Bourdeau (2012). Public sector performance and decentralization of decision rights. *Canadian Public Administration* 55 (4): 575–98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2012.00238.x.

Aulich, Chris, Heba Batainah, and Roger Wettenhall (2010). Autonomy and Control in Australian Agencies: Data and Preliminary Findings from a Cross-National Empirical Study. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 69 (2): 214–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.2010.00679.x.

Bach, Tobias (2014). The Autonomy of Government Agencies in Germany and Norway: Explaining Variation in Management Autonomy across Countries and Agencies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 80 (2): 341–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852313514527.

Bach, Tobias (2018). Administrative Autonomy of Public Organizations (pp. 171 – 178) in Farazmand, Ali (ed.). *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9.

Bach, Tobias, Koen Verhoest, and Jan Wynen (2020). The Interaction of Administrative Tradition and Organisational Characteristics: The Case of Agency Personnel Management Autonomy. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Online first: 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852319889674.

Bandura, Albert (1977). Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. *Psychological Review* 84 (2): 191–215. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Barbour, Rosalina S. (2014). Quality of Data Analysis (pp. 496-509) in Uwe Flick (ed.). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage

Barnard, Chester (1938). *The Functions of the Executive*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Bazeley, Pat (2013). Qualitative Data Analysis: Practical strategies. London: Sage

Bendor, Jonathan, Amihai Glazer, and Thomas H. Hammond (2001). Theories of Delegation. *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (1): 235–69. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.235.

Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, Gery W. (2010). *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Bevan, Mark T. (2014). A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research* 24 (1): 136–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732313519710.

Bezes, Philippe, and Gilles Jeannot (2018). Autonomy and Managerial Reforms in Europe: Let or Make Public Managers Manage? *Public Administration* 96 (1): 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12361.

Birdsall, Chris (2017). The Synthetic Control Method for Comparative Case Studies: An Application Estimating the Effect of Managerial Discretion Under Performance Management. *International Public Management Journal* 20 (1): 49–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2015.1121178.

Bjørnholt, Bente, Maria F. Mikkelsen, Mikkel G. Kjer, Cianna I. Flyger, Lise Kjærgaard, Matthias R. Wagner, Matvei Andersen og Kári Wellsandt (2019). *Den kommunale styring i forbindelse med folkeskolerformen*. Copenhagen: VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research.

Bjørnholt, Bente, Stefan Boye, and Nana W. Hansen (2021). The Influence of Regulative Contents, Stakeholders, and Formalization on Managerial Autonomy Perceived at the Front Line. *Public Management Review*: 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1912818.

Blaikie, Norman W. H. (2010). *Designing social research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blom, Rutger., Peter M. Kruyen, Beatrice I. J. M. Van der Heijden, and Sandra Van Thiel (2020). One HRM Fits All? A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of HRM Practices in the Public, Semipublic, and Private Sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 40 (1): 3–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X18773492.

Bloom, Nicholas, and John Van Reenen (2011). Human Resource Management and Productivity, pp. 1697-1767 In *Handbook of Labor Economics*, 4. Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218(11)02417-8.

Bogner, Alexander, and Wolfgang Menz (2009). The Theory-Generating Expert Interview: Epistemological Interest, Forms of Knowledge (pp. 43-80) in Alexander Bogner, Beate Littig, and Wolfgang Menz (eds.). *Interviewing Experts*. Research Methods Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boon, Jan, and Jan Wynen (2017). On the Bureaucracy of Bureaucracies: Analysing the Size and Organization of Overhead in Public Organizations. *Public Administration* 95(1): 214–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12300

Boye, Stefan and Lars Tummers (2021). Public leadership – what do we know. Unpublished manuscript.

Boye, Stefan, Emily R. T. Christensen, Rebecca R. Nørgaard, Mathilde A. Winsløw, and Mathias R. Østergaard-Nielsen (2021). Public and private management: Now, is there a difference? A systematic review. Unpublished manuscript

Boyne, George A. (2002). Public and Private Management: What's the Difference? *Journal of Management Studies* 39(1): 97–122. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00284

Boyne, George A. (2003). Sources of Public Service Improvement: A Critical Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13 (3): 367–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpart/mug027

Bozeman, Barry (1987). All Organizations Are Public: Bridging Public and Private Organization Theory. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Bozeman, Barry, and Stephanie Moulton (2011). Integrative Publicness: A Framework for Public Management Strategy and Performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21 (3): 363–80. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mur031.

Bozeman, Barry, and Xuhong Su (2015). Public Service Motivation Concepts and Theory: A Critique. *Public Administration Review* 75 (5): 700–710. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12248.

Braadbaart, Okke, Niels van Eybergen, and Jan Hoffer (2007). Managerial Autonomy: Does It Matter for the Performance of Water Utilities? *Public Administration and Development* 27 (2): 111–21. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.447.

Bray, Mark, John W. Budd, and Johanna Macneil (2020). The Many Meanings of Co-Operation in the Employment Relationship and Their Implications. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 58 (1): 114–41. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12473.

Brewer, Gene A., and Richard M. Walker (2013). Personnel Constraints in Public Organizations: The Impact of Reward and Punishment on Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review* 73 (1): 121–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02681.x.

Brewer, Gene A., Richard M. Walker, Barry Bozeman, Claudia N. Avellaneda, and Gene A. Brewer, Jr. (2012). External Control and Red Tape: The Mediating Effects of Client and Organizational Feedback. *International Public Management Journal* 15 (3): 288–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2012.725291.

Bro, Louise L. (2018). *Leadership, Motivation and Span of Control.* PhD Dissertation, Aarhus University: Politica.

Bryson, John M., Barbara C. Crosby, and Laura Bloomberg (eds.) (2015). *Creating Public Value in Practice: Advancing the Common Good in a Multi-Sector, Shared-Power, No-One-Wholly-in-Charge World.* Boca Raton: CRC Press

Bryson, John M., Frances S. Berry, and Kaifeng Yang (2010). The State of Public Strategic Management Research: A Selective Literature Review and Set of Future Directions. *The American Review of Public Administration* 40(5): 495–521. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0275074010370361

Caillier, James G. (2013). Satisfaction with work–life benefits and organizational commitment/job involvement: Is there a connection? *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 33 (4): 340–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X12443266

Cárdenas, Sergio, and Edgar E. Ramírez de la Cruz (2017). Controlling Administrative Discretion Promotes Social Equity? Evidence from a Natural Experiment. *Public Administration Review* 77 (1): 80–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12590.

