

A Principal's Homework

A study of principals' reactions to the Swedish School
Inspectorate's auditing process

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to study and explain Swedish school principals' reactions to and perceptions of the auditing process of the Swedish School Inspectorate. Guided by two strands of institutional theory, rational choice and sociological institutionalism, the author identifies certain factors that can potentially affect how principals react and think about the auditing process. The study follows a case study method where six principals were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the auditing process, to find out if there are information asymmetries between the inspectorate and the schools, what principals thought of the inspectorate's evaluation, what motivated them to implement the interventions to meet the inspectorate's demands and how the stakeholders of the schools influence the entire process. The results of the study point to principals in many cases following rules because they are properly internalized and legitimate. Other principals are more motivated by the sanctions of the inspectorate. The conclusion drawn from the material is that a logic of appropriateness has a sort of primacy in motivating compliance, sanctions and thus rational strategic behaviour steps in where the logic of appropriateness fails.

Key words: principals, school, inspection, inspectorate, audit

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1 Introduction

In 2008 a new administrative authority was created with the Swedish School Inspectorate (SSI). Its purpose is to perform audits of all schools in Sweden to monitor the quality of education and inspect whether the schools follow the Swedish school law. This new authority can be seen as the result of a decentralization and marketization of Swedish schools since the early 1990's, as a way of returning some control to the state. With education becoming more unequal, the variation in school quality becoming larger and the school results becoming worse, the task of the SSI has become more and more important (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 15).

Principals now occupy a position that is increasingly complex and important for the school system. On one hand principals are caught between municipal and state steering. On the other hand they are caught between the steering of the municipality and the demands of teachers as a professional group. Principals are managers with responsibilities of budgeting and hiring staff. But they are also increasingly expected to lead the development of pedagogical work at the school (Jarl, 2012, p. 154).

Schools are already a socially relevant subject of study. After the PISA-results were disclosed it became an issue that climbed the political agenda. It also is evident that a lot of trust and responsibility is being put on both the SSI and principals. Therefore I believe that studying the relationship between them is especially relevant.

As well as being socially relevant, the subject relates to key concepts in political science such as institutional design. As will be expanded upon in coming chapters, this thesis is guided by institutional theory. As well as the subject being made understandable by theories, the theories can be expanded upon by the subject and help answer questions such as "How are actors motivated?" and "How does institutional design affect actors?".

1.1 Purpose of the thesis and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the programme theory¹ of the SSI and how it actually works in practice. The SSI performs inspections of schools, gives

¹ Here, a programme theory signifies how an intervention, policy or strategy is thought to create a chain of results that produce an intended impact.

criticisms and feedback and through a range of sanctions at its disposal it is meant to make schools comply with the standards or law. This process can be thought of in rational terms but there is no guarantee that it works as smoothly in practice. From poor communication to unclear standards and faulty quality indicators there is a whole range of things that can go wrong. The purpose is also to understand the role principals play in both the auditing process and the improvement process of the school and how they experience and understand it.

Through a qualitative case study of several schools and interviews with their principals, the study will be able to examine the mechanisms through which schools are meant to improve and where in this chain of mechanisms there might be weaknesses.

The question I will try to answer in this thesis is: *How do principals perceive of and react to the Swedish School Inspectorate's auditing process? How can these perceptions and reactions be explained and understood?*

1.2 Delimitations

In order for the thesis to have a scope that is suitable for its size while at the same time being able to reach reliable conclusions some delimitations need to be made. This thesis focuses on the SSI but does not cover all its activities such as handling filed complaints or re-evaluation of national exams. It does not cover the quality audits either (briefly explained below). The focus instead lies on what is arguably the central activity of the SSI, the regularly performed audits of all schools.

The thesis will not focus on how inspectors interpret school law in a particular way or the consistency with which the law is interpreted. Neither does it focus particularly on the SSI's reasoning behind how schools should be improved even though the program theory of audits is covered in terms of how schools and principals respond to it. Thus it is the receiving end of the audits that is the focus of this thesis; the schools and principals that are being audited and asked to implement certain improvements. What is interesting here is how schools react to the input of the SSI and how well the assumptions made by the SSI (and by extension the state) of how schools behave and react.

1.3 Chapter summary

This chapter is followed by a chapter containing some background on the SSI as well as previous research on the SSI. The purpose of this chapter is to establish some basic information on the current state of the SSI, school policy and the research on school inspections. This groundwork allows one to clarify what the thesis builds upon.

Chapter 3 explores the theories used. The thesis uses institutional theory and thus institutions are defined and the relevant institutional theories and models are presented and their use is explained and justified.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology and explains the use of case studies and semi structured interviews. It also discusses some of the limitations of the thesis as well as some the ethical problems that must be considered.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the data gathered and Chapter 6 contains the discussion as the theoretical framework is used to understand and analyze the interview material.

The thesis ends in Chapter 7 where the conclusions drawn from the analysis are summed up.

2 Background

2.1 History and function of the school inspectorate

Maria Jarl et al write about the history of the Swedish school policy and the steering through law that the state still has responsibility over. Formulating the school law and the central curriculum is part of this. The inspection of schools to see whether they meet the requirements of the law is also part of this form of steering. As the management by objectives and performance becomes more performance focused the tool of inspections and audits becomes an ideological tool as well as a tool of law. By naming and shaming schools that do not reach given goals, the school inspection can be used as an ideological tool. Since the decentralization the focus on inspections has increased more and more. In 2008 the Swedish School Inspectorate was created to serve this function. In 2010 the new school law placed even more emphasis on inspection (Jarl, 2012, p. 46). The main task of the SSI is to perform audits of schools to ensure schools reach the state-set goals so that students have an equal access to education. The different inspection forms are expanded upon below.

Private individuals can file complaints against schools to the SSI which they handle. The complaints filed to the SSI can concern a particular student who is the victim of some sort of abusive or degrading treatment. Sometimes they receive complaints about larger inadequacies of a school but this is handed over to the inspection units rather than handled like other complaints (Skolinspektionen, 2016, p. 25). Complaints concerning degrading treatment are handled both by the SSI and the Child and School Student Representative (BEO) which is an authority that is part of the SSI. Around 4000 complaints were handled by the SSI and BEO during 2015 (Skolinspektionen, 2016, p. 26).

As a part of the regular supervision the SSI performs reassessment of national tests in order to compare the assessment of the teachers of the school with the inspections reassessment (Swedish: Ombedömning av nationella prov).

For a new independent school (any school not owned and administered by the municipality) to establish it needs to have an application reviewed and license granted by the SSI. The SSI also conducts supervision during the first year of schools establishment to see whether the plan presented to the SSI worked as well in practice. If the application is denied it is often because the school has not adequately shown that the school will attract enough students to be able to function. Another cause might be because the applicant already owns other schools that have shown large inadequacies (Skolinspektionen, 2016, p. 55).

2.1.1 Different forms of inspections

The first sort of inspections is the regular supervision. This is performed on all schools which includes elementary schools and upper secondary schools. However special focus is placed on schools whose students are at risk of not receiving the education they are entitled to. This is called prioritized supervision. The independent schools are included in this but inspection of these schools also includes a risk analysis of their economic situation (Skolinspektionen, 2016, p. 10).

Apart from regular supervision the SSI also performs quality audits. These are performed in order to audit a certain area of education in several schools. These audits are then split into two sorts, teaching audits and themed audits. In the teaching audits a certain subject in the curriculum is chosen and especially supervised. For instance the teaching audits of 2015 focused on history taught at elementary school and reading and writing taught at the earlier years of elementary school. The themed audits instead touch upon a certain theme of education that might not be bound to a certain subject; a themed audit in 2015 for instance was student health. The purpose of the quality audits are to identify general areas of development to improve schools overall (Skolverket, 2016, p. 37). The focus of this study will be on the regular supervision as it is the primary given tool of the SSI to improve individual schools.

2.1.2 The criticisms and their classification

Newer reports from regular audits (reports from after 2014 from what I can gather) have six clear categories in a table where the inspection marks categories as green where no inadequacy has been found and red where the SSI has an injunction to compel the school to improve a certain area. The table also shows if the mandator² (for example the responsible municipality or company) of the school faces a fine if the school fails to comply with the injunction. The six audited areas are:

- *Education and teaching*- this area is judged in the basis of for instance the degree to which teachers are active in creating structured lessons with clear goals and that teachers take the needs and abilities of individual students into consideration (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 2).
- *Special accommodation and assistance*- this area covers the schools actions to accommodate and support students that risk not fulfilling the goals. This entails both evaluating the need for support and evaluating the effects of the support that has been given (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 3)

² I am using the term “mandator” as a translation of the Swedish word ”huvudman” which refers to the responsible authority of the school. In the case of a municipal school the municipal council is the mandator.

- *Assessment and grading*- in this area it is emphasized that the student must only be graded based on the national standards and not standards set by the teacher or the school. It is also important that both students and caretakers are involved in and informed the development of the student and how to assist the process (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 4)
- *Safety, study environment and interventions against abusive treatment*- this area includes the preventive work the school does to stop abusive behavior and other things that can harm the study environment or the safety of the students (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 4).
- *Conditions for teaching and safety*- this area covers for instance the schools work with basic principles such as democratic values or human rights. It also includes noticing students that have invalid absence from school (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 5).
- *School direction and development*- this area focuses on the leadership of the principal, their active work to evaluate school results and developing improvements and allocating resources to different areas of the school based on their needs (Skolinspektionen, 2014, p. 6)

The inspection reports can also give smaller reprimands for problems that might not call for an injunction.

2.1.3 Evaluation by the Swedish National Audit Office

In 2013 the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO, Riksrevisionen in Swedish) conducted an evaluation of the Swedish School Inspectorate (SSI) as none had been made since its inception in 2008. Another reason was a lot of evaluations of the Swedish school system had shown that the equivalence of education has become worse and upholding the equality of education is one of the central tasks of the SSI (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 17). The evaluation made by the SNAO is of a quite general nature but it shows some issues and therefore indicates that this is an area worth studying.

