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## **As You Like It!**

### **How Performance Measurement Affects Professional Autonomy in the Norwegian Public Theatre Sector**

#### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to study the effects of performance measurement on professional autonomy in the Norwegian theatre sector and how these effects have changed over two decades, from the 1990s to the 2010s. We do this by introducing the concepts of decoupling and disciplinary power and by studying the dialogue between five case theatres and the Ministry of Culture as part of the system of Management by Objectives. We find effects both related to processes of decoupling and disciplinary power in this period, but the decoupling effects seem to be most notable in the first part of the period of the study. Consequently, we must also conclude that - though not totally in danger - the professional autonomy of the theatres was increasingly challenged during this period.

**Keywords:** Performance measurement, New Public Management, theatres, professional autonomy, longitudinal study, decoupling, disciplinary power.

## **Introduction**

Theatres during Shakespeare's time, as well as most theatres today, survived by being sponsored. Shakespeare's own company was founded in 1594 during the reign of Elizabeth I and the existence of his company was dependent on aristocratic preferences (Cerasano, 1999). Today as well, theatres that receive financial support have to live up to the expectations of their external funders. In Norway, as well as in many other countries, the external funding primarily comes from public authorities, most importantly from direct governmental support. This paper addresses how the expectations of public authorities affect the degree to which theatres are able to work in line with principles of professional autonomy.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the expectations of the Norwegian government with regard to cultural institutions that receive public funding have been made more explicit due to New Public Management (NPM) reforms. Performance measurement lies at the core of NPM (Pollitt & Dan, 2013). In line with an emphasis on output rather than input, and on results rather than rules, different systems for monitoring the production of public services have been implemented over the last few decades (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Dan, 2013; Speklé & Verbeeten, 2013). One of the NPM reforms that has been implemented in the Norwegian public sector is the performance measurement system: Management by Objectives (MBO) (Christensen, Lgreid, Christensen, & Lægreid, 2010). Norwegian theatres have been included in the system since 1996 (Røyseng, 2003). The system clarifies what objectives theatres should fulfill and what results are expected.

Several studies of the effects of NPM in the cultural sector have already been carried out. The main focus of the existing literature is on conflicting values of NPM, on the

one hand, and the arts and cultural sector on the other (Belfiore, 2004; Chiaravalloti, 2014; Hodsoll, 1998; Lindqvist, 2007). The study presented in this article follows up on this important issue by focusing on the degree to which performance measurement has affected the professional autonomy of theatres. The implementation of MBO is the most pervasive change that the Norwegian state has initiated with regard to the theatres since the 1970s. NPM systems such as MBO have been running for almost three decades and are applied to all parts of the public sector. Studies on how the effects of systems for performance measurement related to NPM may have changed over time are still needed (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015).

We use the concept of professional autonomy to specify the ideal of the autonomy of the arts that is often highlighted as crucial to the field of art (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). Professional autonomy is most often defined at the individual level of analysis as the authority of professionals to make decisions and the freedom to act in accordance with one's professional knowledge base (Johnson, 2016; Skår, 2010) We argue that professional autonomy should also be studied at the institutional level and that processes related to NPM and performance measurement have been of special importance during the last few decades. What we study in this paper is not a profession as such, but professional art institutions where the autonomy of the artistic profession is seen as crucial.

The aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of the degree to which - and the ways in which - performance measurement has affected the professional autonomy of Norwegian public theatres from its implementation onwards, using a longitudinal methodological approach. We developed the following research questions:

- What were the effects of performance measurement on professional autonomy in the Norwegian public theatre sector?
- How did the effects of performance measurement on professional autonomy in the Norwegian theatre sector change in the period from the 1990s to the 2010s?