Carpenter, Daniel P. (2001). *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Carpenter, Daniel P., and George A. Krause (2015). Transactional Authority and Bureaucratic Politics. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (1): 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu012.

Caulfield, Janice, and Agnes Liu (2006). Shifting Concepts of Autonomy in the Hong Kong Hospital Authority. *Public Organization Review* 6 (3): 203–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-006-0013-0.

Cheung, Anthony B. L. (2002). Modernizing Public Healthcare Governance in Hong Kong: A Case Study of Professional Power in the New Public Management. *Public Management Review* 4 (3): 343–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616670210157238.

Cho, Yoon J., and Evan J. Ringquist (2011). Managerial Trustworthiness and Organizational Outcomes. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21 (1): 53–86. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muq015.

Christensen, Jørgen G. (2000). The Dynamics of Decentralization and Recentralization. *Public Administration* 78 (2): 389–408. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00211.

Christensen, Jørgen G., and Peter B. Mortensen (2016). *I politikkens vold. Offentlige lederes vilkår og muligheder*. Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

Christensen, Jørgen G., Eskil Heinesen, and Torben Tranæs (2014). Ungdomsuddannelserne i Danmark og Internationalt (pp. 15-32) in Lotte B. Andersen, Peter Bogetoft, Jørgen G. Christensen, and Torben Tranæs. (eds.). *Styring, ledelse og resultater på ungdomsuddannelserne*. Odense: Rockwool Fondens Forskningsenhed, Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Christensen, Tom, and Per Lægreid (2007). Regulatory Agencies– The Challenges of Balancing Agency Autonomy and Political Control. *Governance* 20 (3): 499–520. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2007.00368.x

Coffey, Amanda, and Paul Atkinson (1996). Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies. London: Sage

Coggburn, Jerrell D. (2000). The Effects of Deregulation on State Government Personnel Administration. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 20 (4): 24–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X0002000404 .

Collier, David, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo, and Andra O. Maciuceanu (2006). Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(3): 211–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600923782

Creswell, John W. (2012). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Currie, G., I. Boyett, and O. Suhomlinova. 2005. "Transformational Leadership within Secondary Schools in Englad. A Panacea for Organizational Ills?" *Public Administration* 83 (2): 265–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-3298.2005.00450.x.

Dahl, Robert A. (1957). The Concept of Power. *Behavioral Science* 2 (3): 201–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830020303.

Damme, Jan Van, and Marleen Brans (2012). Managing Public Consultation: A Conceptual Framework and Empirical Findings from Belgian Case Studies. *Public Administration* 90 (4): 1047–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2011.02014.x.

de Bruijn, Hans (2010). *Managing professionals*. London: Routledge.

De Vries, Hanna, Victor Bekkers, and Lars Tummers (2016). Innovation in the Public Sector: A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda. *Public Administration* 94(1): 146–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12209

Deci, Edward L., and Richard M. Ryan (2004). *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

DeHart-Davis, Leisha, and Sanjay K. Pandey (2005). Red Tape and Public Employees: Does Perceived Rule Dysfunction Alienate Managers? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15 (1): 133–48. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui007.

Desmarais, Céline, and Emmanuel A. de Chatillon (2010). Are There Still Differences Between the Roles of Private and Public Sector Managers? *Public Management Review* 12 (1): 127–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030902817931.

DeVellis, Robert F. 2016. *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*. 4th edition. SAGE Publications.

Dunleavy, Patrick (1991). *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice: Economic Explanations in Political Science*. New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.

Ege, Jörn (2017). Comparing the Autonomy of International Public Administrations: An Ideal-Type Approach. *Public Administration* 95(3): 555–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12326

Eglene, Ophelia, Sharon S. Dawes, and Carrie A. Schneider (2007). Authority and Leadership Patterns in Public Sector Knowledge Networks. *The American Review of Public Administration* 37 (1): 91–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074006290799.

Ejersbo, Niels, and Christian B. Jacobsen (2021). Kommunalpolitikernes bestyrelsesposter – forsyning, uddannelse og kultur (pp. 61 – 82) in Ulrik Kjær, and Lotte B. Andersen (eds.). *Kommunalpolitisk Lederskab. Tæt på borgerne i de lokale fællesskaber*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Evans, Tony (2011). Professionals, Managers and Discretion: Critiquing Street-Level Bureaucracy. *British Journal of Social Work* 41 (2): 368–86. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq074.

Evans, Tony and John Harris (2004). Street-Level Bureaucracy, Social Work and the (Exaggerated) Death of Discretion. *British Journal of Social Work* 34 (6): 871–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch106.

Favero, Nathan, Simon C. Andersen, Kenneth J. Meier, Laurence J. O'Toole Jr, and Søren C. Winter (2018). How Should We Estimate the Performance Effect of Management? Comparing Impacts of Public Managers' and Frontline Employees' Perceptions of Management. *International Public Management Journal* 21 (1): 105–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2016.1236763.

Feeney, Mary K., and Hal G. Rainey (2010). Personnel Flexibility and Red Tape in Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Distinctions Due to Institutional and Political Accountability. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (4): 801–26. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mup027

Feeney, Mary K., and Justin M. Stritch (2019). Family-friendly policies, gender, and work–life balance in the public sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 39 (3), 422–448. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X17733789

Ferlie, Ewan, Jean Hartley, and Steve Martin (2003). Changing Public Service Organizations: Current Perspectives and Future Prospects. *British Journal of Management* 14 (s1): S1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2003.00389.x.

Finer, Herman (1941). Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government. *Public Administration Review* 1 (4): 335–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/972907.

Fjendbo, Trine H. (2021). *Who Do You Lead? The Importance of Employee Gender and Traits in a Leadership Context*. PhD Dissertation, Aarhus University: Politica.

Flanders, Allan (1970). *Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*. London: Faber & Faber.

Flick, Uwe (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (4th edition). London: Sage.