The SNAO are basing the evaluation on the stated goal of the SSI, by both the parliament and the SSI themselves, that inspections should work towards raising the quality of education by focusing on aspects of schools that are important for student performance (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 82). However the SNAO point to that a lot of the SSI's regular inspection work is focused on documentation, something the SNAO write risks leading to more administration than necessary.

The SNAO write that only some aspects of teaching are judged and that an assessment of the teaching process in its entirety is very seldom made. The quality inspections are deeper but also more expensive to conduct and are often focused on specific subjects so only a fraction of the teaching overall is reached this way (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 84). It is also unclear whether the prioritizations in terms of what schools are in most need of inspection are correctly judged.

The SNAO also write that the inspections and their results need to be more predictable and consistent. Since the law can be quite vague it is important that

the SSI still has some form of standardization how the law should be interpreted (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 85).

2.2 The school inspectorate in the scientific literature

School inspection in general is quite a rich research field as many countries make use of some form of evidence-based governance (Ehren et al, 2014, p. 4) and many are moving towards what is often called “audit society” or “evaluation society” (Lindgren, 2015, p. 44). There are also more international assessments on school performance which possibly spur governments to modernize governance. The purpose of evidence based governance according to Ehren et al is to set expectations for performance, evaluate in order to produce evidence and evidence that is then used to stimulate system development (2013, p. 4). The central questions in much of the research concern what impact school inspection has, the mechanisms through which this impact is thought to function and how it fits into a broader governance regime.

2.2.1 International research

In a study from 2015, Gustafsson et al. test the conceptual framework of programme theory of inspection of education in six different European countries.

However the survey had a low response rate in several countries, the survey conducted in Sweden received more responses and makes up almost half of the responses in the entire study. Gustafsson et al write that the purpose is not to conduct a comparative study but to test the programme theory of school inspections and by using different systems gain more generalizability. The cases were then weighted so that each country is given equal weight. The authors recognize that this method gives the study some statistical weakness (Gustafson et al. 2015, p. 51). The data is then analyzed through structural equation modelling.

The study looks at three common mechanisms through which schools are improved by school inspections. Sanctions and rewards such as fines or bonuses may motivate schools to implement change. The sanctions might also consist of naming and shaming schools that do not live up to certain criteria. The second mechanism is feedback from school inspections that highlight strong and weak points of the schools given certain standards. A third mechanism is stakeholder pressure which theoretically would be important on a school market. The stakeholders which can be parents or a school board will be informed of the inspection process and hopefully pressure the school to act on the recommendations from the inspectors. Parents have the possibility to put their children in a different school if they feel the current one does not take steps for improvement (Gustafson et al, 2015, p. 49).

Three intermediate mechanisms are listed. Self-evaluation is deemed important for improvement and accountability. Capacity building through professional learning activities is important for teacher cooperation and to encourage teacher participation in decision making. School effectiveness is the third mechanism, which comes across as a bit unclear. Implementing and monitoring effective teaching and instruction is mentioned (Gustafson et al, 2015, p. 50).

The authors write that the theory is focused on intended consequences of the inspections and that neo-institutional theory might better explain unintended effects. The study fails to describe unintended effects based on what the authors state are poor measurement characteristics and therefore used as observed variables instead of latent ones (Gustafson et al, 2015, p. 50).

To my understanding the theoretical model, which has been developed in a prior study, is based on interview material but only with inspectors. Thus the mechanisms have not been studied in closer detail at all yet. The authors write that qualitative methods such as case studies would be a fruitful way of getting insight into the mechanisms that school inspections exert influence through (Gustafson et al, 2015, p. 56).

Ehren & Visscher (2006), describe possible side-effects of school inspection in a more theoretical study. Isomorphism is one potential side-effect where schools begin to resemble other schools more and more due to the constraining effects of the inspection. Another possible side-effect of school inspections is the performance paradox which is when the indicators for performance have a weak correlation to actual performance. This situation arises when the organization learns what is measured and what is not and then influences the measurement rather than the actual performance. This also leads to poor performance not being discovered at all (2006, p. 64).

In a later study Ehren & Visscher ask the question “What effects do school inspections have on school improvement and do the characteristics of schools contribute to these effects?” The school characteristics measured is the school innovation capacity (which had been estimated through a prior survey) (Ehren & Visscher, 2008, p 215). This did not seem to have any effect on initiatives for improvement. The amount of feedback or the number of improvement suggestions did not seem to have an effect either, but the way feedback was given seemed to matter. If the feedback was directive, the assessment was unsatisfactory and the inspector and principal reached an agreement on improvement within timeframe, then it was likely to contribute to school improvement (Ehren & Visscher, 2008, p. 224-223).

Ehren and Visscher (and other projects that Ehren seem to have been part of) seem to be optimistic about the potential impact of school inspections. Gaertner et al present a study that is more reserved on the impact of school inspection on school development. However they write that school inspections serve other uses as well. They gather knowledge on the quality of schools which in turn can be used as a tool for accountability, school inspections are also a tool for enforcing certain standards (Gartner et al, 2014, p. 491). Gaertner et al perform a quasi-experimental study of school inspections in two German federal states with

schools that were not yet inspected serving as a control group (Gartner et al, 2014, p. 492). School quality was subjectively measured by a survey sent to principals and teachers asking them about the quality at their school. The study found the inspections did not lead directly to school improvement, but did contribute to accountability. Gaertner et al recognize the limitations of the study as the survey period was only over a single year (Gartner et al, 2014, p. 505).

2.2.2 Swedish research

A study by Gustafsson et al tries to reconstruct the programme theory of the SSI and break it down into simple assumptions expressed as “if...then...because”. The results are a total of 14 such propositions out of which 9 are related to the schools and their response to inspections and thus most relevant for this thesis. A couple of examples are quoted below.

*5. **If** the inspection gives clear and trustworthy feedback about its results, **then** schools will feel obliged to work with them within given time frames, **because** schools welcome impartial feedback and advice. [Bold added]*

*6. **If** the inspectorate makes findings from the supervision of individual schools public, **then** designated schools will improve, **because** they want to keep up a responsible attitude towards the public, and their present and potential clients. [Bold added]*

*12. **If** schools receive renewed heavy criticism for not having improved after supervision, **then** schools will generally comply, **because** they fear the consequences of penalties or other sanctions the inspectorate may impose. [Bold added]*

(Gustafsson et al, 2014, p. 468-469)

The authors then evaluate the propositions based on previous research. However because of the lack of Swedish empirical material gathered these results are limited. Their analysis shows that the programme theory might be too rationalistic in assuming how welcoming schools are to feedback and that the competitive market system might make schools take on a strategic behavior of window dressing and implementing procedures because they will be judged better rather than for any effects for the students (Gustafsson et al, 2014, p. 473-474).

2.2.3 How to build from the research

The ambition of this thesis was to build on the questions left unanswered by the previous research, in particular the study by Gustafson et al (2015) which calls for

qualitative studies that look at the mechanisms that exert influence over schools. The study by Gustafson et al from 2014 also ends in an interesting proposal, that a competitive market system might make window dressing and other strategic behavior viable. My thesis, by focusing on the principals, attempts to gain insight on the mechanical processes involved in the auditing process but not only on the SSI exerting influence but also taking into account other stakeholders. Focusing on the principals also allows me to investigate the possibility of window dressing and the potential incentives to do so.

3 Theory

In this thesis I use institutional theory to gain an understanding of how schools and in particular principals could respond to audits. But I also use it to gain an understanding of the material gathered. Institutional theory in very broad terms uses institutions as the primary explanatory factor. What an institution is, is in itself a contested subject. So why is institutional theory a good fit for answering the research question? I would argue that the subject of the SSI and the schools is one of institutional design where the school is the institution and the SSI enforce the rules that are meant to shape school behavior and their practices. However principal behavior is not only governed by the rules that the SSI enforces, and they might be motivated by other things. *In Why Institutions Matter* by Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts they exemplify questions that institutional theories might answer: “What are the dominant practices that are not actually written down? Are there gaps between the formal rules and the way things ‘really work’?” (2013, p. 9). The heart of my question is to try to find out how the programme theory works in practice and how schools react to it. The programme theory in essence is a tool for enforcing the law, the institution of schools in the very broad sense, through inspections, criticisms and sanctions. It is a framework from which the schools as actors have to work within but it is unclear to which degree this framework is having the intended consequences on behavior. It is also unclear what the actual practice of schools is and how in line with the formal rules they are.

Institutional theory is not a uniform body of theory; it is split both vertically over time and horizontally into different traditions. They might all use institutional explanations, but the definition of what the institution actually consists of, how it affects the actors working within it and the expected behavior given certain institutional conditions differ. Therefore I will outline two main strains of institutionalism that offer different explanations on how the SSI’s programme theory works on practice and the effects it has on behavior. They might not necessarily be mutually exclusive though. They might both explain the data in different ways or complement each other.

The institutional theories will allow me to explain why schools react a certain way to the SSI’s audits. The theories will guide where I look for possible problems with the program theory and the assumptions that it makes about school behavior and motivation.

3.1 What is an institution?

The definition of the concept of the institution is a contested subject. A traditional definition would define institutions as established law, custom or practice. In more recent history however institutions refer to forms of social organization in many different forms, both formal and informal rules. Institutions also produce behavior that is predictable and recurring (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 3).

Claus Offe, a sociologist, uses a definition that is especially useful for our purposes and makes institutions easily understandable. His definition is an attempt to clear up the confusion around the difference between an institution and an organization. Organizational rules are dyadic; they refer to the interaction between the organization and the citizens or customers. An institutional rule on the other hand is triadic, meaning that a third party has an interest in enforcing the rules and using mechanisms to secure compliance and punish transgression but is not part of the institutionalized interaction (Offe, 1996, p. 203-204). When applying this to the subject matter of this thesis the third party is the SSI, on orders of the state, which is enforcing the organizations, the schools, to comply with school law.

