



CHAPTER
9

From distributed leadership towards joint leadership – a case study: the early stages of developing a new ECE leadership model for the City of Hämeenlinna

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the preliminary results of the case study on the change of leadership model in early childhood education (ECE) in the City of Hämeenlinna, Finland. The traditional model of one director per childcare centre, was replaced by a model where two directors worked together as a pair, with one as the finance and human resources director and the other as the pedagogy and client process director. This is a new step towards a theoretical model of joint leadership. The qualitative data for the study were collected by interviews from the directors. The results indicate that leadership in the joint leadership model is somewhat deeper and with a developmental element in the director's personal and professional growth. Open dialogue, trust, communication and a common vision built the joint leadership and by describing the structure of leadership work, the vision of joint leadership can be clarified.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, joint leadership, early childhood education

TIIVISTELMÄ

Artikkeli esittelee tapaustutkimuksen alustavia tuloksia Hämeenlinnan kaupungin varhaiskasvatuksen johtamisjärjestelmän muutoksesta. Sen sijaan että päiväkotia johtaa yksi johtaja, kutakin päiväkotia johtavat kaksi johtajaa työparina (taloudesta ja henkilöstöstä vastaava päiväkodin johtaja sekä pedagogiikasta ja asiakkuusprosesseista vastaava päiväkodin johtaja). Uusi innovatiivinen johtajuusmalli sekä siirtyminen jaettuun johtajuuteen on askel kohti

yhteisen johtajuuden käsitteen teoreettista tarkastelua. Laadullinen tutkimusaineisto on kerätty johtajien haastattelulla. Tulokset osoittavat, että yhteisen johtajuuden malli syventää ja kehittää johtajien ammatillista ja persoonallista kehitystä. Avoin dialogi, luottamus, vuorovaikutus ja yhteinen visio rakentavat johtajuutta.

Avainsanat: Jaettu johtajuus, yhteinen johtajuus, varhaiskasvatus

ABSTRAKT

Denne artikkelen presenterer de foreløpige resultatene fra en casestudie om endring av ledelsesmodellen i barnehagene i byen Hämeenlinna, Finland. Som erstatning for en modell med en styrer per barnehagen, ble det utviklet en modell med to styrere som jobber sammen som et par (styrer for økonomi og personal og styrer for pedagogikk og foreldrekontakt). På grunn av den nye innovative ledelsesmodellen og en endring fra distribuert ledelse, er dette et nytt skritt i retning av en teoretisk modell for felles ledelse. De kvalitative dataene for undersøkelsen ble samlet fra intervjuer fra styrerne. Resultatene indikerer at lederskap i denne felles ledelsesmodellen er noe dypere og er et utviklingsmessig element i styrerens personlig og faglig vekst. Åpen dialog, tillit, kommunikasjon og en felles visjon bygger felles ledelse og ved å beskrive strukturen i ledelsesarbeidet kan visjonen om felles ledelse bli avklart.



INTRODUCTION

The City of Hämeenlinna municipality restructured its organisation in 2009 to a purchaser-provider model by moving away from traditional municipal management model. At the same time, the City began to renew its service structure, and in 2014, new services for young children and youth were merged into the same administrative unit. Therefore Health, education and social services were no longer separated according to traditional demarcations. Instead, the distinguishing factor is now the concept of lifecycle. It was decided to simultaneously renew the leadership model of early childhood education (ECE) in Hämeenlinna. The aims of the organisational changes of leadership in Hämeenlinna's ECE were:

1. To strengthen the role of the supervisors;
2. To develop the practices of pedagogical leadership;
3. To provide a better quality of services for families and children.

To achieve these aims, management and leadership functions were differentiated (see, for example, Fonsén, 2013, 2014; Heikka, 2014). The finance and human resources director is responsible for the recruitment of adequate numbers of qualified staff (and, if necessary, substitute staff), and s/he ensures that the other framework conditions are in order. The pedagogy and client process

director works *in situ* or side-by-side with the staff; handles everyday life matters and takes care of all issues related to customer and lead client processes.

Furthermore, both directors share responsibility for pedagogical development – it is not the sole responsibility of the pedagogy and client process director. It is also the finance and human resources director's responsibility to increase knowledge by organising training courses and implementing development discussions with staff. A joint task for both directors is the organisation of pedagogical meetings, forums and development arenas.

