

The report from the commission on higher education management and governance has now been presented. It is extensive and concludes with a few fairly non-controversial proposals to the government, as well as a number of more controversial recommendations to the higher education institutions. The report contains a thorough review of how Swedish universities are governed, as well as an in-depth discussion on the importance of, and problems with, collegiality as a management model. The investigator has interviewed a large number of managers from all research universities in Sweden – except ours. The investigator acknowledges the fundamental importance of collegiality within academia, but recommends that decisions be made in a pure line organisation where collegial bodies only play an advisory role to the appointed managers. At the department level, this means that the head of department has the power to make all decisions; instead of a decision-making department board, there are advisory collegial bodies. The argument for this system of governance is that collegial bodies are unable to make difficult but necessary decisions. Such decisions require a strong leader who does not have to agree with colleagues. It is certainly true that collegiality is problematic and can be crippling – the report thoroughly accounts for this – but the pure line organisation is also problematic, and it is a flaw in the investigation that this is not analysed and discussed.

Collegial bodies can function well, and they can make tough decisions in an efficient manner. I think that our disciplinary domain, both at the faculty and department levels, is proof of this. In a well-functioning collegial system, heads of departments and other managers have ample opportunities to find support for their proposals on the basis of good arguments in discussions with the collegial bodies. The collegial bodies' discussions are very valuable in themselves, as they establish and improve decisions. I cannot remember a single important issue where I have been unhappy with the disciplinary domain board's decision in the past four years. Nor can I recall any issue that I did not want to bring up out of fear that the board would not be able to handle it. I do not believe that we are worse at making difficult decisions than universities with more line management.

A prerequisite for good management and governance is skilled managers. The report mentions this, but states that it lies outside the scope of the investigation. However, the investigator argues that management positions should be made attractive and that good support should be available. This is easy to agree with, but I think the report puts too much faith in the idea that academic leadership itself is attractive to the managers, heads of departments and others we want at the University. We have very competent heads of departments here in the disciplinary domain of science. Most of them are also very active researchers – research is their main interest. I am not sure that all of them would have stepped up as managers if they had been appointed from above and given all the power within their departments. I wonder if many of them do not take on the assignment, which involves sacrifices, precisely because they feel a responsibility and an expectation from their colleagues? One thing I do know, is that I would not have become dean if we had had a pure line organisation.

Although I am critical of the main thesis of the investigation, I would like to stress that it provides a good basis for discussing these important management issues within the University. It would also have been interesting to have this discussion with the investigator during the investigation. Now I am looking forward to the report being used to strengthen the decision-making power of the University's collegial bodies.

Anders