3.2 Rational choice institutional theory

Rational choice institutionalism is both a subset of rational choice theory and a subset of institutional theory. Rational choice is often called social science by economic means (Pettit, 1996, p. 60). It applies some of the assumptions made in the discipline of economics to other areas like public policy. In its original form the central assumption of rational choice theory is that actors calculate the best course of action to pursue their self-interests, within the institutional framework. Institutions do not themselves create motivation for the individual actor, instead the motivation is an exogenous variable and the institution is primarily a means to an already assumed end. The preference is always assumed to be some form of self-centered utility-maximization (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 35).

3.2.1 Rationally acting agents

In this thesis I will use a form of rational choice institutionalism that is a bit more nuanced than simply focusing on utility-maximization. The original form of rational choice has come under a lot of criticism and rational choice institutionalism has been developed and “blurred around the edges” (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 35). Pettit (1996, p. 62-63) discusses the central assumptions about human behavior in rational choice theory. He refers to John Harsanyi’s definition of the central contents of the theory that “people’s behavior can be

largely explained in terms of two dominant interests: economic gain and social acceptance”. Agents act rationally meaning that they choose alternatives that satisfy their desires and beliefs better than any other alternatives presented. Pettit clarifies that what the beliefs of an agent is does not have to be determined by rational choice theory but can be influenced by a completely different theory (Pettit, 1996, p. 62). He then goes on to discuss the issue of self-interest. Many economic scholars argue that rational choice does not have to assume self-interest but can be neutral and the behavior is simply the rational attempt to satisfy whatever that desire or preference is. On the other hand Pettit argues that if rational choice theorists do not try to postulate something of substance on what sort of desire that generally drives human beings it risks losing significance (Pettit, 1996, p. 62-63). My objective in this thesis is not to build on rational choice theory or make any significant contributions to that tradition, but to utilize theory that is applicable to my cases. In this light I feel it is unproblematic to use rational choice institutionalism with previously mentioned caveats concerning self-interest.

Pettit writes that the idea that social acceptance is a motivation for agents that can work parallel to self-interest are not particularly new within the discipline of economics. He argues that while it does make models a bit less accurate to utilize both factors, that drawback is outweighed by the fact that the large plausibility that social acceptance is an important factor behind human behavior (Pettit, 1996, p. 65).

3.2.2 The principal-agent model

One commonly used model in rational choice theory is the principal agent model. It is used for analyzing how a principal, here meaning a hierarchically superior actor that is concerned with making its subservient agents comply with an obligation of some sort (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 56). However since the agents are rational and utility maximizing actors they will try to engage in different kinds of cheating, if given the institutional room to do so. The institution in this case is the rules of the game. Often when this theory is used the principal and agents have some form of agreement of payment and there is an asymmetry of information in favor of the agents. The agents who are some form of public bureaucrats have better knowledge than the political overseers since they are experts in their area. Often this asymmetry is exploitable by the agent in some form. When there is an agreement of payment for certain services provided by the agent and there is asymmetry of information, the agent can lie about the costs of service delivery and the quality of those services (Banks & Weingast, 1992, 509-510). This is the original version of the model and it has been utilized to design institutions. Since then it has been developed to add more complexities to reflect how the relationship between principals and agents has developed.

If we apply this theory to the SSI and Swedish schools we can imagine how they would behave and under what conditions. There are some conditions of their relationship that differs from the original model. The schools are not financed

directly by the state and their budget is determined by the amount of students they have and thus get vouchers for. However, they are still incentivized to not break the school law or at least not to be perceived to break the school law through the incentives set by injunctions and fines as well as naming and shaming. The possibility of cheating then depends on whether there is an information asymmetry between the schools and the SSI or not. There are three points of the programme theory at which the SSI needs information on the schools to evaluate their compliance. First the SSI collects material and documentation on the school that creates the basis for the visit. Then they collect information at the actual audit during which they evaluate to what extent the school complies with the school law. Lastly the SSI follows up on any criticisms the school receives (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 71). If at any of these points there is hidden knowledge and thus information asymmetry there is an opening for the school to exploit that asymmetry and thus a possibility of “cheating”.

Rational choice theory is keener than other strands of institutionalism on making normative statements on what the good institution is. One of the key issues identified by rational choice scholars is the disjuncture between individual and collective rationality. What is rational for the individual might not be what is rational for the entire collective. Thus a good institution is one that limits individuals from actions that are utility maximizing for them but leads to collective costs (Peters, 2012, p. 65-66).

3.3 Sociological institutional theory

A more sociological approach does not take the preferences of actors in the institution for granted. While it often acknowledges rules as having primacy over practices, rules do not necessarily mean compliance. As Anthony Giddens (1999, p. 127) writes; institutions do not exist objectively outside their effect on the behavior of its actors.

3.3.1 Rules and practices

Both rules and practices are seen as things that constrain the behavior of actors. While one is almost always influenced by the other in some way and while practices can perfectly reflect the rules they need to be theoretically separated. Different modes of constraint do not necessarily work together. Practices can be cemented from older rules and thus changing rules does not have immediate effects on the practices of an institution. Changing and enforcing rules is often an attempt to change unwanted practice. Offe writes that enforcement simply refers to that an argument is being made to why an institutionalized order should be adhered to (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 188).

The sociological theories of institutions conceptualize institutions and adherence to rules more in terms of the social obligation to comply with rules and practices rather than the incentives for utility maximization of the actor. This also means that the problem of the “bad” institution is formulated a bit differently than in the rational choice institutionalism. What the good institution is within sociological institutionalism depends a bit on which particular strand we are talking about but the one postulated by March and Olsen depends on the ability of the institution to instill its values into the members of the institution. The difference here is that according to the rational choice institutionalist theory (and the principal agent model) having the right structure of incentives through positive and negative sanctions will make a certain alternative the rational one for the agent to choose. In the logic of appropriateness model the practices and the values reproduced by the institution are instilled into the agents so that they feel it is the appropriate thing to do (Peters, 2012, p. 140-141).

3.3.2 Logics of appropriateness

One of the most influential contributions to the sociological school of institutionalism is March and Olsen’s logic of appropriateness. According to March and Olsen the institution is a collection of rules and practices. These rules and practices exist within a structure of resources. The resources allow for action, for example financial or staff resources. The rules and practices also exist within structures of meaning that justifies behavior and explains it, like roles and normative beliefs (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 59).

Actors may follow rules because they are appropriate, meaning they are natural and legitimate. Actors do so while fulfilling a role and an identity and fit into some sort of social collective. So the behavior of actors is always appropriate to a certain context and situation (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 691). March and Olsen differentiate between logic of appropriateness that is more socially constructed and a logic of consequentiality that rests on rational strategic behavior (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 701). March and Olsen point out that rules prescribe what is an appropriate action, more or less precisely. But we cannot assume that rules always dictate behavior. What March and Olsen attempt to do is to make understandable the process through which rules are translated into behavior. A direct and stable relation between rules and behavior would most likely happen in a very stable and legitimate institution. However the relation might not be so simple. In some contexts there are ambiguities regarding different roles and rules that makes a clear course of action difficult (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 693). Another problem might be that the rules are clear but they are incompatible with the capabilities of the organizations, be it financial or staff resources that are lacking (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 695).

In the case of the SSI and the schools the success of the institution depends on how well the rules are translated into behavior which in turn is influenced by certain factors of the institution. It depends on how clear the roles of principals, teachers and inspectors are. It depends on the legitimacy of the rules enforced by

the SSI. It depends on the clarity of the rules and interpretations of the rules. And it depends on the resources available for the schools to meet the requirements set by the rules. If a school would fail to comply or behave in a way not closely related to the rules, according to the logic of appropriateness theory it would be because the practices have more legitimacy and to keep following is more appropriate than complying with the rules. This could stem from a failure in the institution to make the actors within internalize the values of the rules.

The SSI has both a temporal and geographic distance to the schools which arguably makes its enforcement of the rules more difficult. Between every audit the schools are influenced by other actors like the teachers and the teachers' union, the municipal council or company owning the school, parents and students. There are thus many experiences and lessons learned between every audit that might translate into principles and practices that fit badly with the written rules (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 695). Expressed differently, the "hardware" of the institution, the official rules, is enforced by the SSI but the "software", the arguments and discourses in favor of the rules, might not reach the schools successfully (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 189).

3.4 How theories will be employed

The key theoretical concepts need to be operationalized into not necessarily quantifiable indicators since this research is qualitative, but at least indicators that can be asked about in an interview situation and categorized in some way so that the material can be usefully analyzed. The question of how one knows a theoretical concept when one sees it in reality must be properly answered (Gerring, 2007, p. 215)

The dependent variable in this case is how the schools implement the changes that the SSI recommend or demand. It can also be expressed as the level of compliance of the school. I did not expect to find schools that openly refuse to comply. Instead compliance was operationalized in a more nuanced way. Even if schools comply they may do so on a sliding scale from willing to unwilling compliance. Some schools might enthusiastically implement changes while others do so haphazardly and with resistance.

Following the rational choice institutionalism and the principal agent model I asked questions exploring the *incentives* that motivate the principals. The incentives were relatively easy to operationalize. I tried to go through different motivating factors and ask to what extent this incentivizes the school to comply. It was not always easy for the interviewee to make an estimate but comparing them to each other at least gave a sense of which ones that motivate more strongly. The interest here is not only to have an estimate of which incentive is strongest but to find out the reasons why certain factors motivate while others do not. *Information asymmetries* were operationalized into instances where the staff of the school could possibly withhold information from the. The interviewee did

not have to confess to withholding information but the presence of an information asymmetry is still interesting for evaluating the program theory.