The biggest change – and the change that has brought about the greatest improvement in value – is the introduction of pedagogical discussions with staff, allowing personnel to genuinely discuss what is best for the children in ECE. The creation of the different pedagogical structures required has been crucial for these developments. In conclusion, Hämeenlinna is investing heavily in the reform of pedagogical leadership. This indicates the City's commitment to children – after all, in 2013 UNICEF declared Hämeenlinna a child-friendly city.

JOINT LEADERSHIP BASED ON DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

The aims of leadership arise from the core task and the substance of the work (pedagogy) (Nivala, 2002; Hujala et al., 1998). Nivala (2002) claims “that leadership is always related, in one way or another, to substance. Despite its central position, however, substance cannot be considered a subject. It is not an independent actor. Substance is defined in terms of the related actors, mutual communication and action.”

According to Halttunen (2009), the recent leadership theories emphasise the shared vision of leadership, and Kocolowski (2010) stresses the view that the time of heroic and individual leaders has passed. The challenges facing post-modern organisations are too complicated for a single leader to cope with. Decisionmaking should be flexible and efficient, and it should take advantage of many people's expertise. The need for distributed leadership arises when organisational changes make leadership practices more expert- and network-intensive (Ropo et al., 2006; Halttunen, 2009; Kocolowski, 2010; Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, 2012; Juuti, 2013).

Distributed leadership can be considered from two perspectives. First, it can be understood as the sharing of the activities and responsibilities of leadership. In this case, leadership appears as an entity that can be partitioned or divided. Leadership elements can be constructed by more efficient work processes, by encouraging the employees, and by building teams. With this

approach, the aim of distributed leadership is to generate management and to ensure organisational order. The second perspective on distributed leadership views it as the process of learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Spillane (2001; 2004) describes distributed leadership as an interdependence between people and their enactments of leadership. Leadership is thus cognition that is more widely distributed. In this chapter, joint leadership is regarded as the distributed understanding of leadership responsibility. Distributed leadership can be described as walking the same path, facing future challenges together, and continuously discussing issues. (Ropo et al., 2006; Juuti, 2013.)

In the context of Finnish ECE, there has been recent research on the topic of distributed leadership (for example, Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011, Heikka, 2013, 2014; Halttunen, 2009). The Finnish language poses some problems for researchers because shared leadership and distributed leadership are both translated the same way – as *jaettu johtajuus*. As a result, it can be difficult to distinguish the concepts of shared leadership, distributed leadership and democratic leadership from each other (Heikka et al., 2012). Whereas Kocolowski (2010) stresses that shared leadership implies leadership responsibilities and duties are shared between the team members, Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala (2012) consider distributed leadership to be the complex interaction of people who are working for a common purpose; thus, their focus is on the distribution of leadership among people rather than on the distribution of leadership tasks and roles.

Heikka (2014) considers distributed leadership to be the collective enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially the core task of ECE, namely pedagogy. She perceives leadership to be built through a shared understanding of the core task, and notes that pedagogical leadership is the main leadership responsibility. A shared vision and purpose of the work increase the commitment to work and enhance the greater distribution of leadership. According to Heikka (2014) “the development of leadership would include the development of interdependence which requires, firstly, quality assurance systems and tools to share information and decision-making between stakeholders.” The responsibility for the quality of pedagogy also creates stakeholders at both the micro and the macro level; these include ECE centre directors, and administrative ECE leaders in municipalities, and actors at the national level. Each solution in the field of ECE – just like solutions in everyday activities – can be considered as part of the leadership process.

In the studies above, distributed leadership is examined from a vertical perspective (see Heikka, 2014). In this case, distributed leadership is based on different vertically formed organisational levels of common responsibility or commitment to the core task. Examination of previous ECE leadership studies noted the influence of both teacher leadership and the role played by the context of leadership. This study emphasises a broader and deeper understanding of distributed leadership by using the concept of joint leadership. The concept of joint leadership is based on the foundation of distributed leadership and on the emphasis of the joint purpose and joint vision of leadership. Pair leadership is a shared and joint construct that produces collectively and collaboratively formed knowledge.

TOWARDS THE JOINT LEADERSHIP

The concept of joint leadership is partly synonymous and closely related to the concept of the pair leadership. Ansio, Houti and Järvinen (2013) argue that pair leadership is also applicable to many areas, as it provides opportunities to meet the increasing demands of working life. Pair leadership can be seen as a model of leadership that creates new opportunities for leadership, but it also brings with it challenges, such as work-sharing, interpersonal relations, and communication.