Freeman, R. Edward, Jeffrey S. Harrison, Andrew C. Wicks, Bidhan L. Parmar, and Simone de Colle (2010). *Stakeholder Theory. The State of The Art*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Fry, Brian R., and Jos C. N. Raadschelders (2013). *Mastering Public Administration: From Max Weber to Dwight Waldo*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Geertz, Clifford (1974). "From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 28 (1): 26–45. https://doi.org/10.2307/3822971.

George, B., Sandey K. Pandey, Bram Steijn, Adelien Decramer, and Mieke Audenaert (2021). Red Tape, Organizational Performance, and Employee Outcomes: Meta-analysis, Meta-regression, and Research Agenda. *Public Administration Review,* Early View: 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13327

Gerring, John (1999). What makes a concept good? A criterial framework for understanding concept formation in the social sciences. *Polity*, 31(3), 357-393. https://doi.org/10.2307/3235246

Gerring, John (2006). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gerring, John (2012a). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework. Strategies for Social Inquiry* (2nd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gerring, John (2012b). Mere Description. *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (4): 721–46. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000130.

Gibson, William J., and Andrew Brown (2009). Introduction to qualitative data: analysis in context. Working with Qualitative Data. London: Sage.

Gilbert, Linda S. (2002). Going the distance: 'Closeness' in qualitative data analysis software. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *5*(3), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570210146276

Goertz, Gary (2006). Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Groeneveld, Sandra, Lars Tummers, Babette Bronkhorst, Tanachia Ashikali, and Sandra van Thiel (2015). Quantitative Methods in Public Administration: Their Use and Development Through Time. *International Public Management Journal* 18 (1): 61–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2014.972484.

Grøn, Caroline H., and Heidi H. Salomonsen (2019). In the Mayor We Trust? Trust as the Micro-Foundation of Complementary Politico-Administrative Relations in Local Governments. *Administration & Society* 51 (4): 581–606. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399718791541.

Grøn, Caroline H., Louise L. Bro, and Lotte B. Andersen (2020). Public Managers' Leadership Identity: Concept, Causes, and Consequences. *Public Management Review* 22 (11): 1696–1716. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1645875.

Gulick, Luther (1937). Notes on the Theory of Organization (pp. 1-46) in Luther Gulick and L. Urwick (eds.). *Papers on the Science of Administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration.

Gyldendal (2021). *Gyldendals Røde Ordbøger, dansk-engelsk*. Accessed through www.ordbog.gyldendal.dk

Hackman, J. Richard, and Greg R. Oldham (1976). Motivation through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 16 (2): 250–79. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7.

Hambrick, Donald C., and Sydney Finkelstein (1987). Managerial discretion: A bridge between polar views of organizational outcomes. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 9,* 369–406.

Hammond, Thomas H., and Jack H. Knott (1996). Who Controls the Bureaucracy?: Presidential Power, Congressional Dominance, Legal Constraints, and Bureaucratic Autonomy in a Model of Multi-Institutional Policy-Making. *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 12 (1): 119–66. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jleo.a023355.

Hansen, Jesper A., and Lars Tummers (2020). A Systematic Review of Field Experiments in Public Administration. *Public Administration Review*, *80*(6), 921–931. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13181

Hansen, Jesper R., and Anders R. Villadsen (2010). Comparing Public and Private Managers' Leadership Styles: Understanding the Role of Job Context. *International Public Management Journal* 13(3): 247–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2010.503793

Hansen, Kasper M., and Niels Ejersbo (2002). The Relationship between Politicians and Administrators – a Logic of Disharmony. *Public Administration* 80 (4): 733–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00326.

Hays, Steven W., and Jessica E. Sowa (2006). A Broader Look at the 'Accountability' Movement: Some Grim Realities in State Civil Service Systems. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 26 (2): 102–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X06287462.

Hill, E. Jeffrey, Joseph G. Grzywacz, Sarah Allen, Victoria L. Blanchard, Christina Matz-Costa, Sandee Shulkin, and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes (2008). Defining and

Conceptualizing Workplace Flexibility. *Community, Work & Family* 11 (2): 149–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800802024678.

Hood, Christopher (1991). A Public Management for All Seasons? *Public Administration* 69 (1): 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x.

Hood, Christopher (2000). Paradoxes of Public-Sector Managerialism, Old Public Management and Public Service Bargains. *International Public Management Journal* 3 (1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7494(00)00032-5.

Hood, Christopher, and Guy Peters (2004). The Middle Aging of New Public Management: Into the Age of Paradox? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 14 (3): 267–82. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muh019.

Hood, Christopher, and Martin Lodge (2006). *The Politics of Public Service Bargains: Reward, Competency, Loyalty-and Blame*. Oxford Scholarship Online. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/019926967X.001.0001

Hoque, Kim, Simon Davis, and Michael Humphreys (2004). Freedom to Do What You Are Told: Senior Management Team Autonomy in an NHS Acute Trust. *Public Administration* 82 (2): 355–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-3298.2004.00398.x.

Houlberg, Kurt, Vibeke N. Andersen, Bente Bjørnholt, Karl F. Krassel, and Lene H. Pedersen (2016). *Country background report – Denmark. OECD review of politics to improve the effectiveness of resource use in schools*. Copenhagen: KORA.

Huber, Gregory A. (2007). *The Craft of Bureaucratic Neutrality: Interests and Influence in Governmental Regulation of Occupational Safety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huber, John D. and Charles R. Shipan (2012). *Deliberate Discretion?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511804915

Hupe, Peter (2013). Dimensions of Discretion: Specifying the Object of Street-Level Bureaucracy Research. *DMS – der moderne staat – Zeitschrift für Public Policy, Recht und Management*, 6(2): 425-440.

Jaccard, James, and Jacob Jacoby (2020). *Theory construction and model-building skills: A practical guide for social scientists*. Guilford Publications.

Jacobsen, Christian B., and Lotte B. Andersen (2015). Is Leadership in the Eye of the Beholder? A Study of Intended and Perceived Leadership Practices and Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review* 75 (6): 829–41. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12380.

Jacobsen, Christian B., and Lotte B. Andersen (2017). Leading Public Service Organizations: How to Obtain High Employee Self-Efficacy and Organizational Performance. *Public Management Review* 19 (2): 253–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2016.1153705.