Then following the sociological institutional theory and the logic of appropriateness I asked questions about the *clarity of rules and roles*. This was quite straight forward to operationalize. The interviewee was asked about the clarity of the school law and how it is interpreted and if the expectations on them as a principal are clear. Another concept to operationalize is *legitimacy*. The legitimacy of the rules enforced by the SSI and the criticisms they present were estimated by asking if the changes are in line with how the principal thinks that the school should improve. The questions covered if the *values* the SSI espouse are present in the school and supported by its staff. Since I interviewed principals it means I had have to rely on a second hand estimate of what the staff thinks. However since the principal is the operative manager of the school they likely have some form of comprehension of how the staff feels. When it comes to the *practices* of the school it is difficult to completely understand them with only one interview so the legitimacy and presence of values had to serve as indicative of how well the practices fit with the rules and to what extent the school has internalized the values in the rules. Lastly the *capabilities* of the school to comply with demands were not difficult to operationalize. The principals had a good grasp of there being a lack of financial or staff resources to be able to fully implement the changes or simply enough time to do it in.

4 Methodology

This chapter covers the methodology used in the thesis. This includes the general research design, how data will be gathered, what the limitations of the research design are and what ethical considerations I have taken. My research question is answered through a qualitative method going deeper rather than broader. For my research question to be answered I need data that is able to express subtleties and detailed mechanics about how audits work, how the institution works and motivations of the actors within it. To collect this data would be difficult through quantitative means which is why I have chosen to conduct semi structured interviews.

4.1 Case study design

Robert Yin writes that research questions of the How? and Why? variety can suitably be answered by a case study. Research questions of that sort are explanatory and thus they cover mechanical links that need to be traced over time rather than in single snapshot like a survey (one can of course do several surveys over time as well) (Yin, 2003, p. 6). Yin also argues that the common criticism directed at case studies that they do not provide basis for generalizations is misdirected. Case studies do not provide generalizations about populations but they do however generalize theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003, p.10), Yin likens this to experiments. Experiments are conducted and then replicated in different settings to build on and generalize a theory. Experiments, apart from ones with really large populations do not generalize to larger populations. Similarly certain results could be predicted from a case and if a theory correctly predicts all in a series of cases the theory is strengthened. Where the theory wrongly predicts a case or several cases the theory must be revised (Yin, 2003, p. 47-48).

4.1.1 Case selection

Case selection is a crucial part of the research design for a case study. The case selection in this thesis is not only which schools to look at but also narrowing it down to some sort of geographical area. The cases are chosen among schools from a single large Swedish municipality. In order for the anonymity of the interviewees to be secured the name of the municipality is not revealed. One of the key reasons for picking this municipality is that it is large enough to have many different schools and thus make it easier to pick enough cases with the

characteristics I am looking for and be able to afford some schools dropping out. It is also a municipality where the latest regular audit was not so long ago and therefore fresh in the memory of the respondents. Lastly there are some simple logistical reasons for picking the municipality.

I am using what is called a diverse case selection method (Gerring, 2007, p. 89). Gerring writes that a diverse case selection is used to represent variation in a certain variable. This sort of case selection will represent a population in the sense that it represents its variation but it might not fully mirror the distribution of said variation (Gerring 2007, p. 89, 98). I have chosen cases that variate on the socioeconomic background of the students, which in broad terms is also related to the performance of the students. This is done in order that I may determine if a school's capabilities in terms of resources (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 695) to implement the changes recommended or demanded by the SSI is at all related to the socioeconomic background of schools. The reasoning here is that while schools receive equal amounts of resources for every student they teach, students with parents from a lower socioeconomic background may have more difficulties reaching educational goals and might thus need more resources. The capabilities of schools or the socioeconomic background is not a central variable to the thesis but one that it might be important to isolate for. It is also of the main variations of schools that is observable from the outside without doing the interviews and arguably the biggest difference between schools apart from perhaps municipal versus independent schools. Independent schools were planned to be included first but very few had the other relevant characteristics for being able to produce useful data.

Other characteristics of schools are as similar as possible to be able to make the results comparable. These characteristics are also crucial for getting cases that are as relevant as possible to the study and produce useful and relevant data. Only schools that have received an injunction after the audit are included. The reason for this being that only schools that are being demanded to improve are relevant for studying how the schools implement changes, compliance and the follow-up by the SSI. The focus is on the SSI as an institutional enforcer of sorts. If I am to include schools that have passed their audits flawlessly or with some minor criticisms there would be a large risk of that case not producing any useful or interesting data.

The schools chosen were underperforming. The SSI has stated that their ambition is to focus on schools that need to be evaluated and improved the most (Riksrevisionen, 2013, p. 17). Their overarching goal is equivalence of education so improving underperforming schools is a priority. This makes the underperforming schools the most relevant cases. This information was found through SALSA, a model created by the National Agency for Education which estimates what results a certain school should produce given certain background factors. If a school is performing under this level then the organization of the school is somehow at fault rather than just the socioeconomic background factors.

The schools have received as similar criticism as possible from the SSI. If the schools have received criticism on at least the same issue areas they are more

easily comparable to each other since they have received similar input from the SSI.

Lastly cases were also included based on availability. All principals do not have the time or interest in doing interviews which unfortunately limits the cases somewhat.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The data collection method of this thesis is semi-structured interviews with principals from six schools. The principal is identified as a central actor for several reasons. While usually not being the responsible authority for neither municipal nor independent schools, where the municipal council or a company is responsible, principals are central as operative leaders. They make decisions and they have insight on the impact of decisions made by someone above them. Principals are responsible for getting improvement done. They are close to the teachers and the everyday work at the school while also representing the school when dealing with politicians. This means that they are familiar with the practices and values of the school. Principals are crucial to understanding how the programme theory works in practice since they are involved in so many of its “links”.

There are several reasons for using a semi-structured interview instead of a survey or a completely unstructured interview in the case of this thesis. A semi-structured interview entails having an interview guide so that every interview follows the same overall themes and subjects. However it is also flexible enough to give leeway in how to reply (Bryman, 2004, p. 321). This allows the interview to use the advantages of the qualitative approach. The interviewee’s thoughts are allowed to expand on certain questions that he or she has a lot to say about. It also allows for the interviewer to ask questions not in the interview guide but based on something interesting the interviewee said. Even though they were not included in the guide to begin with they might still be relevant and useful and expand the interviewee’s knowledge (Bryman, 2004, 321). Since this case study takes focus on including more interesting variables than having a larger population, opening for the possibility for the interviewees to mention factors that the interviewer was not aware of can potentially create a fuller and more nuanced picture of the subject. This is not possible in a survey, or at least more difficult.

The questions asked at the interviews attempted to get at how the relationship between the SSI and the schools work as an institution, especially pertaining to the audits and their programme theory. The interviews were as methodically as possible designed to go through every “link” in the programme theory to find and assess potential weaknesses. The interviews also attempted to get a full picture of the factors that helped and hindered the principal in the auditing process and how they perceive of it.

4.3 Method of analysis

My method of analysis needs to be clarified in order to fulfill the objective internal reliability. This means that if someone else were to follow my research design and analysis they would reach the same conclusions (Bryman, 2004, p. 273).

Gerring writes that causal inferences in case study research are not strongly drawn through covariational observations alone. It is not enough that X and Y covariate in a case, even though it is what a causal inference builds upon, since the case study does not have the advantage of large numbers and quantitative methods of control variables (Gerring, 2007, p. 172). The form of analysis used instead is process tracing or causal-chain explanation. The causal inference is built through contextual evidence and deductive logic to build a causal chain (Gerring, 2007, p. 173).

For the causal inferences to be made with as little assumptions as possible the interviews were as often as possible asked why the interviewee thinks that something works well or why they feel motivated by a certain stakeholder. This makes the analysis easier. I have tried to categorize substantive statements that indicate certain concepts or variables. Then through the contextual information provided by the interviewee I have tried to draw causal chains in order to infer causality between variables. This has been done as transparently as possible in order for the reader to follow my reasoning and clarify to what extent something is my interpretation.

4.4 Ethical considerations

When dealing with interview subjects it is important to take into account any ethical problems that might arise. In order to get as truthful and earnest responses as possible the principles and schools are anonymous. There are good reasons for why a principal does not like his or her identity revealed when talking about problems with staff, their perception of the auditing process, criticism of the inspectors or certain rulings and their thoughts about injunctions and fines or pressure from stakeholders. Schools with more serious problems are often covered by local media and it is important that the respondents feel they can say something that might be controversial without repercussions. To further guarantee anonymity the municipality will not be revealed either in the final thesis but will instead be referred to as a large Swedish municipality. It is also important to communicate this to the principals before the interview in order to make them as comfortable as possible.

4.5 Limitations

There are a couple of limitations to this research design that need to be addressed. Interviewing principals reveals how they think about and understand the process of inspection and improvement. But only interviewing principals leaves out the thoughts of the inspectors themselves. This is a weakness in the study. The aims of the SSI has to be inferred by their documents, research already done on the SSI and what the principals have to say. It is not unreasonable to think of principals and inspectors of the SSI as having a somewhat antagonistic relationship and only interviewing principals leaves the study open for their biases. One example of this is where respondents have answered that they do not receive advice or feedback. An answer given by two respondents is that the inspectors can only tell that something is wrong but not give advice on how it ought to be. Without asking inspectors as well it is difficult to get the full picture on how they answer a request for advice. On the other hand, given that the respondents are not only misrepresenting the situation because of some other grievance, the statements should be taken seriously because the usefulness or amount of advice might be best judged by the person receiving it.

Due to the limitations of this thesis in time and scope only one professional group is interviewed. It is still easier to infer the aim of the SSI by the documents available to us than it is to infer the thoughts and practical struggles of the principals. Therefore this limitation, while not ideal, focuses on the most relevant study object and the best one could do given the circumstances.

Another limitation is that schools are not being audited at the same time. Some were audited very recently and others a long time ago. Therefore it is important to be aware that older audits might not perfectly reflect how the SSI works currently or that the interviewee might misremember something. Being aware of this problem and thus gauging the strength of any conclusions drawn accordingly limits this problem.