According to Ansio, Houti and Järvinen (2013), pair leadership models can be seen from two different dimensions. The first dimension is based on hierarchy, and it defines authority and decision-making rights; in such cases, leaders are either equal or in hierarchical relation to each other. The researchers describe the second dimension as a distribution of tasks among the leaders, which may be either temporary or permanent, and the limits assigned to common leadership tasks. Pair leadership can be described as complementary; thus, the leaders not only complement each other's expertise, but also offset each other's weaknesses or lack of knowledge.

As Wilhelmson's (2006) study reveals, joint leadership can provide the leaders themselves with a basis for personal development and learning. Thus, joint leadership depends on common core values, a supportive relationship and common work processes as well as complementarity, joint sensemaking and critical reflection (*ibid.*). Ansio, Houti and Järvinen (2013) also emphasise that the main pillars of joint leadership are vision and goals, and communication and trust, with trust being the most essentials of these pillars. A prerequisite for building confidence is the two directors' ability to describe their leadership and appreciate their strengths as a pair. Continuous joint

reflection deepens trust and confidence. They also point out that dialogue can take various forms. Its purpose could be the clear delivery of information, the giving and receiving of feedback, peer support, or open dialogue without an exact aim. Dialogue can also be seen as a tool, or as way of working. Miles and Watkins (2007) argue that the greatest benefit of joint leadership is the diversity of thought and talent. Decision-making may be slower, but decisions arrived at are often better, since ‘two heads are better than one’, and the paired leaders can use their individual strengths.

Miles and Watkins (2007) studied joint leadership teams and conceptualised the leadership model as complementary leadership. They point out that the risks inherent in complementary leadership cannot be avoided, but organisations can manage these risks by heeding the four pillars of alignment for successful complementary teams: a common vision, common incentives, communication, and trust. As a team’s complementarity increases, so does the importance of these pillars (*ibid.*).

Joint leadership in the City of Hämeenlinna’s ECE is horizontally divided between paired directors. The directors are equal in seniority and work together at the same ECE centres. Both perspectives of distributed leadership are implemented in the joint leadership model: this applies equally to the sharing of activities and leadership responsibilities and to the collective and collaborative construction of meaning and sharing knowledge about leadership. In the process of constructing a shared vision through distributed leadership, dialogue and construction of a new collective reality of leadership are emphasised (see Ropo et al., 2006; Viitala, 2005).

The aim of joint leadership is to provide a more profound and more diverse perspective on ECE and its management. This arises from the common discussions derived from the foundations of the directors’ leadership positions. The dialogue opens up new perspectives, creativity and innovation in the development of ECE, and also in facing the challenges of tighter municipal budgets.

METHODOLOGY AND NARRATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEW

The case study research design is a valuable tool for investigating the implementation of a new model of leadership in practice. As a flexible method, it allows the use of a variety of data sources. In the case of Hämeenlinna, data were collected using questionnaires and interviews with the directors. The phenomenon of the new joint leadership model is explored from a variety of perspectives. In this chapter, the focus is on describing the directors’ perceptions of the change in the leadership model. The chief data in this article

consist of interviews with the directors. These interviews were conducted one year after the new model was implemented.

Yin (1994, p. 13) defines case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” In Hämeenlinna, the leadership model is new, and the participants needed to find new innovative ways to implement this leadership model. Syrjälä (1994) points out that the basis for a case study is the individual’s ability to interpret real life events and to understand the significance of their actions in the world.

A team consisting of three directors was interviewed. One of the three is a pedagogy and client process director and the other two are finance and human resources directors. They were selected for interview because of their unusual and challenging situation as a director team. Overwhelmingly, directors work in pairs, but this three-person group formed both a pair (two finance and human resources directors) and also a three-member team.

The interview, which was recorded and transcribed, was conducted at the day care centre. The interview was conducted by applying the narrative interview method (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005) and it is based on an open-ended question interview (Rosenthal, 2003, 2004; Wengraf, 2000, 2001). According to Riessman (2008) a narrative interview involves the intensive interaction of the researcher and the participants. By telling a story, the interviewees structure, share and make sense of their experiences. Riessman (2001) claims that in narrative interviews, attention to personal narratives opens up discursive spaces for the respondents. The narrative interview method is appropriate in the context of this particular study because it is considered a future oriented form of data collection. In addition, the method produces information on experiences, and the narrator is able to examine long-term developments. Narratives can be used to understand the development of managerial work from the past to the present, and from this moment to the future. (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005, 199; Webster & Mertova, 2007, 10–11.)