Jacobsen, Christian B., Lotte B. Andersen, Anne Bøllingtoft, and Tine L. M. Eriksen (2021). Can Leadership Training Improve Organizational Effectiveness? Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment on Transformational and Transactional Leadership. *Public Administration Review*, early view. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13356.

Jacobsen, Christian B., Thorbjørn S. Nielsen, and Jesper R. Hansen (2014). Det ledelsesmæssige fundament : Ledelsesstruktur, ledelsesstrategi og strategisk ledelse (pp. 93-110) in Lotte B. Andersen, Peter Bogetoft, Jørgen G. Christensen, and Torben Tranæs, T. (eds.). *Styring, ledelse og resultater på ungdomsuddannelserne*. Odense: Rockwool Fondens Forskningsenhed, Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Jakobsen, Mads L. F., Martin Bækgaard, Donald P. Moynihan, and Nina van Loon (2018). Making Sense of Performance Regimes: Rebalancing External Accountability and Internal Learning. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 1 (2): 127–41. https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvx001.

Jakobsen, Mads L. F., and Peter B. Mortensen (2014). *Regelstaten – Væksten I danske love og bekendtgørelser 1989 – 2011*. Copenhagen: Jurist og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

Jakobsen, Mads L. F., and Peter B. Mortensen (2016). Rules and the Doctrine of Performance Management. *Public Administration Review* 76 (2): 302–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12409.

Jakobsen, Mads L. F., Anne Mette Kjeldsen, and Thomas Pallesen (2016). Distribueret ledelse i offentlige service organisationer. *Politica*, 48(2), 208–227.

Jilke, Sebastian, Bart Meuleman, and Steven Van de Walle (2015). We Need to Compare, but How? Measurement Equivalence in Comparative Public Administration. *Public Administration Review* 75 (1): 36–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12318.

Karlsson, Tom S. (2019). Searching for Managerial Discretion: How Public Managers Engage Managerialism as a Rationalization for Increased Latitude of Action. *Public Management Review* 21 (3): 315–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1473475.

Kelliher, Clare, and Lillian de Menezes (2019). *Flexible working in organisations: A research overview*. (1st ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351128346

Kettl, Donald F. (1997). The Global Revolution in Public Management: Driving Themes, Missing Links. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 16 (3): 446–62. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6688(199722)16:3<446::AID-PAM5>3.0.CO;2-H.

Key, Susan (1997). Analyzing Managerial Discretion: An Assessment Tool to Predict Individual Policy Decisions. *The International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 5 (2): 134–55. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb028865.

Kim, Nanyoung, and Wonhyuk Cho (2014). Agencification and Performance: The Impact of Autonomy and Result-Control on the Performance of Executive Agencies in Korea. *Public Performance & Management Review* 38 (2): 214–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2015.983826.

Kirkhaug, Rudi, and Knut H. Mikalsen (2009). Coping with Autonomy. *Public Management Review* 11 (2): 137–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030802685735.

Klein, James P., Gary Goertz, & Paul F. Diehl (2008). The Peace Scale: Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Non-Rivalry and Peace. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25(1), 67–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940701860466

Knies, Eva, and Peter Leisink (2014). Leadership Behavior in Public Organizations: A Study of Supervisory Support by Police and Medical Center Middle Managers. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 34 (2): 108–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X13510851.

Kotter, John P. (2008). *Force for change: How leadership differs from management*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Krause, Tobias, and Sandra Van Thiel (2019). Perceived Managerial Autonomy in Municipally Owned Corporations: Disentangling the Impact of Output Control, Process Control, and Policy-Profession Conflict. *Public Management Review* 21 (2): 187–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1473472

Kvale, Steinar, and Svend Brinkmann (2015). *Interview. Det kvalitative forskningsinterview som håndværk* (3rd edition). Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag

LeRoux, Kelly, and Mary K. Feeney (2013). Factors Attracting Individuals to Nonprofit Management over Public and Private Sector Management: Factors Attracting Individuals to Nonprofit Management. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 24 (1): 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21079

Leys, Wayne A. R. (1943). Ethics and Administrative Discretion. *Public Administration Review* 3 (1): 10–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/973098.

Lipsky, Michael (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. 30th year anniversary expanded edition. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Löfgren, Karl, Michael Macaulay, Evan Berman, and Geoff Plimmer (2018). Expectations, Trust, and 'No Surprises': Perceptions of Autonomy in New Zealand Crown Entities. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 77 (4): 672–84. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12305.

Lønkommissionen (2010). *Lønkommissionens redegørelse: Løn, køn, uddannelse og fleksibilitet. Sammenfatning og konklusion*. Albertslund: Rosendal-Schulz Grafisk

Lonti, Zsuzsanna (2005). How Much Decentralization?: Managerial Autonomy in the Canadian Public Service. *The American Review of Public Administration* 35 (2): 122–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074004272622.

Lonti, Zsuzsanna, and Anil Verma (2003). The Determinants of Flexibility and Innovation in the Government Workplace: Recent Evidence from Canada. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13 (3): 283–309. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpart/mug025.

Lowe, Kevin B., K. Galen Kroeck, and Nagaraj Sivasubramaniam (1996). Effectiveness Correlates of Transformational and Transactional Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Review of the MLQ Literature. *Leadership Quarterly* 7 (3): 385–425. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(96)90027-2.

Lynggaard, Mikkel, Mogens J. Pedersen, and Lotte B. Andersen (2018). Exploring the Context Dependency of the PSM–Performance Relationship. *Review of*

Public Personnel Administration 38 (3): 332–54.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X16671371.

Maggetti, Martino, and Koen Verhoest (2014). Unexplored Aspects of Bureaucratic Autonomy: A State of the Field and Ways Forward. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 80 (2): 239–56.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852314524680.

March, James, and Herbert Simon (1958). *Organizations*. 2nd edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Blackwell Publishers.