5 Results

In this chapter I aim to present the results of the interviews and link them to the theory. However the main theoretical discussion of the results is in the discussion section. The results are presented under different headings pertaining to specific theoretical postulations. The six interviewees have been assigned a number to keep them anonymous but still allow the reader to discern between them. Each section covers different areas or factors that could affect decision making of the respondents.

5.1 Overall thoughts on the inspection process

The thoughts on the quality and justness of the auditing process vary between the interviewees but not to a huge degree. Respondent 3 is particularly happy with the audits:

The professional view is that an inspection is a good thing...they don't send an invoice (the SSI). If you would hire an outside consultant that would do the equivalent amount of work; Send out surveys, read it through, gather all documentation, read all of that through. And on top of that make a two day visit to the school, write a report. That would be expensive...so it is important to approach the whole thing positively.

(Interview, 2016-04-28)

The respondent emphasizes the professionalism of the inspectorate as well as the professional view among principal that might not be as negative as that of the public or the politicians. Whereas the public might think that it would be a great shame to receive an injunction, the professional view is that it is useful because it has pointed out a problem that needs to be improved.

On the other end of the spectrum respondent 4 and 6 are less convinced of the auditing process. In their view the SSI get answers to the questions that they ask which might not necessarily be the right or most relevant ones. One example was criticism of the quality of the school library as a source of knowledge for the pupils even though all pupils have their own computers to use.

Respondent 2 thought the inspectors were very professional but had heard horror stories from other schools about inspectors being unfairly tough. This gave the respondent the impression that one's experiences of the auditing process could depend a lot on the individual bureaucrat.

Overall the respondents were in agreement that the material gathered before the audit was extensive. As respondent 1 expressed it the SSI audits what is possible to audit.

5.2 Information asymmetry

To try to understand if there is an information asymmetry between the schools and the SSI the respondents were asked if it was hypothetically possible to hide problems or if the auditing process was thorough enough that problems would shine through. They were also asked if any preparations before the audits were possible.

The respondents were in agreement that it was more or less impossible to willfully hide problems. Respondent 2 explained it colorfully:

...they (the inspectors) are allowed to walk around as they please, you can't know where they will go. It is not as if we delegate a North Korean committee or something like that to raise the flag and sweep away the problems. They will have to be revealed I guess, that can be a good thing.

(Interview 2016-04-26)

Almost all respondents point to the fact that the inspectorate can interview students, parents and teachers, observe lessons and go where they like without the principal present. Respondent 4 pointed to how transparent organizations are nowadays which makes hiding problems very difficult. Respondent 6 said that the school could possibly hide problems but only haphazardly since the inspectorate could miss problems if they choose not to look at those areas. It was not possible to do so by design.

When asked if it is possible to prepare for an audit respondent 1 answered:

I would say that it is similar to the national tests in that you don't really work for the national tests, we don't work for the school inspectorate. The things that the school inspectorate looks at, we are always supposed to keep those things at a high level. Then of course you prepare to some degree...even if you think you have routines that work you check that those routines correspond to the demands of the law. The audit is an opportunity to think about what we do one more time.

(Interview, 2016-04-25)

Similarly to respondent 1 others answer that it might be important to go through some details with the staff one more time. Other than that it is important that the school acts in a way that is representative to how it usually functions.

These results strongly suggest that a principal-agent relationship between the inspectorate and the schools is quite unlikely since it presupposes an information asymmetry in favor of the agents. An answer by respondent 3 suggests that even

the motivation to try to hide problems from the inspection is unclear since the principal still has to deal with the problems in some way.

5.3 Sanctions

The sanctions that the SSI employ make up a framework with the intention that within it, it is the rational decision to comply with the law and the address the criticism expressed by the SSI. To try to get at how these sanctions are experienced by the principals they were asked what motivates them to address criticism and what they think about individual potential motivating factors.

Three of the respondents, 1, 5 and 6, had received injunctions with the threat of a fine. Respondent number 6 said that avoiding having to pay the fine was the biggest motivation to address the criticisms. Respondent number 5 did not feel motivated to address the criticisms from the fine as they were problems that the school was already aware of and in the process of addressing. The audit and potentially the threat of a fine was a motivation to do it within the timeframe set by the SSI which was tighter than otherwise planned.

The fine itself would not be paid by the school but by the mandator which in the cases here is the municipal council. Respondent 1 experienced the pressure of a potential fine more through the work with the mandator than the SSI itself. Others were not feeling particularly motivated by the threat of a fine as improving the quality for the students was most important.

The “naming and shaming” of schools through publicizing the audit reports was a source of pressure for some. But it was particularly tied to the media writing dramatic headlines based on the reports which did not happen to all schools. The respondents agreed that the language in the report which is of a legal nature lacked nuance and could therefore be misinterpreted by the layman.

I would have wished that they could make it more nuanced. They are overexplicit in the graphic sense. It's red, green or yellow in some cases. But you could write that “there is a high degree of deviation or moderate or essentially within the guidelines”. Use the language to provide nuance... it may be different for us in the profession, we understand what they write and mean by it but the average caregiver or the interested public might not interpret and read the decisions in the same way.

(Interview 2016-04-26)

Since the language is of a legal nature failure to comply with law is expressed in absolutes. This could potentially make parents more worried than necessary. Respondent 4 thought that reporters probably also lacked the insight into the school to properly understand what the situation was actually like when only basing it on the audit report. Respondent 3 highlighted that the report served different purposes and could be understood differently by different groups. The

media reads and writes about it a certain way, the public another but the professionals within the school system simply see it as a natural part of the development of a school. The respondent also pointed out that the reports are used in the political arena on the municipal level. The opposition is always keen on using the reports as evidence of the failures of the ruling politicians. Respondent 6 was relieved that fewer parents than expected had contacted the school. It was as the respondent expressed it only the most querulant parents that took advantage of the report to make complaints. Others understood that problems were more nuanced than in the report and most of them did probably not read the report at all. Respondent number 1 was confident that the report would not make a parent refrain from placing their child in the school. A visit to the school and soaking in the atmosphere would influence the parent more than the report.

Respondent 2 explained that avoiding naming and shaming is not the most important motivation.

The students are the reason we are here, so if it [the intervention] helps them fulfil the goals or gives them safety or whatever the problem is, that is more important than living up to some external image of the school. That exists as a factor as well but a good school that delivers quality and delivers citizens that can go out in life with their backs straight and enough knowledge, which is what we all want right?

(Interview, 2016-04-26)

The results suggest that while the threat of a fine is clearly a strong motivation for some, many express other reasons that motivate them more strongly. While compliance is likely the choice that gives the principals most utility, that utility does not necessarily come from avoiding a fine or naming and shaming.

5.4 Clarity of rules

Attempting to find out the clarity of rules was done through asking the respondents about how well the criticisms correspond with how the respondents think about the shortcomings of the school, whether it is clear how criticisms should be addressed and whether the original guidelines are clear.

Generally the inspectors found problems that the principals were aware of and agreed that they needed to be addressed, however there were some noteworthy criticisms leveled at the inspectorate. Respondent 2 did not agree with the inspectors about one area of criticism that led to a polemical discussion with the inspectorate. The respondent felt that the area in question was one that the school excelled at. The respondent and the inspectors were in disagreement how the law should be interpreted. Respondent 4 found that the SSI's role was too confined to finding problems but not coming with advice.

... it feels like they always manage to find something every time. There is always something on the area of systematic work, there is always something to nag on there because no one can say how it ought to be either. You have to build your own models. When you have done that they respond that it's not good "How is it supposed to be then?" "We don't know that but this was not good"

(Interview 2016-05-02)

The respondent's experience was that the inspectorate could tell when something was wrong but could not explain how it ought to be. For example the respondent inquired about a clear definition for special support but the inspectorate could not produce one. Respondent 6 also felt that it was disappointing that the inspectorate could not specify how something should be addressed even when directly asked. Furthermore they felt that a lot of the criticism they had received and the injunctions were more rooted in the changing requirements from the SSI rather than a worsening of the quality at the school.

We did not understand that it could go so bad. It hasn't been that way before, we haven't received such strong criticism before. And that's not because the school has become much worse but because they have changed their criteria.

(Interview 2016-05-04)

The respondent felt that these changes were unclear and that the respondent and the school staff were not aware of the newer requirements.

This sentiment was not necessarily shared by everyone though. Respondent 2 exemplified that while the latest audit led to some disagreements the one before that was very useful. The inspectors clearly conveyed that they were there to help. The respondent characterized the process as a "constructive and curious dialogue".

5.5 Capabilities

The respondents were asked about any resource-related problems with complying and addressing the criticisms. Most respondents felt that the changes that needed to be made were not especially resource intensive. Mostly it was about having proper systems for handling problems when they arrive. Most respondents said that it is always nice to receive more resources but it was not necessary in order to finish the changes.

Two of the respondents had problems of a resource nature though. Respondent 5 had received an injunction with the threat of a fine but also needed to hire new staff in order to meet the demands of the injunction. This means either going over budget or paying the fine. Respondent 5 deliberated that going over budget, while undesirable and something the respondent never usually had to do, it was still

better than paying the fine since the fine is simply resources thrown away at nothing; new staff on the other hand is not. Respondent 5 also explained that when becoming the new principal at the school a plan was necessary to gain some stability with the goal-fulfilment of the students. This had to be done at the expense of properly documenting everything which led to a large point of criticism from the SSI.

Respondent 6 was under a different form of pressure as the school was under renovation and all administration and teaching had to be performed in temporary premises beside the school. The school then received an injunction based on several problems that stemmed from the renovation. The respondent was disappointed that the special circumstance was not something that the SSI took into consideration.

