

Interview with Monica Rolfsen

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This is the second interview of an interview series about leadership in the context of IDI's leadership development program for women. The first interview (with Gunnar Bovim is available here <http://letiziaccheri.org/2014/08/07/women-in-leadership-positions-at-idi-ntnu-interview-with-a-leader-gunnarbovim-ntnu/>)

I visit Monica in her office at the 13th floor of one of the high blocks at Gløshaugen, beautiful view and nice office.

I start with the question **How do you understand leadership?** I have printed the interview with Gunnar Bovim that I share with Monica and I add that I would like to have focus on the role of economy in the leadership question.

Monica starts by saying that it is extra difficult to define leadership when one teaches leadership. At the beginning she looks almost skeptical to my simple question and I admit I had some seconds in which I did not know what to say. I managed not to say anything and Monica started to talk.

Leadership is about obtaining results through others and economy is an important factor. She mentions the important of encouragement and confidence (norsk oppmuntring / tillit). She adds that there are thousands of books about leadership. But there are mainly two kinds of leadership styles. One is based on transactions and incentives and the other one on encouragement and confidence.

The vision of the department is centered around teaching, research and recently also innovation. The task of the leader is to struggle toward resource allocation that maximize results. But it is not positive that somebody "buy her freedom from teaching" (norsk kjøpe seg fri fra undervisning).

Here I use the occasion to ask Monica about how we can translate "kjøpe seg fri fra undervisning" into English since this is a concept that we do not have in Italian universities, at least we did not have while I was employed at Politecnico di Torino or I have heard my International colleagues talking about it. Monica says that she does not know how to translate into English.

Monica is aware that somebody publishes less than others. She repeats that it is important that all scientific personnel is involved in teaching as we have a mission to disseminate research based knowledge and students should have the possibility to meet the best researchers.

Quality in research is up to the scientists and a leader should work for enabling a framework around the scientists and the leader should work to establish and improve the framework around the scientists.

Monica adds that NTNU is changing to become a research project organization. An University – she adds – is less prepared to manage research projects than pure research organizations.

Monica starts to talk scientific publishing. She is convinced that everybody wants to publish and has empirical data. It is the responsibility of an university leader to help the scientist to have enough time for publishing.

Monica starts again to talk about research projects and the importance of having a good system around externally founded projects (NTNU calls this system BOA Bidrags- og oppdragsfinansiert aktivitet – it can be an useful word for foreign researchers to learn quickly!). When I ask how she defines a good system around externally founded projects, Monica mentions that we should aim at good support for 1) monitor the status of the economy in the project; 2) write consortia agreements; 3) write applications. “If a professor experiences too many problems, he/she will contribute to allocate the project to another institution than NTNU next time”.

It is also important to invest in the right internal research projects that can generate new ideas and externally supported activities. I ask a question here. I want Monica to tell more about what it means to invest in university leadership. She mentions 1) employ phd students 2) invest in support for EU project proposals.

The last point Monica brings to the table are conversations with scientific personnel (medarbeidersamtale). A leader should try to listen to what is important for the single scientist. Last but not least a leader should be able to step in and help when problems arise.

Thirty minutes have passed quickly. I have managed to write down everything and I could in fact sit there and listen for the whole day. Monica concludes by inviting me to come back if I want to discuss more.