The theatre sector in Norway consists of three different parts: institutional theatres, independent theatre groups and commercial theatres (Hylland & Mangset, 2018). These different parts of the theatre field differ in programming philosophy and size. The programs of the institutional theatres typically consist of classical and newly written plays; the independent theatre groups represent a tradition in which more experimental theatre art is staged and the commercial theatres mainly produce entertaining theatre within the genres of comedy and musicals (Hylland & Mangset, 2018). In 2017 institutional theatres reported 14 000 performances while independent theatre groups reported 3450 performances (sentralbyrå, 2018). Since the commercial theatres do not receive any public funding they do not report their activities to the authorities. However, based on recent research it is reasonable to claim that the commercial part of the field is the smallest of the three (Hylland & Mangset, 2018). The degree of government support varies from non-existent for the commercial theatres to considerable for the institutional theatres. Since only institutional theatres receive direct government support and therefore are part of MBO, we only focus on these theatres in this study. Institutional theatres receive between 70-95 % of their total income from public support (Hylland & Mangset, 2018). The biggest share of the support comes from national government support, but regional support is also important.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next two sections we will present the conceptual framework of our study. Subsequently, we will present the methodological approach we have used. Afterwards comes the presentation of the empirical results which we have organized into three chronological sections. We end the paper with some concluding comments and remarks.

### **Performance measurement and professional autonomy**

The term NPM was coined early in the 1990s (Hood, 1991, 1995) and can be described as a family of doctrines related to ideals such as accountability, professional management and cost effectiveness (Hood, 1991). It has also been underscored that NPM is a reform paradigm that is manifested in the growing impact of neoliberal ideas in the public sector (De Vries & Nemec, 2013). Public organizations are increasingly managed from a business perspective where the relationship between the corporation and the market is the primary ideal (Christensen et al., 2010). The role of the citizens as customers of public services has been emphasized as a core characteristic of NPM (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006). The overarching goal of NPM has been to increase the cost-effectiveness of the public sector. In order to achieve this goal, a shift from bureaucratic rules to actual results was seen as advantageous (Christensen et al., 2010; Hood, 1991).

Consequently, performance measurement has been implemented in order to promote an effective, efficient, and accountable public sector (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Pollitt & Dan, 2013; Speklé & Verbeeten, 2013, p. 131). With this emphasis on explicit and measurable pre-set performance targets, the performance measurement systems related to New Public Management have been characterized as a rather mechanistic way of documenting the performance of public sector organizations

(Johnsen, 2005; Læg Reid, Roness, & Rubecksen, 2006). The use of more quantitative evaluation measures has been seen as problematic due to the notorious ambiguity of the goals of many public-sector organizations. It has been argued that it is difficult to define appropriate measures in the public sector (Speklé & Verbeeten, 2013; Ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012), and that it is even more difficult in the arts sector (Belfiore, 2004; Lindqvist, 2007).

When performance measurement has been seen as problematic in the arts sector it has been related to a general view that arts institutions such as theatres should have freedom and independence from political and bureaucratic power (Belfiore, 2004; Røyseng, 2003, 2007, 2008). This view is reflected in the motto that has developed in the fields of arts in Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Art for art's sake! (*l'art pour l'art*) (Bourdieu, 1993; Habermas, 1992). The importance of the autonomy of the arts and their independence from political and bureaucratic power is often related to the need for critical and independent voices in a democratic society. This democratic principle has been named the arm's-length principle, often perceived more or less as a 'constitutional law' in cultural policy (Chartrand, 1989; Mangset, 2013). On this background, the arm's-length principle has been understood as decisive for securing the professional autonomy of the arts sector (Blomgren, 2012).

The concept of social contract has been introduced in order to illustrate that professional autonomy relies on a trust relationship established between a profession and society (Freidson, 1986). Social contracts are the mechanisms by which society legitimizes professions and grants them authority and autonomy to carry out their functions (Funck, 2012). This means that the professional autonomy is not total but depends on the level of trust that is established in relation to society.

Funck has suggested that we see professional autonomy as a “social contract between a profession and policy elites to act in society’s best interests” (Funck, 2012). This means that attention is not solely on the individual professional worker, but also on the profession as an institutionalized occupational group. In this light, it is crucial to study the relationship between the professional organizations and society, i.e. political and bureaucratic authorities. In this paper, we argue that the system of MBO is a suitable case for studying the expectations that are directed towards art institutions from public authorities, on the one hand, and the response from the art institutions on the other. The formal dialogue between the two parties makes up a basis for analyzing how professional autonomy is constituted. In order to study this, we introduce two concepts that we suggest can help us analyze the influence of MBO – decoupling and disciplinary power.