Marsden, David (1999). *A Theory of Employment Systems: Micro-Foundations of Societal Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maxwell, Joseph A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review, 62*(3), 279–300. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.62.3.8323320856251826

Maxwell, Joseph A. (2012). *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Maxwell, Joseph A. (2013). Qualitative Research Design – An Interactive Approach. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Maxwell, Jospeh A., and Kavita Mittapalli (2011). Realism as a Stance of Mixed Methods Research (pp. 145 – 167) in Charles B. Teddlie, and Abbas Tashakkori (eds.). *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Maynard-Moody, Steven, and Michael C. Musheno (2003). *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Meier, Kenneth J., and Laurence J. O'Toole (2008). Management Theory and Occam's Razor: How Public Organizations Buffer the Environment. *Administration & Society* 39 (8): 931–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399707309355.

Meier, Kenneth J., and Laurence J. O'Toole (2009). The Proverbs of New Public Management: Lessons From an Evidence-Based Research Agenda. *The American Review of Public Administration* 39 (1): 4–22.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074008326312.

Meier, Kenneth J., and Laurence J. O'Toole (2011). Comparing Public and Private Management: Theoretical Expectations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21 (3): i283–99. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muro27.

Meier, Kenneth J., Simon C. Andersen, Laurence J. O'Toole, Nathan Favero, and Søren C. Winter. (2015). Taking Managerial Context Seriously: Public Management and Performance in U.S. and Denmark Schools. *International Public Management Journal* 18 (1): 130–50.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2014.972485.

Meriam-Webster (2019). *Dictionary*. Accessed through https://www.merriam-webster.com/

Merritt, Cullen C. (2019). What Makes an Organization Public? Managers' Perceptions in the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment System. *The American Review of Public Administration* 49 (4): 411–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074019829610.

Merton, Robert K. (1995). The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect. *Social Forces* 74 (2): 379–422. https://doi.org/10.2307/2580486.

Migué, Jean-Luc, Gérard Bélanger, and William A. Niskanen (1974). Toward a General Theory of Managerial Discretion. *Public Choice* 17 (1): 27–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01718995.

Mikkelsen, Maria F. (2016). *Effects of Managers on Public Service Performance.* PhD Dissertation, Aarhus University: Politica.

Miles, Miles B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Miller, Gary J. (2005). The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models. *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (1): 203–25. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104840.

Moe, Terry M. (1984). The New Economics of Organization. *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (4): 739–77. https://doi.org/10.2307/2110997.

Moher, David, Alessandro Liberati, Jennifer Tetzlaff, and Douglas G. Altman (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *Research Methods 8.*

Moore, Mark H. (1995). *Creating Public Value. Strategic Management in Government.* Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press.

Morales, Fernando, Rafael Wittek, and Liesbet Heyse (2013). After the Reform: Change in Dutch Public and Private Organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23 (3): 735–54. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus006.

Moynihan, Donald P. (2004). Why and How Do State Governments Adopt and Implement "Managing for Results" Reforms? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15 (2): 219–43. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui012.

Moynihan, Donald P. (2006). Managing for Results in State Government: Evaluating a Decade of Reform. *Public Administration Review* 66(1): 77–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00557.x

Moynihan, Donald P. (2008). *The Dynamics of Performance Management: Constructing Information and Reform.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Moynihan, Donald P., and Sanjay K. Pandey (2005). Testing How Management Matters in an Era of Government by Performance Management. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15 (3): 421–39. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui016.

Moynihan, Donald P., and Sanjay K. Pandey (2006). Creating Desirable Organizational Characteristics. *Public Management Review* 8(1): 119–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030500518899

Moynihan, Donald P., and Sanjay K. Pandey (2010). The Big Question for Performance Management: Why Do Managers Use Performance Information? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (4): 849–66. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muq004.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean, Jill Nicholson-Crotty, and Sergio Fernandez (2017). Performance and Management in the Public Sector: Testing a Model of Relative Risk Aversion. *Public Administration Review* 77(4): 603–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12619

Nielsen, Poul A. (2014). Performance Management, Managerial Authority, and Public Service Performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24(2): 431–58. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mut025

Nielsen, Poul A., and Christian B. Jacobsen (2018). Zone of Acceptance under Performance Measurement: Does Performance Information Affect Employee Acceptance of Management Authority? *Public Administration Review* 78 (5): 684–93. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12947.

Nielsen, Poul A., and Donald P. Moynihan (2017). Romanticizing Bureaucratic Leadership? The Politics of How Elected Officials Attribute Responsibility for Performance. *Governance* 30 (4): 541–59. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12256.

Nielsen, Poul A., Stefan Boye, Ann-Louise Holten, Christian B. Jacobsen, and Lotte B. Andersen (2019). Are Transformational and Transactional Types of Leadership Compatible? A Two-Wave Study of Employee Motivation. *Public Administration* 97 (2): 413–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12574.

Nigro, Lloyd G., and J. Edward Kellough (2000). Civil Service Reform in Georgia: Going to the Edge? *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 20 (4): 41–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X0002000405.

Niskanen, William (1971). *Bureaucracy and representative government*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

Nowell, Branda, and Kate Albrecht (2019). A Reviewer's Guide to Qualitative Rigor. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 29 (2): 348–63. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy052.

O'Toole, Laurence J., and Kenneth J. Meier (1999). Modeling the Impact of Public Management: Implications of Structural Context. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9 (4): 505–26. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024421.

O'Toole, Laurence J., and Kenneth J. Meier (2004). Desperately Seeking Selznick: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks. *Public Administration Review* 64 (6): 681–93.

O'Toole, Laurence J., and Kenneth J. Meier (2015). Public Management, Context, and Performance: In Quest of a More General Theory. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (1): 237–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu011.

O'Toole, Laurence J., Kenneth J. Meier, and Sean Nicholson-Crotty (2005). Managing Upward, Downward and Outward: Networks, Hierarchical Relationships

and Performance. *Public Management Review* 7 (1): 45–68.
https://doi.org/10.1080/1471903042000339419.

O'Toole, Lawrence J., and Kenneth J. Meier (2011). *Public Management: Organizations, Governance, and Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ospina, Sonia M. (2017). Collective Leadership and Context in Public Administration: Bridging Public Leadership Research and Leadership Studies. *Public Administration Review* 77 (2): 275–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12706.