They want 100%. It has to be 100% good study environment, 100% counteraction against all forms of abuse, 100% support to everyone that needs it. Nothing should be affected by the fact that the school is under evacuation... we thought they would take that into consideration, because that is something we do. We feel that "sure, we are under evacuation, but we can persevere for a shorter period of time".

(Interview, 2016-05-04)

While the respondent was unsatisfied with this situation, they did point out that it was the mandator that was pointed out as responsible for this by the SSI since the mandator had not given the school the conditions it needed to fulfil the goals. The respondent was glad that the report was clear on that but also felt that they were the ones that have to fix the problems in the end anyway.

5.6 Legitimacy and values

Most respondents did not have a problem defining the criticism from the SSI as legitimate. Most were weaknesses that the principals were aware of prior to the audit and were planning to address. If they were not aware, they still found the law and the ability of the inspectors to be legitimate.

Respondent 1 explains how they position themselves to the criticisms of the SSI:

...I have not really had any reason to ask myself if I agree or not. We have received criticisms and I can't position myself any other way other than to fix it.

(Interview 2016-04-25)

This suggest an internalization of rules and the rulings of the SSI. It furthermore suggests a clear idea of the identity of the respondent in the

institution. However the respondent explained that the same feeling was not shared by the entire staff. Some of the staff members did not recognize themselves in the criticisms received by the SSI.

A minority, but still a couple of teachers, thinks that the answer to the School inspectorate and the interventions that the school will carry out is a product of bureaucrats and is not grounded enough in the staff group.

(Interview 2016-04-25)

The respondent explained that one compounding reason for the staff to feel this way is because the principal working before the respondent was responsible for writing the answer to the SSI but then moved on to become manager of the school district. The former principal still continued to finish working on the answer and the interventions with a distance to the staff group. The respondent had gotten the impression that they did not feel included enough. The problems with implementing the interventions are not the interventions themselves but getting the staff to understand the necessity of the interventions. The respondent points out that the dialogue with the staff and other actors like union representatives might have not been ideal and the decision became rather top down. This is combined with that some staff members probably feel that the criticism is unfair or unwarranted. He continues to explain that the staff in large understands that the school has to do something when there is an injunction and the threat of a fine but that the speed with which the interventions have to be implemented is thought of as a problem.

At the same time the report from the SSI is thought of something that adds legitimacy in the developmental work. Respondent 2 explains that when the SSI criticizes something that the school is already aware of it works as leverage in the developmental process at the school. It gives extra weight to the necessity to intervene in problems that might already be identified. Respondent 2 explained that it was important to include the teachers and consult from them their insights especially when it pertained to points of criticism that were close to the teachers. Questions of steering of management are less relevant than safety and study environment for instance.

Respondent 5 has had similar experiences, having the report and the points of criticism from the SSI gives legitimacy to the interventions that are already planned. It is easier to push the interventions through than if the respondent would have had to do it themselves. It is also easier to ask for more resources if they are necessary to meet the demands of the SSI.

Respondent 4 on the other hand is of a different opinion. The respondent does not think that the principal can push the staff using the SSI, it would be a poor style of management to do so. The respondent also expressed the feeling that the audit could have a disruptive effect on the schools organization. Some of the staff use the audit as an opportunity to share their own criticisms which only results in what the respondent called mudslinging. The respondent expresses this as a failure in leadership, it takes work to restore a sense of togetherness after that.

Respondent 4 expressed other views that seemed to undermine their perceived legitimacy of the SSI.

...It's troublesome when they use those forms of sanctions [the fines] and I have a hard time understanding them. The judicial system that goes parallel to the ordinary judicial system, I don't understand that...one part of the state apparatus fines another part, the municipalities in this case. They have this vision that just because there is a threat of a fine it becomes more serious but there isn't anyone who does not take it seriously anyway. The only result is that you yank more money out of the municipal budget that could have been used in a better way.

(Interview, 2016-05-02)

Here, legitimacy is not only lacking in individual rulings but in a much broader sense. The legitimacy of the SSI even being able to demand a fine questions large parts of the function of the SSI.

5.7 Stakeholders

The respondents were asked about different stakeholders that could be influential in the developmental process and how the interventions are formed.

Respondent 1 explained that the mandator, the municipal council, had been quite involved in the process. Every principal is responsible for their own school unit, but the area manager and the manager above that level were also involved. When asked if the respondent experiences any pressure from that direction the respondent answered that all interventions were discussed and reached in unison. Then the respondent also explains that there is some pressure in the sense that the mandator wants to avoid a fine.

Respondent 2 answered in a similar fashion that there is more priority on sending in an answer to the SSI in a single document together with several school units (it is unclear whether it is done area by area or the entire municipality). This means that the mandator and area managers are more involved with review the quality of the documents that are handed in. The respondent is also convinced that the motivation from that direction is seldom needed because schools do not want to receive criticism. The mandator does not have to steer with a heavy hand for the principals to understand the necessity to improve.

Respondent 6 had to present the planned interventions in four different managerial levels including the mandator. The respondent found this relationship to be a bit unfair considering that the mandator had given the respondent the conditions for the schools through the resources the mandator has distributed.

Respondent 5 explained that the relationship to the mandator was about trust and the respondent felt that the mandator trusted them. The respondent emphasized the importance of direct dialogue with the mandator. Informing the

mandator through all the layers of municipal administration has a tendency to result in “a game of telephone” where the original message is distorted after being filtered through every layer. The respondent was confident that the mandator trusts the respondent and their plan.

6 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the material presented above using the theoretical framework of two institutional theories, the rational choice institutionalism and the sociological institutionalism. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the two theories can complement each other.

6.1 Rational choice theory

This section will present and discuss the results of the study from the perspective of the rational choice institutional. I will attempt to show how and under which conditions it seems to be able to explain behavior and where it does not.

6.1.1 Principal-agent theory

In the theory chapter the principal agent theory was outlined and explained. The principal in the case of the study being the SSI and the agents being the schools being audited. I identified three points at which there was a possibility of there being an information asymmetry, the gathering of material, the audit and the follow-up process on the interventions. An exploitable information asymmetry is a condition for there to be a principal agent relationship and thus the possibility of for instance window dressing.

Based on the interviews there does not seem to be an exploitable information asymmetry. The documentation is extensive and based on survey material, the school's routines and the publicly available statistics. The actual audit does not seem to have an exploitable information asymmetry either. Most respondents agree that problems at the school are very likely to shine through even if the school attempted to hide it. The inspectors are not guided by the principals in any way.

Two respondents answer that what the audit finds depends on what questions the audit asks which suggests some form of information asymmetry. However there does not seem to be any way in which the principals are able to affect which questions are asked. There might thus be an information asymmetry in the sense that the audit might miss some problem at the school that the principal is aware of. This asymmetry does not seem to be meaningfully or predictably exploitable though as there is no way of being sure what the inspectors will closely look at. It seems to depend on chance rather than any design on the part of the school or principal.

The follow-up process is harder to draw any clear conclusions on. The respondents have not yet reached the follow up process on their most recent audit. Principals who have experienced previous follow-ups suggest that the SSI can, if they choose to, make another visit to the school. Otherwise it relies on showing that demanded routines and systems are in place if the injunction is less serious. The impression of most respondents is that it is a thorough process if the injunction comes with the threat of a fine for instance. One respondent suggests however that the answers to the SSI might be presented in a way that is prettier than reality allows. However this pertains to a problem specifically hindered by short term capabilities of the school. It does not suggest that the SSI will not notice any window dressing yet since that is too early to tell.

Another thing to take into account is the motivation or incentives for attempting to exploit a principal-agent relationship in the case of schools and the SSI. If a school has problems serious enough to warrant an injunction with the threat of a fine there might be incentive to avoid the fine. However there are problems with this line of reasoning. The principal has an operative responsibility over the school unit but it is still the mandator who has the ultimate responsibility over the school. In the case of municipal schools this is the municipal council and there is no guarantee that an incentive for the municipal council carries over to the individual principal. In an independent school the organization surrounding the school is likely not as large and the administrative distance between mandator and school might not be as big. Since the study does not cover independent schools I cannot draw any conclusions about them. Returning to the municipal schools, as respondent 5 explained that the SSI presenting an injunction with the threat of a fine actually gave the principal leverage to ask for more resources. This inverts the incentive structure since the SSI identifying problems lends legitimacy to schools who might have previously asked for more resources. To borrow from the sociological institutional theory it seems many of the respondents have internalized the appropriateness of the rules. The main motivator for these principals is to make the school as good for the pupils as they can. For these principals, hiding a problem is counterproductive to their goals.

To conclude a principal agent relationship seems unlikely. Problems with window dressing are not supported in the material. The material does not support the presence an exploitable information asymmetry either. The material and the analysis do not show clear reasons for what a school would gain from it. There is some suggestion that it would be done as a way of coping with or minimizing the consequences of certain capability problems.

6.1.2 Incentives to comply and rational course of action

This section will analyze the material in terms of the incentives to comply with the demands of the SSI. It will also discuss the framework of actors as utility driven and rational and the support for this in the material.

The results above present the respondent's answers concerning how they are motivated and the sanctions employed by the SSI. Not surprisingly, the three

respondents that have received an injunction with the threat of a fine reflect differently on them. Respondent number 2, who did not receive such an injunction, explains that they would have been very surprised if they would have received one. While everyone at the school are aware of the arsenal of sanctions it is not a strong motivating factor as it seems too far away as a possibility. The results suggests that the fine as a sanction is most effective after the criticisms and injunctions have been presented in order to motivate interventions rather than to motivate compliance with the law in the first place. Respondent 5 explained how the fine was a motivator for speeding up the process of developing and implementing interventions compared to the pace they would have done it in otherwise. Respondent 6 named the fine as the number one motivator for implementing the changes. While the respondent clarified that the school does not pay the fine it was pressing “from upstairs” that the municipality does not have to pay one. A similar sentiment was expressed by respondent 1. Failing to comply would likely greatly hurt the trust between principal and mandator.