### **Decoupling and disciplinary power**

A central insight in neo-institutional theory is that organizations will find ways to increase their legitimacy and prospects of survival by adapting to different expectations in their environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1997). Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggested that this would typically be done by developing loosely coupled organizations which, on the one hand, would incorporate institutionalized practices in their environment, while on the other hand would build a gap between such formal structures and actual work activities. This enables organizations to seek legitimacy while at the same time continuing their core activities with ‘business as usual’. Decoupling in this sense, according to Boxenbaum, means that organizations only superficially adopt new structures without implementing related practices (Boxenbaum, 2008, pp. 78-79).

MBO requires theatres to document certain aspects of their activity in return for the grants they receive. This reporting can be seen as a vehicle for improving legitimacy towards public authorities. However, since quantitative measures are often considered contradictory to art and artistic activity, one could imagine that public theatres conform to the system in a ceremonial way while at the same time the artistic activities at the technical core continue more or less unaffected. However, a question that arises in relation to such a scenario is whether decoupling might be sustainable over time (Boxenbaum, 2008, p. 88). Scott (2001) has argued that decoupling might lead to full implementation after some time because most individuals refuse to see themselves only as ceremonial props.

An alternative scenario is that the expectations communicated by MBO affect the core activities of the theatres in a more profound way. We suggest that Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is useful for this analytical purpose. MBO can be described as a system in which documentation and an increased interest in details are characteristic. According to Foucault, discipline is carried out through different forms of knowledge production that at the same time work as surveillance (Foucault, 1995). Disciplinary knowledge production aims at documenting everything that can be observed. It aims at bringing the truth into the light. Foucault further emphasizes that the truths that are produced by documentation are truths that in turn will be used for purposes of power. In the writings of Foucault there is a close relationship between what is given the status of truth or knowledge, on the one hand, and of power on the other.

According to Foucault, disciplinary power is based on practices of division and classification. In the case of the execution of different work tasks, disciplinary power will imply that the tasks will be separated into smaller operations that can be observed

and documented. In this way, the divisions will enable detailed and precise control of the work that is performed. Discipline aims at effectiveness and makes every detail potentially significant.

Further, Foucault underlines that disciplinary power works by making the subordinates internalize the fact that they can be monitored at any time. When they realize that they are being watched or that they potentially can be watched, they will internalize the power relationship. In this way, disciplinary power is an invisible form of power.

However, it can be studied by focusing on how the techniques for knowledge production constitute important categories; in our study, how performance measurement constitutes the category of professional autonomy in the public theatre sector. While Foucault mainly focused on how discipline affected individuals, we will focus on how discipline might work at the institutional level of theatres.

We ask to what extent performance measurement affects the professional autonomy of Norwegian theatres. Do we see processes of decoupling or processes of disciplinary power, or both?

## **Method**

In order to study the effects of MBO in Norwegian theatres we have chosen a longitudinal approach. We gathered documents for the following years: 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2012. We chose these years in order to get data from before the reform was implemented and that cover the period after the implementation. We chose 2012 as the end year because an additional evaluation was implemented in 2012 and we wanted to exclude this initiative from our study. The longitudinal approach enables us to study the development of almost two decades.

We have chosen a case study design. There are 17 institutional theatres that receive funding from the state budget. These theatres are located in 12 of the 18 different regions of Norway. Several of the theatres are supposed to cover another region in addition to the one they are located in through touring activities, which means that in principle the whole Norwegian population has access to institutional theatres. Three of the theatres are defined as national institutions, which means that they receive all their support from the national government. Fourteen of the institutions are defined as regional theatres, which means that they receive funding both from the state, the regions and the municipalities. Even if the regions and the municipalities contribute with substantial financial support, it is the state that runs the system of MBO entirely (Author 1 2003). It has also been argued that this has led to a situation where the theatres orient their activities more towards a common standard defined by the central theatres in the capital than towards different characteristics in their regions (ibid.) In order to cover the breadth of the sector, we have included one national theatre and four regional theatres from different parts of Norway.

The data source for the study is documents. In order to accomplish a longitudinal approach, we argue that documents are especially relevant. Documents are manifestations of the point in time in which they were produced and may be highly valuable when events can no longer be observed or when potential informants have forgotten the details (Michaud, 2017). We have gathered all the central documents related to MBO, i.e. applications for public support from the theatres, grant letters from the Ministry of Culture and annual reports from the theatres on their performance. For the selected theatres and the selected years, this comprises 75 documents and 1096 printed pages. We got access to the material through the archive at the Ministry of Culture.