Overman, Sjors (2016). Great Expectations of Public Service Delegation: A Systematic Review. *Public Management Review* 18(8): 1238–62.
https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2015.1103891

Painter, Martin, and Wai-Hang Yee (2011). Task Matters: A Structural-Instrumental Analysis of the Autonomy of Hong Kong Government Bodies. *The American Review of Public Administration* 41 (4): 395–410.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074010380451.

Palus, Christine K., and Susan W. Yackee (2016). Clerks or Kings? Partisan Alignment and Delegation to the US Bureaucracy. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 26 (4): 693–708. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muw001.

Pemer, Frida, Love Börjeson, and Andreas Werr (2020). The Role of Chief Executive Tenure for Public Organizations' Hiring of Management Consultants. *Governance* 33 (2): 269–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12422.

Petersen, Niels B. G. (2021). Disciplining the Strong? Discrimination of Service Users and the Moderating Role of PSM and Ability to Cope. *Public Management Review* 23 (2): 168–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1668469.

Petrovsky, Nicolai, Oliver James, and George A. Boyne (2015). New Leaders' Managerial Background and the Performance of Public Organizations: The Theory of Publicness Fit. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (1): 217–36. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu008.

Petticrew, Mark, and Helen Roberts (2006). *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub.

Podsakoff, Philip M., Scott B. MacKenzie, and Nathan P. Podsakoff (2016). Recommendations for Creating Better Concept Definitions in the Organizational, Behavioral, and Social Sciences. *Organizational Research Methods* 19(2): 159–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428115624965

Pollitt, Christopher (2011). *The Essential Public Manager*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Pollitt, Christopher, and Geert Bouckaert (2004). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Portillo, Shannon (2012). The Paradox of Rules: Rules as Resources and Constraints. *Administration & Society* 44 (1): 87–108.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399711413714.

Post, Corinne, Riikka Sarala, Caroline Gatrell, and John E. Prescott (2020). Advancing Theory with Review Articles. *Journal of Management Studies* 57(2): 351–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12549

Produktivitetskommissionen (2013). *Styring, ledelse og motivation I den offentlige sektor. Analyserapport 3*. Copengenhagen: Produktivitetskommissionen

Ragin, Charles C. (1992). Introduction: Cases of "What is a case?" (pp. 1-18) in Charles C. Ragin, and Howard S. Becker. *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rainey, Hal G. (2014). *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations*. 5th edition. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Rainey, Hal G., and Barry Bozeman (2000). Comparing Public and Private Organizations: Empirical Research and the Power of the A Priori. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 10 (2): 447–69.

Ramesh, M. (2008). Autonomy and Control in Public Hospital Reforms in Singapore. *The American Review of Public Administration* 38 (1): 62–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074007301041.

Roness, Paul G., Koen Verhoest, Kristin Rubecksen, and Muiris MacCarthaigh (2008). Autonomy and Regulation of State Agencies: Reinforcement, Indifference or Compensation? *Public Organization Review* 8 (2): 155–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-008-0057-4.

Saldana, Johnny (2015). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers Third Edition* (3rd edition). Thousands Oaks: Sage

Salomonsen, Heidi H., Stefan Boye, and Jan Boon (2021). Caught up or Protected by the Past? How Reputational Histories Matter for Agencies' Media Reputations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 31 (3): 506-22. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa056.

Sandfort, Jodi R. (2000). Moving Beyond Discretion and Outcomes: Examining Public Management from the Front Lines of the Welfare System. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10(4): 729–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024289

Sartori, Giovanni (1970). Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics. *The American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1033–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356

Scott, William R. (2014). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*. 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options. *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2): 294–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077.

Simon, Herbert A. (1997). *Administrative behavior: A study of decision-making processes in administrative organizations* (4th ed.). New York: Free Press.

Soss, Joe (2006). Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations. A Practice-Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research (pp. 127-149) in Dvora

Yanow, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds.). *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.

Sowa, Jessica E., and Sally C. Selden (2003). Administrative Discretion and Active Representation: An Expansion of the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy. *Public Administration Review* 63(6): 700–710. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6210.00333

Spencer, Liz, Jane Ritchie, Rachel Ormston, William O'Connor, and Matt Barnard (2014). Analysis: Principles and Processes (pp. 269-293) in Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carol M. N. Nichollsl, and Rachek Ormston (Eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: Sage.

Ssengooba, Freddie, Lynn Atuyambe, Barbara McPake, Kara Hanson, and Sam Okuonzi (2002). What Could Be Achieved with Greater Public Hospital Autonomy? Comparison of Public and PNFP Hospitals in Uganda. *Public Administration and Development* 22 (5): 415–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.244.

Stake, Robert E. (2006). *Multiple Case Study Analysis*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Staniok, Camilla (2017). *Work Commitment in Public Organizations*. PhD Dissertation, Aarhus University: Politica.

Strukturkommissionen (2004). *Strukturkommissions betænkning. Bind 1: Hovedbetænkningen. Betænkning nr. 1434*. Copenhagen: Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet.

Stubager, Rune, Kasper M. Hansen, and Jesper S. Jensen (2020). *Danske vælgere 1971-2019. En oversigt over udviklingen i vælgernes holdninger mv*. Det Danske Valgprojekt. 4. udgave. Retrieved June 23, 2021 from https://www.valgprojektet.dk/files/Danske%20v%C3%A6lgere%201971-2019%20v1.pdf

T'Hart, Paul, and Lars Tummers (2019). *Understanding Public Leadership*. London: Red Globe Press.

Taylor, Frederick W. (1911). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers.

Tesch, Renata (1990). Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools. New York: Falmer Press.

The Danish Leadership and Management Commission (2018). *Offentlige ledere og ledelse anno 2017. Samlet afrapportering fra Ledelseskommissionens spørgeskemaundersøgelse*. Retrieved June 23, 2021 from: https://ledelseskom.dk/files/media/documents/publikationer/offentlige_ledere_og_ledelse_anno_2017_-_samlet_afrapportering_fra_ledelseskommissionens_spoergeskemaundersoegelse_2017.pdf

The Danish Leadership and Management Commission (2019). *Put citizens first. Leadership and management in the public sector with focus on operational development*. Retrieved June 23, 2021 from: https://ledelseskom.dk/files/media/recommendations_uk.pdf

The Prime Minister's Office (2020). *The Prime Minister's opening speech at parliament*. October 8, 2020. Retrieved July 7, 2021 from

https://www.regeringen.dk/aktuelt/statsministerens-aabningstale/statsminis-terens-aabningstale-2020/

Thiel, Sandra van, and Kutsal Yesilkagit (2014). Does Task Matter? The Effect of Task on the Establishment, Autonomy and Control of Semi-Autonomous Agencies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 80 (2): 318–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852313514524.