Respondent 5 explained that having received the injunction also works as leverage to ask for more resources. When the intervention needed to meet the demands of the SSI is resource-intensive, the presence of a threat of a fine changes the incentive structure. Without the fine, the principal might not want to go over budget to meet the demands and risk using a cheap but perhaps ineffective solution. With the fine however, using a half measure intervention would risk the mandator to have to pay the fine which is money completely thrown away for the municipality. Investing resources in meeting the demands, even if the intervention is not the highest priority for the principal or the mandator, is still better than risking the fine since it is very unlikely that the mandator would rather throw away money on a fine than investing in a school. This depends on the actual cost of the intervention and the size of the fine of course. At what point the mandator would rather pay the fine than investing is unclear but it seems safe to assume that the intervention would have to be a good deal costlier than fine. Even if the principal is not the paying the fine, it would likely be in their interest to avoid one as less resources in the municipal budget could mean less resources for the school, or less chance of receiving more resources. Thus respondent 5 illustrates how the fine as a sanction creates a situation where spending resources becomes a rational choice.

The second sanction is the naming and shaming of schools through the audit reports that are public and sometimes reported on by the press. Since schools act on a school market and have to try to attract students or the students’ parents, bad publicity about the school receiving criticism from the SSI should be avoided. The naming and shaming as a sanction is thus more focused on preventing points of criticism in the first place. There is of course also the additional naming and shaming involved when the SSI follows up on a school and it does not present the demanded interventions. This sort of report is also publicly available.

As presented in the results above the respondents do not seem particularly motivated by this sanction. Most agree that the language used is of a legal nature which sounds dramatic for the layperson and makes for explosive newspaper headlines. But the material does not suggest that it is something the schools are

particularly motivated to avoid. Respondent 1 is confident that a parent visiting the school with their child will feel the atmosphere and make a judgment based on that. Without having deeply analyzed news coverage, the material seems to suggest that schools that are already thought of as problematic, with low grades for instance will be reported about most anyway. Respondent 6 has received calls from parents that use the report to legitimize their criticism of the school. It does seem to bother these schools more when the schools are already performing badly or have a bad image in the media. But it seems evident that the public at large does not read the report and if they do read the content of it is likely through the press. Respondent 4 explains that parents, like students are tied to the school for a limited amount of time and then they or their child move on. With processes and interventions which intended consequences might not come to fruition until a child as already left the school, it does not seem rational to focus too much on these individual parents. While it might bother or hurt the pride of the principals that their school is unfavorably covered in the media and the report does not convey the nuance of problems, there is nothing in the material to suggest that it is something the respondents are really motivated to avoid. The respondents do not seem to see any direct negative consequences in utility from naming and shaming and thus it does not seem to greatly affect decision making.

6.2 Sociological institutional theory

In this section I will discuss the support for the sociological institutional theory in the material. Compared to the rational choice institutionalism which makes bolder and falsifiable postulates, sociological institutional theory and specifically the logic of appropriateness by March and Olsen presents arguments of factors that mediate or hinder compliance with institutional rules. These factors are not as easy to rule out or falsify so the discussion differs accordingly.

6.2.1 Internalizing rules

This section will discuss how and to what degree the respondents seem to have internalized rules and what seems to hinder or strengthen the internalization.

Respondent 1 seems to have most clearly internalized the rules and the rulings of the SSI. March and Olsen write about socially valid rules as rules taken as fact by most actors and thus they feel no need to question or explain it. From the scope of this thesis there is no way of knowing most actors take them as fact but it is certainly present. Respondent 1 explains that they have had no reason to ask whether they agree with the criticisms. This suggests both the rules and rulings as internalized but also an internalization of the role of the principal.

Respondent 6 on the other hand is quite critical of the rules and rulings concerning the school library. The respondent considered the rule to be outdated

and irrelevant with the modern information technology the students use. This seems to be an instance where the rules do not meet the daily practices of the school. The questioning of this rule might not have come up if there would not have been an outside reason for the school receiving criticism on the library.

Respondent 2 seems to have internalized the rules, but the rulings are questioned. The respondent does not agree with the interpretation of the law made by the inspectors. The respondent also expresses that their impression is that there is not a uniform standard of inspectors. Even though the respondent has had good experiences they have heard stories of inspectors that were not objective. The respondent's main criticism of the inspectorate and the auditing process is that it relies too much on the individual bureaucrat. These experiences could very well undermine the internalization of the rulings and the roles of the inspectors.

Another reason for a lack of internalization of rules seems to be the lack of clarity. Both respondent 4 and 6 express confusion over the rules. One issue is the lack of answers from the SSI on how a proper intervention should look. March and Olsen write that different logics can be differentiated according to their prescriptive clarity. A clear logic will then dominate over a less clear logic (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 16). If the rules and how they should be applied are unclear, principals then risk abandoning a logic of what is appropriate and instead follow a logic of what is most suitable for them at the present moment. What is interesting here and what will be expanded upon below is that the logic of appropriateness goes against what rational choice theory proposes. If actors have internalized rules as being the appropriate course of action they will follow them as opposed to following the course of action the gives the actor most utility.

6.2.2 Capabilities

The capabilities of the schools to implement interventions did generally not seem to be a problem. There are two important examples to the contrary though. The school of respondent 6 was being renovated and thus severely limiting the capabilities of the school. The school of respondent 5 did not have room in the budget for the teacher needed in order to meet the demands of the SSI.

Respondent 5 is a particularly telling example of lack of resources hindering both following rules before the audit and as a hindrance for implementing an intervention. The resources at the schools were not enough to both work for goal-fulfilment and documentation. They were then not enough to hire the staff necessary for the interventions demanded by the SSI. Furthermore the staff are overworked so that demanding a bigger workload in order to fulfill the demands would entail involving the teachers union. Respondent 5 expresses the difficulties of running a school in an underprivileged area of a segregated municipality. It is more difficult to hire qualified staff and many of the students have to learn a new language while also acquiring new knowledge in that language and little extra teaching time is compensated for that by the municipality. It is evident that the sociological theory taking into consideration capabilities and thus by extension

structural economic problems is a great advantage. It would be difficult to include the same factor using a rational choice model.

6.2.3 Stakeholders and compliance

This section discusses the way in which mainly the mandator and the staff enhance or counteract rule following and the implementation of interventions.

To continue the discussion above on internalization, respondent 1 had the clearest example of staff vocally disagreeing with the intervention. This adds layers to what has been discussed above. Principals do not only have to act within a set of rules, incentives and sanctions, but an organization with different wills and interests. Naturally this affects decision making. Internalization of rules is not necessarily consistent across an organization especially with different roles and rules that apply more specifically to those roles. As a detailed study of the entire organization in every case is beyond the scope of this thesis the conclusions we can draw are limited. But there are some things suggested in the material. A part of the staff felt that the criticism was unfair which suggests internalization of rules are important among staff as well as principals. The issue was not isolated to the criticism as such though but the intervention proposed was seen as a bureaucratic product. This seems to stem from the distance between the former principal formulating the interventions and the reality of the teachers. Respondent 2 and 6 also say that grounding the interventions in staff group is important, especially pertaining to the interventions directly connected to teaching. This seems to suggest that even if the principal fully intends to meet the demands of the SSI, to fully do so they must anchor it properly for the implementation to be successful. Respondent 5 illustrates a different issue which is both staff and capability related. The teachers union has filed an injunction to make sure that the teachers have time for recovery and a reasonable workload. This puts the respondent in a situation where the demands of the SSI must be met which can entail more work but adding to the workload is also breaking the rules.

On the other hand the SSI report can be resource in itself for the principal. Respondent 2 and 5 both explain that the report adds weight to school development plans that overlap with the demands of the SSI that need to be met. This seems to suggest that developmental discussions that are conducted with consideration more on the needs and efficiency of the school than to rules might follow a logic of consequentiality. When the SSI reports that certain areas are not meeting the standards of the law the principal can use this to introduce a logic of appropriateness that adds legitimacy to certain developmental plans.

While the staff might in some cases be a hindrance from below for the principal, the mandator from above is more of a strengthening factor. Most respondents answer that the mandator and the upper management level is either a resource in formulating the interventions or a motivator for meeting the demands. However, the mandator also sets the conditions for the schools by distributing resources and thus affecting their capabilities. In instances where the respondents

feel that their means are insufficient to meet the demands, the mandator is hindrance. But as has been mentioned before, the report and the injunctions can serve as way to legitimize a principal's wish for additional resources. Just as the injunction can work as a way to straighten the ranks below, it can also serve as a way to gain further means from above.

6.3 The good institution

In the theoretical section I had a brief discussion on what each of the both strands of institutional theory considers a good institution and I will continue that discussion here with material in mind.

In the rational choice institutionalist tradition, a good institution is one where actions that are utility maximizing for the individual but costly for the collective, are limited (Peters, 2012, p. 65-66). In the case of schools as an institution, the rational choice institutionalism would likely count it as a good institution. Hypothetically it could be utility maximizing for a school or a principal to not bother with documentation, special assistance or preventing abusive behavior in the sense that it could save time and resources for the school. But one could argue that there are collective costs for society if students do not get an equal education or the assistance they need if it leads to for example unemployment. Without getting into a large and complex argument about the social functions of a good education, we can assume that there are collective costs to neglecting the needs of the students. The institution hopefully limits that sort of neglect with the school law and the SSI enforcing it. With the threat of a fine the previously utility maximizing behavior is no longer utility maximizing. As I concluded earlier the principal-agent issue does not seem to exist either so there is no way of the utility-maximizing principal to neglect the school in spite of the laws and sanctions and hide it. While this is hypothetically true, the results of this thesis do not indicate that a willful neglect coming from a strategically reasoned decision is very widespread. However, respondent 6 mentioned the audits puts some pressure on developmental processes that were perhaps planned but had not been initiated for different reasons. So rather than a preventing willful neglect it motivates processes that are simply under prioritized.

