


Høgskolen i Telemark

# Exploring staff leadership

A collaborative PhD project  
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## Introduction

- Leadership/management theories have almost never considered leadership as a craft that requires artistic managerial traits who highlight professional knowledge. Instead they have defined and simplified the work practices of managers into activities and functions (Tengblad, 2012:5).
- Leadership researchers have often divided leadership work into small, separate tasks and/or created models for effective leadership (Tengblad, 2012).
- The problem with such approach is that it does not take into account the many unanticipated events that usually occur and the complexity of everyday life.
- If this is the case, why not explore leadership work as social practice?

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## Purpose:

- **Adding** to leadership discussions in early childhood
- **Presenting** leadership as social practice
- **Illustrating** leadership as artistic activity
- **Discussing** a hermeneutic approach to leadership - as a necessary capacity to deal with staff leadership in a complex and distributed pedagogical practice.

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## Research questions

1. How is leadership performed in collegial work?
2. What if leading is viewed hermeneutically?
3. How can we understand leadership actions as artistic activity?
4. How does phronesis emerge in situations when leaders deal with the fluid conditions and their responsibilities in everyday work?

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## 1. How is leadership/management performed in collegial work?

**One example from the category: Professional dialogue**

The assistant enters the playroom and meet the pedagogical leader in the hall with a seeking tone where she wonders about a child playing. The pedagogical leader looks at her and say with a clear and listening voice: *Right*

They continue to talk about the child's challenges in play, and in the conversation the pedagogical leader creates a communicative space where she highlights professional concepts and the importance of interaction in play relations (from shadowing data: 7.3.2013: 70 sec.)

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## 2. What if leading is viewed hermeneutically?

- The hermeneutical approach views leading as a constantly emergent, interpretive act – as continually seeing with new eyes (Woodward and Funk, 2010:301).
- It focuses on the act of personal experiences, on discovering questions, and the constant creation of meaning.
- An artist – leader can be viewed as a seeker, questioner and crafter of meaning – therefor artistry is more than a metaphor.

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### 3. How can we understand leadership actions as artistic activity?

1. The assistant meet the pedagogical leader and wonder about a child playing. The pedagogical leader **say with a listening voice: Right**
2. When the leader deals with this situation, her professional knowledge come into play...
3. The leader is **active** by listening and by taking part in the conversation with the assistant.
4. The leader **considers** how she will look after the best interests of the child, professional development for the assistant and meet the organizational demands.

Gadamer:

1. Play – to-and-fro movement.
2. Horizons – Tradition , prejudice and experience
3. Dialogue/ conversation
4. Phronesis


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### Dialogue with the pedagogical leader:

- When I move into a situation like this, I am very aware of, at once, to take the opportunity to think about guidance/supervision.
- If we supervise situations in action, I think this is the best opportunity to learn. It is important that the assistants are taken seriously when they express a sense of wonder and uncertainty.
- I do point out, to the assistant, that we must think about what *we* need to do, (...) ... to get the perspective, that ok, the child is in the middle of its learning process of social competence. What then are our responsible actions? (stimulated recall, 8.3. 2013)

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#### 4. How does phronesis emerge in situations when leaders deal with the fluid conditions and their responsibilities in everyday work?

- *The crucial thing about phronesis, however, is its attunement of the universal knowledge and the techniques to the particular occasion, so that they are deployed in relation to “the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way... (which) is not for everyone, nor is it easy” (Dunne, 1993, s. 368).*
- Leadership as artistry can highlight the role of phronesis and how this kind of knowledge is active in taking the right decisions at the right moments.

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Exploring phronesis in leadership actions can help us rethink leadership as something more than activities and functions.