Thuesen, Frederik, and Rebekka Bille (2017). *Politiske styringsinstrumenter på beskæftigelsesområdet*. Copenhagen: SFI – Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd.

Thuesen, Frederik, Rebekka Bille, Mogens J. Pedersen (2017). *Styring af den kommunale beskæftigelsesindsats: instrumenter, motivation og præstationer*. Copenhagen: SFI - Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd.

Thynne, Ian, and Roger Wettenhall (2016). Public Management and Organizational Autonomy: The Continuing Relevance of Significant Earlier Knowledge. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 70 (4): 609 – 621. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852304048445.

Torfing, Jacob, Lotte Bøgh Andersen, Carsten Greve, and Kurt K. Klausen (2020). *Public Governance Paradigms: Competing and Co-Existing*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Van de Walle, Steven (2019). Explaining variation in perceived managerial autonomy and direct politicization in European public sectors. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 85(4): 627–644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852317748357

Van Dooren, Wouter, Geert Bouckaert, and John Halligan (2015). *Performance Management in the Public Sector*. London: Routledge.

Van Wart, Montgomery (2003). Public-Sector Leadership Theory: An Assessment. *Public Administration Review* 63 (2): 214–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6210.00281

Verhoest, Koen (2005). Effects of Autonomy, Performance Contracting, and Competition on the Performance of a Public Agency: A Case Study. *Policy Studies Journal* 33 (2): 235–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2005.00104.x.

Verhoest, Koen, and Jan Wynen (2018). Why Do Autonomous Public Agencies Use Performance Management Techniques? Revisiting the Role of Basic Organizational Characteristics. *International Public Management Journal* 21 (4): 619–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2016.1199448.

Verhoest, Koen, and Per Lægreid (2010). Organizing public sector agencies: Challenges and Reflections, pp. 276- 297 in Lægreid, Per, and Koen Verhoest. *Governance of Public Sector Organizations. Proliferation, Autonomy and Performance*. London: Springer.

Verhoest, Koen, B. Guy Peters, Geert Bouckaert, and Bram Verschuere (2004). The Study of Organisational Autonomy: A Conceptual Review. *Public Administration and Development* 24 (2): 101–18. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.316.

Verhoest, Koen, Bram Verschuere, and Geert Bouckaert (2007). Pressure, Legitimacy, and Innovative Behavior by Public Organizations. *Governance* 20 (3): 469–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2007.00367.x.

Verhoest, Koen, Paul G. Roness, Bram Verschuere, Kristin Rubecksen, and Muris MacCarthaigh (2010). *Autonomy and Control of State Agencies: Comparing States and Agencies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277274.

Verschuere, Bram (2007). The Autonomy – Control Balance in Flemish Arm's Length Public Agencies. *Public Management Review* 9 (1): 107–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030601181266.

Verschuere, Bram, and Dario Barbieri (2009). Investigating the "NPM-Ness" of Agencies in Italy and Flanders. *Public Management Review* 11 (3): 345–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030902798271.

Visscher, Christian de, and François Randour (2014). The Reform of the Belgian Federal Administration 10 Years on: What Balance Has Been Achieved between Operational Autonomy of Top Managers and the Supervision Carried out by the Horizontal Ministerial Departments? *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 80 (1): 33–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852313509537.

Voet, Joris van der, and Steven Van de Walle (2018). How Cutbacks and Job Satisfaction Are Related: The Role of Top-Level Public Managers' Autonomy. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 38 (1): 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X15609409.

Voorberg, William H., Victor J. J. M. Bekkers, and Lars G. Tummers (2015). A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the Social Innovation Journey. *Public Management Review* 17(9): 1333–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.930505

Voorn, Bart, Marieke van Genugten, and Sandra van Thiel (2019). Multiple Principals, Multiple Problems: Implications for Effective Governance and a Research Agenda for Joint Service Delivery. *Public Administration* 97(3): 671–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12587

Walker, Richard M., and Rhys Andrews (2015). Local Government Management and Performance: A Review of Evidence. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25(1): 101–33. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mut038

Walker, Richard. George M. Boyne, and Gene A. Brewer (Eds.) (2010). *Public Management and Performance: Research Directions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wang, Weijie, and Ryan Yeung (2019). Testing the Effectiveness of "Managing for Results": Evidence from an Education Policy Innovation in New York City. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 29 (1): 84–100. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy043.

Wangrow, David B., Donald J. Schepker, and Vincent L. Barker (2015). Managerial Discretion: An Empirical Review and Focus on Future Research Directions. *Journal of Management* 41(1): 99–135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314554214

Waters, Tony, and Dagmar Waters (2016). *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society. New Translation on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*. New York: Palgrave Macmilla

Williamson, Aimee L. (2011). Assessing the Core and Dimensional Approaches: Human Resource Management in Public, Private, and Charter Schools. *Public Performance & Management Review* 35 (2): 251–80. https://doi.org/10.2753/PMR1530-9576350202.

Wilson, James G. (1989). *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books.

Wilson, Woodrow (1887). The Study of Administration. *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (2): 197–222. https://doi.org/10.2307/2139277.

Wooldridge, Jeffrey M. (2018). *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach.* 7th edition. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.

Wülferth, Hagen (2013). *Managerial Discretion and Performance in China. Towards Resolving the Discretion Puzzle for Chinese Companies and Multinationals*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-35837-1.

Wynen, Jan, and Koen Verhoest (2015). Do NPM-Type Reforms Lead to a Cultural Revolution Within Public Sector Organizations? *Public Management Review* 17 (3): 356–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.841459.