The three types of documents we analyze have different functions in the dialogue. The applications for support describe the plans and strategies of the theatres for the coming year and the reports document the results produced by the theatres the previous year. The grant letters are sent to the theatres when the Ministry has worked through the applications and reports and Parliament has decided on the state budget for the next year. The grant letters also act as binding contracts between the Ministry of Culture and the theatres. This means that the Ministry commits itself to disbursing a specified sum and that the theatres agree to work to realize certain specified objectives.

Studying these documents means that we have access to the formal dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and the theatres. However, this does not give us complete access to how the theatres have operated from day to day (Atkinson, 1997). The documents show the written communication between the Ministry and the theatres at different points in time on a limited part of the theatres' activities. Documents are produced for a specific purpose and target audience (Bowen, 2009).

We have analyzed the documents in two steps. The material was not digitized, so we could not use analytical software. The first step was characterized by an inductive approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Guided by our interest in professional autonomy, we developed analytical categories through careful reading and coding of the documents. The categories were related both to the form and the content of the texts. The following categories emerged as relevant with regard to form: the level of detail, the scope, the authorship, the dramaturgy and the language and rhetoric of the texts.

*Table 1 should be placed here*

Categories that emerged as important with regard to the content of the texts were: the measures specified from the state, the artistic strategies formulated by the theatres,

qualitative vs quantitative focus, audience development initiatives and the underlying message in the texts.

*Table 2 should be placed here*

Together these categories enabled us to capture how different aspects of the dialogue developed in the period and how these could be related to professional autonomy. In the second step, we looked more carefully at changes in the period from 1994 to 2012 and what kinds of dynamics seemed to be characterizing these changes. At this point we needed the concepts of decoupling and disciplinary power to be able to capture the ways in which MBO has affected the professional autonomy of the theatres. The analysis of the data resulted in a division of the period from 1994 to 2012 into three phases. In the next sections we present them chronologically and relate them to processes of decoupling and disciplinary power.

### **1994: The thousand flowers bloom**

1994 is two years prior to the implementation of MBO and therefore represents a time without the formal influence of the NPM reform. In the grant letter for this year the Ministry underlined that government support would be given in order to:

(...) produce and disseminate varied, professional theatre. It is important that the theatre (...) reaches out to as many as possible, and that the institutions demonstrate abilities of innovation and cooperation when they utilize their resources, especially in their dissemination work (Grant letter from the Ministry of Culture for 1994).

Furthermore, the issue of cost-effectiveness was mentioned as a simple encouragement for the theatres to make sure that the economy of the theatres is healthy: “The

institutions must determine their own income. The activities must be adjusted so that expenses remain within the limits of grants and other income” (Grant letter from the Ministry of Culture for 1994). Diverse theatre art, accessibility to the audience and reasonable use of resources were emphasized. In this way, the expectations from the government were formulated short and simple. How did the theatres respond?

After comparing how our case theatres wrote their applications and reports for 1994 it is quite clear that they did this in very different ways. No specific form was developed, and the language and style of the texts varied considerably from one theatre to another. Some of the documents are rather informal, for example there are instances where the text is written in first person singular: “I have talked to N.N. (...)” (Report for 1994, theatre 3). We also find that it is accepted not to have made the plans for the year the theatre applies for funding: “The budget for 1994 is not yet finished, but we mention projects that we are working on” (Application for 1994, theatre 1). The theatres more or less define for themselves what they emphasize and how they present different strategies, activities and results. We perceive the varied responses from the theatre institutions as a situation in which “the thousand flowers are blooming”.

In our material for 1994, we also find some instances of resistance and critique against cultural bureaucracy. One of the theatres emphasized that cultural bureaucracy represented an obstacle for the realization of their goals in the area of theatre for children and youth:

Despite signals of an increased focus on theatre for children and youth from the political authorities for several years, clear results have been a long time coming, (...) partly because of the inefficiency of the cultural bureaucracy. (Report for 1994, theatre 4).