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data analysis is based on the narrative content analysis, in which the material is reduced, grouped and categorised. The analysis of stories about management work aims to highlight the themes related to growth and development in joint leadership, and to submit proposals for joint leadership development. In this study, the narrative interviews form a joint leadership story, as well as

being three individual leadership stories. The joint leadership story has a plot structure that becomes apparent when one applies Labov's (1997) structural analysis (see Table 1).

Orientation	Complicating action	Evaluation	Result	Conclusion
Telling about the lived reality.	What promotes or prevents the events and/or a new twist to the course of events?	Evaluation of events.	Where did things get to after the evaluation?	Leads story back to the present.

Table 1. The plot structure analysis (Labov 1997)

The *orientation* of the narrator tells the story of the lived reality. *Complicating action* describes what promotes or prevents the events. Alternatively, is there something or someone who brings a new twist to the course of events? The assessment of the events is very important part of the story and called by the term *evaluation*, because it is applicable for the *result*, which tells you where things lead to after the evaluation. The *conclusion* leads the story back to the present.

The plot analysis can be used to reflect, and draw conclusions about how the plot structure was formed from the stories. The story of joint leadership is structured according to where the joint leadership is described to have started from (orientation), what has been surprising in the process and/or what has either been promoted or prevented in the development of joint leadership (complicating action), what has been the consequences (evaluation), and what has resulted (the result). Finally, a conclusion leads the narrative back to the present.

ORIENTATION

The start of the process of joint leadership was related to the organisational change in Hämeenlinna. The interview commenced with an open question. The interviewees were asked to recall *the time before* the change of leadership model. The new model of leadership was received as calmly and the interviewees rarely mentioned anything about the time before the changes. After this, the interviewees were asked supplementary questions about the story. The story rather begins by describing how difficult it has been to adapt to new tasks.

COMPLICATING ACTION

The interviewees were asked to tell *what is surprising in the current position compared to the previous task*, and *what they miss*. The interviewer asked also about *positive changes*, since the answers to the first open question mostly brought out the negative aspects of the change. Some of the management tasks have been left out completely, or they have been transferred to the other director. This change is described, for example, thus:

“Today, I no longer have any relationship with the parents... I do not know the children and parents who are here [at the kindergarten] [it makes me feel bad...]

“The hardest thing, in my opinion, is perhaps that personnel issues have been left out of my remit... and it is difficult for me to understand that I have really no more money [the use of which I must decide...]

In addition, directors reflect on whether they can avoid interfering with the other directors’ tasks. However, they are pleased that certain tasks no longer fall under their remit. They would have liked more support from their own superiors, and also some kind of strategic management and structures for their leadership work.

“It is a surprise how your immediate supervisor’s support has decreased. We did have a clear strategy and consider our objectives and now what... nothing...”

Former work tasks were considered more positive than they might have actually been. Of their former tasks, directors only missed those tasks that they had managed well, particularly if those tasks were not within their remit under the new leadership model.

The directors’ leadership stories describe this very clearly, although stories are not analysed very closely in this chapter. Three examples are briefly described as follows:

1. A director who was formerly administratively oriented appreciated the overall sense of control in the old model. Under the new model the director felt negatively when given holistic management work where a number of his/her former tasks were replaced by new tasks that required him/her to learn new skills and information. The director believes that the sense of control can be returned by collaborative teamwork: the overall vision of the leadership work must be created through joint discussion between the director pairs, not alone.

2. The human resources management-inclined directors felt that although the administrative work has been easy to leave behind, they look back favorably on strong, authoritybased management (positive meaning). On the other hand, the directors are happy to focus on pedagogical leadership and customer relations.
3. Directors with a strong pedagogical orientation are concerned with the quality of their work, because the pedagogical tasks were moved to the other director role. They feel that, although their position may be that of a finance and human resources director, the clients and their wellbeing are also central to this role.

EVALUATION

Adapting to the new tasks has taken a surprisingly long time, and it has caused a sense of urgency and even inadequacy. Lack of time seemed to be before the change but especially in the new position a clear problem:

“We do not have enough time to stop and to discuss about the change. We have not had opportunities to talk about things and get things agreed, now everything is so confusing...”

“It has surprised me that I do not have time to plan or reflect things what happens and I have to keep pedagogic meeting with too high speed plan.”

Lack of time causes a rush and the sense of chaos and that adds problems and difficulties to perform tasks that are necessary in daily work life. More time is needed because there is

- ◆ lack of discussion
- ◆ lack of strategy and goals (and support)
- ◆ lack of new frameworks, rules and the way to work together

All the participants stressed that problems are solved together through discussion. This requires time and organisation of the schedule. Especially structures of pedagogical leadership need to be developed. Through this will organised more time to the pedagogical discussion. Joint discussion was seen as a constructive holistic view of the situation.