From the perspective of the sociological institutional theory, a good institution could be thought of as one that is able to instill its values in the actors within it (Peters, 2012, p. 140-141). As mentioned before some of the respondents seem to have fully internalized the rules and values of the institution. But where is it instilled from? Respondent 1, 2, 3 and 4 have more or less fully accepted their role in the institution. But the material does not suggest clearly where that comes from. Respondent 3 might have a good explanation in pointing towards the professional that the principal is schooled in a certain form of professionalism. However, this does not necessarily coincide with the values of the SSI or the legislators. An explanation could be that the professional role of principal simply

entails following the law. This part of the study is sadly to underdeveloped for any more useful discussion than that.

Then we have respondent 4 and 6 and mentioned staff members of respondent 1 that have clearly not internalized the rules nor been instilled with values of the SSI. It seems that the distance and lack of clarity are big factors undermining the institution to be a good institution in the sociological sense.

One thing that must be discussed is the difference in normative postulations. The rational choice institutionalist theory is normative and even prescriptive. The sociological theory is more hesitant. Calling an institution good from the sociological perspective means accepting the law as good but that may not be a case. An institution with invalid laws but a fantastic ability to instill values would not be desirable. Therefore it might be more fitting to talk about institutions being effective in the sociological institutionalism as it does not necessarily express support for the rules within the institution.

6.4 The best of both institutionalisms

This section will conclude the discussion of the material and compare the theories and try to find ways in which they complement and support each other.

When comparing the two theories it seems like the sociologic institutionalism and March and Olsen's logics of appropriateness is a closer fit for understanding the decision-making of a principal within in an institutional context. It takes into account more of the factors that the principals themselves brought up but also offers some interesting explanations for why principals comply with rules or struggle to do so. The principal agent model did not seem to make a good fit within the context of schools and the SSI. The material strongly suggests that the conditions for a principal agent relationship are not present. There is also very little in the material that suggests behavior that the principal agent theory predicts. Thus it is not bad grade for the model itself but merely that it holds little explanatory power in this particular context. The discussion is still an interesting one as window dressing is an expressed concern among scholars. Disproving a theory is not necessarily less interesting than proving one.

The more general postulation of the rational choice institutionalism is however interesting in the context of sanctions and I believe they can be meaningfully combined with the logic of appropriateness. The material suggests that internalizing the appropriateness of the rules is a sort of primary mechanism for compliance. Several of the respondents agreed that rules should be followed and that working for the good of the students is the central motivation. They also largely responded that the inspectorate's findings and the criticisms were valid. Not all respondents had internalized the rules and questioned them or found them unclear and thus difficult to follow. The material suggests that the sanctions on the other hand are in place so that if the compliance does not seem like the appropriate thing to do it will be the rational thing to do. When the rules are

unclear, not taken as fact or thought of as invalid, following them is still the rational thing to do because of the sanctions in place. This applies both to the principals but also to their staff. Several of the respondents agreed that the injunction had a motivating effect on the staff. Additionally, the injunctions are expressed by some as a utility when legitimizing a certain course of action. Legitimacy might not usually be thought of as a utility in rational choice institutionalism. Combining utility driven actors with a more sociological idea of utility makes the rational choice framework more applicable to this context. However it is unlikely that one would be able to build a mathematical model to predict behavior as many rational choice scholars do, since there seem to be too many factors that are difficult to measure.

It is also important to point out that combining the rational choice institutionalism with sociological institutionalism might not be necessary. As mentioned before, March and Olsen use the concept of the logic of consequentiality which shares many similarities with a utility-maximizing rationality. Exploring the tension between the logics and where one takes over the other has been quite fruitful for this study.

To conclude, both theories make contributions to make the cases understandable. While the sociological theory has breadth in factors, the rational choice institutionalism can explain decisions in the absence of logic of appropriateness but so can the logic of consequentiality.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to find out how principals experience the auditing process. The purpose was also to see how principals fit into the school system in an institutional sense and to some degree evaluate the institutional design of school system, and more specifically the purpose of the SSI, from the perspective of different institutional theories. I have used institutional theory to most importantly guide the areas I look at, but also as way to understand and explain the results I have found.

The six interviews produced material that reflected both similarities and differences in how principals perceive and react to the audits. Some of the respondents found the audits to be a useful or helpful tool for school improvement. Others felt some degree of frustration towards the lack of clarity or substantial advice.

All respondents were in agreement that it was more or less impossible to purposefully hide problems from the inspectors throughout the auditing process. While they were not all sure that the inspectorate always looked at the most important areas they mostly agreed that the methods of inspection were valid.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the material is that the principal agent model does not apply to schools as an institution. The exploitable information asymmetry does not seem to exist as the auditing process is thorough and not entirely predictable from the principal's perspective. There is not a clear monetary incentive to do so in the first place. The incentives for trying to hide potential problems from the SSI were discussed and it is unclear how strong these incentives are.

The sanctions as a framework for the principal to act within works as intended to some extent. However several of the principals express thoughts on the sanctions as being either superfluous or counterproductive. On the other hand the presence of sanctions such as a fine is also a tool for the principal to motivate staff, legitimize certain courses of action or as leverage when asking for more resources.

One might ask what the results mean in the grander scheme of things. If the results were more generalizable, it would mean that principals will accept rules as appropriate and fact in many instances and when that is the case, compliance is not a problem. When principals do not however, they follow a logic of consequentiality or a more utility-maximizing logic instead. Then the sanctions are useful for getting the principal to comply. The biggest problem that makes a logic of appropriateness inferior is the lack of clarity in rules and clear advice from the inspectors. Another issue that undermines the legitimacy of the SSI on rulings is that several principals do not get the impression that the SSI is not

consistent in its rulings either over geographical areas or from inspector to inspector.

In theoretical terms the material suggests that while designing institutions with strategic behavior of utility maximizing actors in mind might be good, the more effective form of compliance still seems to be were the actor in their professional role takes the rule as fact, or as something valid and legitimate. An institution where that sense of clarity in one's professional role is fostered might become effective.

What does this mean for the SSI? Much of the auditing process seems to be the best use of the means available to the SSI. Auditing much like the scientific process has limitations to what one can find out with certain methods given a certain period of time and resources. But the problems that were raised about the lack of clarity, advice and consistency are likely workable issues given the conditions of the SSI. Some principals seem to rather develop their interventions by themselves because they know the school and its problems well and can fit it together with established routines. On the other hand some principals seem to have really needed either concrete advice or explanations of what an intervention to a certain issue should look like. School law touches on areas that are inherently "soft" and thus difficult to create clear cut laws for. Some uncertainty or lack of clarity might be unavoidable simply because of the subject matter. But to mitigate that it might be good for the inspectors to be able to have more of an advisory role instead of only reporting deviations from the law. From what has been gathered from the interviews, inspectors are not only people educated in law but also people who have previously worked at schools such as principals or teachers. The expertise very likely exists in within the organization already.

The material indicates a conclusion already drawn by the SNAO in their evaluation of the SSI that the consistency in rulings is lacking. The SNAO emphasizes the lack of consistency across the different inspection units in different regions of Sweden. One of the interviews suggests the same criticism. Another emphasizes that the experience varies too much from inspector to inspector. The fact that the principals interviewed have different experiences of the auditing process suggests the same thing. Based on these insights it would likely be useful for the SSI to have training and clear action plans and policies in place to ensure that auditing and ruling is consistent across the country and between individual inspectors. This could potentially result in further legitimacy for the inspectorate and logic of appropriateness among the principals. The perception of respondent 3 of the inspectorate, that an audit is a good and useful thing within the professional sphere, might also become more generally recognized.

It is important to note that while the material suggests some things, six interviews is not enough material to draw general conclusions from. However, my thesis has potentially identified issues and factors that could be meaningfully extended for further research. If I would have had the chance to do the study again but on a larger scale I would add more questions pertaining to the principal's professional identity and role. I think this could explain more about the optimism towards the SSI some principals showed in the interviews. I regret not asking

more questions about this since it would likely have contributed to an interesting discussion.

A survey with principals from all over Sweden could test the conclusions reached in this thesis. If one could create meaningful indicators for the perceived acceptance and validity of the ruling and the degree of motivation from sanctions such as a fine, then the argument could be generally tested. If resources allow, another project could follow the implementation process of interventions from within the school. While this thesis hints at some things it could be interesting to more closely, and over a longer period of time, follow the implementation process and even better understand dynamics between mandator, principal and staff. To better understand any dimension of a social function as crucial as schools is important and interesting. The research can be even more useful if it could be guided by an ambition to find out how the institutional design could become better and what schools need in order for them to live up to the standards that are mandated.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Interview guide

1. Describe in broad terms how the SSI performs their audits.
2. In what ways can the school and school staff prepare for the audit?
3. Do you think the SSI audits the aspects of the school that is most important?
4. Do you think the SSI has a fair idea of how the school operates through its audit? Is it hypothetically possible to hide problems at the school?
5. Do you agree with the assessments the SSI does?
6. How does the SSI present the improvements they want to see at the school?
7. Do you think that the changes that the SSI suggests/demands will improve the school? Are they valuable and well-founded?
8. To what extent would you appreciate the school staff believes that the changes the SSI suggests/demands are valuable or justified?
9. To what extent are the changes that the SSI suggests/demands practically doable? Is there enough time and resources?
10. Does the SSI take resources or lack thereof into account?
11. Which of the following motivates you to implement the changes that the SSI suggests / requires? Develop and motivate.
 - The changes will make the school better.
 - The city council wants changes are implemented.
 - The risk that the SSI gives school bad publicity through their reports and / or media.
 - The risk that the SSI demands a fine.
 - The teachers want the changes to be implemented.

- The students want the changes to be implemented.
- The student's parents want the changes to be implemented.

12. How are the changes implemented? Are the changes met with resistance?

13. How does the SSI follow up that the changes have been implemented? How thorough is the process?