The theatre in question chose to express its views on what they found problematic concerning how they cooperated with certain parts of the bureaucracy. It seems as if there were no strict rules that governed dialogue with the Ministry of Culture.

1999-2004: Standardization takes place

The second phase we identify starts after the implementation of MBO. The implementation of MBO in Norwegian theatres in 1996 was related to the budget process. The implementation of the system meant that a hierarchy of objectives, which included primary objectives, secondary objectives and performance indicators, was formulated for all theatres that receive support from the state budget. Identical objectives were communicated in the grant letters to all the theatres. Three main objectives were emphasized. First, the institutions “should make sure that as many as possible get access to theatre, opera and dance of high artistic quality.” Second, the theaters should “promote artistic renewal and development” and third, “the institutions should use the resources as well as possible and target their activities” (Grant letter from the Ministry of Culture for 1999). The objective of cost effectiveness was given more emphasis, but the content of the other objectives was the same as before. The main change rather lied in growing interest in the details on how the theatres perform on the objectives.

In line with the principles of MBO, the main objectives were now operationalized in secondary objectives and performance indicators that were concrete and quantifiable. For the main objective on accessibility and artistic quality, two secondary objectives were formulated, the first being: “The theatres should reach out to as many as possible with theatre art”. The objective was further operationalized in the following performance indicators:

- “Total number of productions, performances and audience”.
- “Total number of productions, performances and audience on tour.”
- “Total number of productions, performances and audience in the county of the theatre.”
- “Total number of productions, performances and audience outside the county of the theatre. Specify the counties” (Grant letter from the Ministry of Culture for 1999).

The performance indicators required details that had not been demanded from the theatres before. Similar indicators were also formulated for the other main objectives. The Ministry of Culture stipulated that “many of the performance indicators aim at strengthening the element of planning in the ongoing activities”. In this way, planning and administrative control were values that the Ministry of Culture urged the theatres to implement. Let us see what the reports and grant applications looked like after the implementation of MBO.

Compared to the documents from 1994 the language style of the theatres’ texts had changed significantly and become more formal. In addition, after the implementation of MBO the theatres started to structure their documents in accordance with the objectives and performance indicators. This was a formal requirement from the Ministry and theatres that deviated from this template did not get their documents approved. In a document from the executive officer in the Ministry of Culture, we find the following conclusion:

We cannot accept the report for 1997. They [theatre 3] have taken the main objectives as their point of departure, but the results are not directly related to the performance indicators as was asked for in the grant letter for 1997. (...)

Furthermore, N.N. said that she feels that the theatres and the Ministry are on completely different planets when it comes to what is perceived as important, and what the Ministry defines as important often does not correspond to the theatre's perception (Document from the executive officer in the Ministry of Culture in the processing of the public grant for theatre 3 1999).

On this background, the implementation of MBO seems to have implied that the artistic activities of the theatres should be subsumed under administratively formulated categories to get the Ministry's approval. However, theatre 3 was not the object of any economic sanctions.

In addition, there was growing emphasis on the cost effectiveness of the theatres. Typically, one of the theatres wrote in their grant application that it would work to ensure the efficiency of the theatre:

At the organizational level, the work for a gradual streamlining of the utilization of resources will continue from the current year. There will be a very comprehensive reorganization of the entire theatre's production apparatus, in which simplified organization, cost control and unambiguous distribution of responsibilities will be central (Grant application for 1999, theatre 1).

In line with the urgings of the Ministry of Culture, issues such as efficiency and strategic planning were emphasized. Another theatre described a similar process in the following way: "The organizational structure is tightened up a little and we have introduced a greater degree of structure. This is primarily the administrative and technical parts of the organization. (Not the artistic part.)" (Report for 2004, theatre 3). In this way, it was emphasized that the artistic core of the theatre had been shielded, a comment that indicates decoupling.

Even if the picture is not clear, a tendency can be observed wherein a change of authors of the documents took place during this period. On most of the documents the name of the person responsible for it is written. While the applications and reports from the theatres were written by the artistic director of the theatres prior to the implementation of the system of management by objectives, the task was now delegated to the administrative director. When we study the documents, we see that the change of author from the artistic director to the administrative director ran parallel to the implementation of MBO. The production of these documents in the legitimization process is now defined as an administrative responsibility. In this way, the artistic director does not necessarily have to deal with the system and could rather concentrate on the artistic activity more or less unaffected.