RESULTS

The final part of the interview related to the new joint leadership model, and its challenges, solutions, and development targets. Directors had thought about how to make the joint leadership model succeed, and they decided to create a calendar showing when various meetings and staff training events will be held and what is on the agenda of different meetings.

“We have an agreement that we gather every Friday and discuss current issues... we’ll try to get a complete picture of what’s going on.”

Thus, the schedules and agendas of both directors and the staff were developed. Through this process, 1) *the common structure of leadership work is clarified*, and the directors know what tasks fall under their remit, and what tasks must be addressed collaboratively. Another aim was 2) *to provide the personnel with a clear vision of the organisation’s leadership*. This also helped in the personnel’s everyday activities, such as in the organisation of work shifts at the day care centres.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data of joint leadership (Table 2) shows – and this also can be considered the main result of the study – that describing the structure of leadership work clarified the vision of joint leadership. The interviewees concluded that they did not want to return to the previous leadership model and management tasks. Each thought that the new joint leadership model was beneficial and desirable, and that the model needs to be developed together; they argued that the model requires them to spend time together, and to develop unity and the mutual understanding that they are working towards a common goal:

“I dream that the staff says, yes, this is our area and this is simply the best. Then we have a situation where we are able to share our knowledge and learn together. And I am proud to introduce this to the rest of the city... that here we really appreciate the children and the employees and learning.”

Orientation	Complicating action	Evaluation	Result	Conclusion
Receiving a new management position	Time challenges, abandonment of the old methods, the same tasks still continue, lack of supervisor’s support, uncertainty about the task.	Lack of common time is considered a critical issue	Joint leadership structures are created.	No need to go back to the old days. The future is seen as better than the previous leadership model would have allowed.

Table 2. The plot structure analysis of the joint leadership narrative

DISCUSSION

Changing the leadership model is not an easy process. The structure of leadership and management work must be jointly considered structures. Open dialogue, trust, communication and a common vision build joint leadership, and by describing the structure of leadership work, the vision of joint leadership can be clarified. The change increases the importance of talk and needs sufficient time to implement.

The first aim of the organisational changes of leadership was to strengthen the role of the supervisors. In Wilhelmson's (2006) study, joint leaders contributed to each other's development through common work processes. This arrangement makes each of them a more reflective leader, and it brings with it personal development. The results of this research also indicate the same developmental element in the directors' personal and professional growth.

Akselin's study (2013, pp.138–139) points out the different types of management stories that early education directors express when they described their executive duties. One of those stories was the "travelogue of leadership", in which the leadership work is described functionally. The director requires diligence and high (working) standards of him/herself. The aim of the work is high-quality early childhood education, and the joint leadership model has many similarities with this type of story: Akselin's travelogue of leadership and Hämeenlinna's story of joint leadership both share the high valuation of leadership work and the core task of ECE.

The joint leadership model for ECE in Hämeenlinna can be examined from the abovementioned dimensions. The finance and human resources director is officially and administratively responsible for the supervision of the staff, while the pedagogy and client process director is responsible for managing the work process. However, the day care centre directors are equals. The remits of both ECE directors are designed to define the model in a clear and controllable way. In addition, the aim is to avoid non-substantial overlapping processes, so some of the tasks are clearly limited to only one director. Some tasks, however, consist of interfaces because it is necessary for the method of management. In particular, these interfaces ensure a joint leadership based on dialogue: joint leadership requires a balance between independent management and dialoguebased management.

The second aim of change was to develop the practices of pedagogical leadership. In this article, the results of the study indicate that joint leadership has many positive effects in deepening and strengthen pedagogical leadership (see

Fonsén, 2014). Fonsén (2014) argues that pair leadership can be the answer to the allocation of leadership duties when under pressure due to increasing numbers of leadership tasks and wider areas of responsibility (see also Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013).

The third aim was to provide a better quality of services for families and children. According to the directors, customers had hardly noticed the change of leadership model. The personnel – after the initial confusion at the beginning of the leadership model change – have a highly positive attitude towards the change. They appreciate the greater depth in work discussions and the space for pedagogical debate. However, the pedagogy and the client process director noted that the pedagogical debate must be guided: the personnel too readily start talking about day-to-day topics rather than about in-depth pedagogical issues. Joint leadership was described: to paraphrase, after the chaos of the beginning, the quality of ECE gradually increased.



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