Wynen, Jan, and Koen Verhoest (2016). Internal Performance-Based Steering in Public Sector Organizations: Examining the Effect of Organizational Autonomy and External Result Control. *Public Performance & Management Review* 39(3): 535–559. https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2015.1137769

Wynen, Jan, Koen Verhoest, and Kristin Rübecksen (2014). Decentralization in Public Sector Organizations. *Public Performance & Management Review* 37 (3): 496–520. https://doi.org/10.2753/PMR1530-9576370307.

Wynen, Jan, Koen Verhoest, Edoardo Ongaro, and Sandra Van Thiel; and in cooperation with the COBRA network (2014). Innovation- Oriented Culture in the Public Sector: Do Managerial Autonomy and Result Control Lead to Innovation? *Public Management Review* 16 (1): 45–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.790273.

Yamamoto, Kiyoshi (2006). Performance of Semi-Autonomous Public Bodies: Linkage between Autonomy and Performance in Japanese Agencies. *Public Administration and Development* 26 (1): 35–44. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.369.

Yesilkagit, Kutsal, and Sandra van Thiel (2008). Political Influence and Bureaucratic Autonomy. *Public Organization Review* 8 (2): 137–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-008-0054-7.

Yu, Jianxing, and Xiang Gao (2013). Redefining Decentralization: Devolution of Administrative Authority to County Governments in Zhejiang Province. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 72(3): 239–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12038

Yukl, Gary, and William L. Gardner (2020). *Leadership in Organizations*. 9th edition. Boston: Pearson Education

Zhang, Yahong, and Richard C. Feiock (2010). City Managers' Policy Leadership in Council-Manager Cities. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (2): 461–76. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mup015.

Zimmerman, Barry J. (2000). Self-Efficacy: An Essential Motive to Learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25(1): 82-91. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1016

Zimmerman, Barry J., Albert Bandura, and Manuel Martinez-Pons (1992). Self-Motivation for Academic Attainment: The Role of Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Personal Goal Setting. *American Educational Research Journal* 29(3): 663–676. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312029003663

English Summary

The academic and political interest in management and leadership of public organisations has increased manifold in the last decades. The number of empirical studies has climbed sharply, and the parole of management matters is being championed in the academic literature and in public policy. However, for public managers to matter, it is reasonable to assume that public managers must have some room for manoeuvre in decision-making – they must have managerial autonomy.

The purpose of the dissertation is to improve our understanding of managerial autonomy in public organisations and the antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. To do this, I conduct a systematic review of the literature of managerial autonomy, and based on this, I present a conceptualisation of managerial autonomy in public organisations. I use the conceptualisation to analyse interviews with public managers about their experiences with managerial autonomy. The analysis of the qualitative data shows that managerial autonomy in public organisations is continuously bargained between the public managers and stakeholders. In three articles, I draw on the conceptualisation, regulative theory, theory of work organisation, and performance management, to test theoretical expectations in terms of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy. The articles use the reform of the Danish primary schools, large-N student data, content coding of local regulation, and population-based survey data of public managers to test the expectations. First, the analyses show that the regulative stakeholders and regulative processes have influence on the level of experienced managerial autonomy. Second, granting employees' autonomy in work organisations vis-à-vis their managers is found to relate positively with organisational performance. Third, managerial autonomy coupled with high use of performance goals is positively associated with organisational performance.

The dissertation contributes with clarification of key concept in public management theory. It offers a common language for academics and practitioners to communicate about public management, and it dissertation provides the necessary building block for the development of public management theory. Furthermore, the dissertation contributes with new empirical insights to the literature of antecedents and consequences of managerial autonomy that also have implications for future public policy in this regard.

Dansk resume

Den akademiske og politiske interesse i ledelse af offentlige organisationer er steget kraftigt de seneste årtier. Antallet af empiriske studier er mangedoblet, og parolen om, at ledelse betyder noget, har gået sin sejrsgang i både den akademiske litteratur og den førte politik. For at offentlig ledelse skal have positiv betydning, synes det rimeligt at antage, at offentlige ledere også må have et vist ledelsesrum – de må have ledelsesautonomi.

Formålet med afhandlingen er at bidrage med en øget forståelse af ledelsesautonomi i offentlige organisationer, hvilke faktorer der har betydning for offentlige lederes ledelsesautonomi, og hvilke konsekvenser ledelsesautonomi har. For at gøre dette, laver jeg i afhandlingen en systematisk gennemgang af litteraturen om ledelsesautonomi i offentlige organisationer. På baggrund af gennemgangen præsenterer jeg en konceptualisering af ledelsesautonomi i offentlige organisationer, som jeg anvender i analysen af interviews med offentlige ledere om, hvordan de oplever deres ledelsesautonomi. Analysen viser, at ledelsesautonomien i offentlige organisationer skal forstås som en gentagen forhandling mellem offentlige ledere og deres stakeholders. I tre artikler undersøger jeg – på baggrund af konceptualiseringen, teori om regulering, teori om arbejdsdeling, og teori om performance management – forventninger til, hvilke faktorer har betydning for ledelsesautonomi, og hvilke konsekvenser ledelsesautonomi har. I artiklerne bruges folkeskolereformen, stort-N elevdata, indholdskodning af lokal regulering og populationsbaseret spørgeskemadata for offentlige ledere til at teste forventningerne. Analyserne viser for det første, at stakeholders og deres indflydelse i udformningen af den lokale regulering har betydning for den opfattede ledelsesautonomi; for det andet, at medarbejderautonomi i organiseringen af deres arbejde har en positiv sammenhæng med organisatoriske resultater; og for det tredje, at ledelsesautonomi kombineret med et højt målfokus har en positiv sammenhæng med organisatoriske resultater.

Afhandlingen bidrager med klarhed om et af kernebegreberne i litteraturen om offentlige ledelse. Den giver et bud på et muligt fælles sprog til kommunikationen mellem akademikere og praktikere om offentlige ledelse og lægger det nødvendige fundament for udviklingen af offentlig ledelsesteori. Slutteligt bidrager afhandlingen med nye empiriske indsigter i litteraturen om, hvilke faktorer har betydning for ledelsesautonomi, samt hvilke konsekvenser, ledelsesautonomi har. Disse indsigter har betydning for udformningen af fremtidig politik på området.