The transition from the years prior to the implementation of MBO to the period 1999-2004, was characterized by a shift of focus from artistic creativity to administrative control. Both the way reorganizations are described and the change of author from artistic director to administrative director indicate that we might have to do with processes of decoupling. This implies that it could have been fully possible for the theatres to adapt to MBO in a ceremonial way, while at the same time continuing the core artistic activities more or less unaffected by the requirements from the Ministry.

### **2009-2012: The productivity of MBO**

In the last phase, a growing number of goals and consequently a growing number of performance indicators were introduced by the Ministry of Culture. As a result of political ambitions related to cultural diversity, cultural heritage, audience development and the celebration of different anniversaries such as the Norwegian constitution and

voting rights for women, the theatres were asked to contribute to the fulfillment of these ambitions. In the grant letter for 2012, the following was written:

The Ministry presupposes that the institutions develop new ways to work in order to safeguard the importance of inclusion and cultural diversity through its ordinary activities. Inclusion and cultural diversity must be included as a natural part of programming, organizational development, recruitment and public work in the short and long-term strategies of the institutions. (Grant letter from the Ministry of Culture for 2012).

In response we see that the theatres expressed ambitions of working towards a growing number of target groups. Previously, the specification of target groups had been quite general. The theatres had typically pointed out their efforts to attract children and youth. However, in this period the theatres specified more target groups and more fine-grained subdivisions of target groups they intended to work with. The following is an illustrative example from one of the theatres:

In 2012, the theatre presented several shows where the purpose was to provide a generally low-threshold offer to special groups of disabled people, upper secondary school students who are engaged in school theatre, and refugees and asylum seekers (Report from theatre 1 for 2012).

However, the new goals that were introduced were not only related to the theatres' work on reaching a diverse audience. The new goals were also related to their artistic programs. The theatres were asked to plan projects and events that could be part of the Ministry's specific ambitions. The increased number of goals that were introduced in this period led to a public debate on whether the arm's length had been shortened. One theatre manager raised his concerns in a web journal for the performing arts. He

underlined that “before 2009, it was not specified what the theater should produce. (...) In 2009 there was a change.” He went on to list the new goals that had been introduced by the Ministry and argued that this was a threat to the artistic freedom of the theatres.

The arts do not belong to anyone, they are free and should not be subordinate to specific policy goals, such as, for example, integration, diversity, tolerance and solidarity. (...) dear politicians, because of this you should keep your fingers far away from the dish! (Theatre Director Terje Lyngstad at Sogn og Fjordane Theatre, Scenekunst.no, February 20, 2012).

Other theatre managers stated that they did not feel very restricted by the goals from the Ministry. Nevertheless, the debate ended up in Parliament where the Minister of Culture was accused of shortening the arm’s-length principle. Contrary to how the theatres would voice their critique prior to the implementation of MBO, we do not find any traces of this debate in the documents. After the implementation of MBO, the written dialogue in applications, grant letters and reports seem to be established as a mode of discourse in which such discussions had no room. This is also underlined by the fact that from 2009-2012 the dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and the theatres was further standardized. This was done by the introduction of a digital form that the theatres were obliged to use when submitting their applications for support and reporting on their results. The digital form defined all the categories and criteria the theatres should adhere to when documenting their activities. The digital form also meant that the order of the different categories and criteria was similar for all theatres. There was no freedom left for the theatres in terms of designing the general dramaturgy of their texts.

Furthermore, we find that the theatres seem to have found ways to combine the bureaucratic requirements that were emphasized from the Ministry with the formulations of their artistic ambitions. The theatres described their strategies in ways in which their artistic ambitions were intertwined with administrative processes. Several of the theatres formulated strategies for their activities where the artistic and administrative aspects were understood to be coherent rather than contradictory. An example of this was that some theatres highlighted typical values of art, while at the same time expressing the value of confronting these with administrative tools. One of the theatres wrote:

We know that there is no easy way to get artistic results. All art requires curiosity, wonder, imagination and transgression. One has to surprise and be surprised. Complacency rarely creates long-term success. In art there are no recipes. But even if plans and strategy documents are unreliable navigational instruments, they can be used to reflect on some goals and to discuss some possible choices of direction (Report for 2012, theatre 2).

By emphasizing words like curiosity, imagination, transgression and surprise, the arts' well-established values related to the autonomy of art were emphasized. At the same time, the theatres considered administrative tools with affinity to MBO to be fruitful for ongoing discussions, including discussions regarding artistic strategies.

The increasing focus on detail, as well as standardization of the dialogue, can be interpreted as a disciplinary process in a Foucauldian sense. As Foucault stated, disciplinary power is exercised through an interest in and documentation of, detail and by this, detection of deviations: the effect being normalization. MBO has implied that the quantifiable and documentable performance of the theatres was highlighted along a

growing number of variables. In principle, this documentation was also the basis for reward and punishment. The logic of MBO is that public money should be spent where the best results are produced. Good performance should be rewarded with extra funding and bad performance should be punished by cuts in public support. While the documentation and reporting of performance on the one hand, is presented as neutral data collection, it is, on the other a way of highlighting performance of the theatres that can lead to fundamental consequences.

## **Conclusions**

The aim of this paper has been to study the effects of performance measurement on professional autonomy in the Norwegian theatre sector and how these effects have changed in the period from the 1990s to the 2010s. We do not find a univocal picture. When we analyze the dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and the Norwegian theatres from 1994 to 2012, we see a development in three stages in which the transition between the first two stages is characterized by an increasing emphasis on detail and by standardization of the communication. This transition has less to do with the content of the artistic activities at the theatres than the form in which the activities are described and documented. The way the theatres describe themselves goes from being creative and diverse to being more administrative and standardized. The transition between the second and the third stage is characterized by continued standardization. In addition, we see more detailed attention not only in form, but also directed towards the content of the activities at the theatres. This transition led to a public debate on whether the autonomy of the theatres was endangered. The three stages are summarized in the table below.

*Table 3 should be placed here.*

The effects of MBO are both related to processes of decoupling and disciplinary power in this period, but the decoupling effects seem to be most notable in the first part of the period of the study. Processes of decoupling may be best understood as strategies to secure professional autonomy at the level of the theatre organizations. By decoupling their reporting requirements from the artistic activities, the autonomy of these activities is more or less unaffected. Decoupling leads to a clearer division of the tasks between the administration and the artistic staff at public theatres. This is giving the creative theatre art professionals room to devote themselves more undisturbed to the artistic production, while the administrative professionals produce the reporting and secure a good relationship with the financing authorities.

Discipline, on the other hand, is more ambiguous. MBO is a system that introduces more formal control in the relationship between public authorities and the theatres and, by that, might have challenged the level of trust between the parties (Van Thiel & Yesilkagit, 2011). Inspired by Foucault, MBO can be interpreted as the implementation of a form of power that works through its indirect effects. In this way, our study supports the perspective introduced by Scott (2001) that decoupling might lead to full implementation after some time. However, our study does not indicate that the implementation is complete, rather that what we have is implementation with a limited scope which means that the requirements of MBO to some degree also trickle down to artistic strategies. Disciplinary power executed in an indirect way may infuse theatres' internal dialogue and also theatres' performance production culture with quantitative performance values, such as efficiency, in terms of costs related to the breath and number of audiences. This slow cultural shift, shown through the rhetoric of the theatres' written reports and also their performance orientation, may in a longer time perspective challenge important tenets of art production, such as autonomy and inner

motivation, which are important for creativity and innovation. In other words, the disciplinary effect may change the orientation of artistic professionals in public theatres towards less experimentation, less artistic risk-taking and less creative theatre art production. The result of this is more mainstream theatre productions satisfying the majority of audiences' taste. This development has been noted already and discussed in Norway. The practical implications of this is that the Public Authorities should be very clear about giving the theatre field and theatre professionals support in pursuing artistic aims and experimentation.

An important limitation of the study is that the documents only give access to the formal dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and the theatres. We have not been able to study how these effects have played out in the theatre organizations on a day-to-day basis. This means that we cannot conclude unambiguously on the question of professional autonomy. An ethnographic follow-up study would be of great value.

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