

Position paper Distributive leadership

Introduction:

The vision on leadership have changed during the last 200 years. In the 19th and beginning of the 20th century leadership was considered as "follow the leader". Organisations were organised in a pyramid form: the leader on the top, everyone knew his place and fort filled his entrusted tasks, individual entrepreneurship was not expected. In this way, the development of the whole organisation relied on the time, competences and vision of one person. This is not a big problem in a static environment. It's getting problematic when the context in which an organisation works changes rapidly and unforeseen. And this is exactly what happened the last decade, because of the globalisation, the open information society, internet, social media, the rapid growth of technological possibilities and high standard professional staff. This changed society asked for a different vision on leadership. During the last 15 years, two new visions on leadership has developed; distributed leadership and system leadership. System leaders are those who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to

support the improvement of other schools as well as their own.¹

Distributed leadership deals with sharing responsibilities within the own organisation. This position paper sets the ESHA standards for distributed leadership.

Under Distributed Leadership, everyone is responsible and accountable for leadership within his or her area. Good ideas come from throughout the organisation, and many people will cooperate in creating change. Distributed Leadership is an environment where everyone feels free to develop, initiate and share new ideas.

Distributed Leadership supports and strengthens already outstanding individuals, in a climate of trust, of shared responsibilities, teamwork and respect.

Characterizes of distributed leadership:²

1. Distributed Leadership does not mean *delegating*. Instead, it means finding the best path for expertise, ideas, and effort of everyone involved.
2. Distributed Leadership brings success in handling problems, threats, and change. It not only encourages idea sharing; it demands it. Good ideas can come to fruition because a team is ready to ignite the process moving from concept to reality.
3. "The way we've always done things" isn't necessarily the best way. Using Distributed Leadership, we can look for better ways and test them through controlled, reasoned risk taking.
4. In a Distributed Leadership environment, mistakes often lead to discovering valuable new approaches.
5. In Distributed Leadership, not everyone is a decision-maker, but everyone is an expert whose knowledge contributes to the decision-making process.
6. Distributed Leadership is not for mavericks and lone eagles.

¹ David Hopkins

² West Chester University

7. Distributed Leadership is about cooperation and trust, not about competition among units and factions. We all share the same mission, even though we contribute to it in different ways.
8. Distributed Leadership empowers everyone to make his or her job more efficient, meaningful, and effective.
9. Under Distributed Leadership, everybody matters.

Transversal K competences in distributed leadership

The EC has recognised 8 transversal K competences. In distributed leadership we could allocate the following K-competences:

- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression
- Communication skills in the mother language and foreign languages

Transversal leadership is based on the ligatures among functions effected by individuals or groups that have accepted to distributed nature of governance and are building on new modes of cross-functional coordination. While much of this new coordination is fuzzy and built on moral contracts, it must be clear that it represents the only effective way to guide the organization and nudge it in different directions [Putnam 1995]. To realise this it's important to acknowledge more K-competences that are transversal in organisation working with distributed leadership:

1. Equality
Although in every organisation there is a final level of decision making, in the process of policy making and sharing opportunities and knowledge, there should be a guaranteed level of equality. Someone's position in the organisation does not a priory give him a better position to press his opinion.
2. Trust
Trust is maybe the most important value in any organisation.
3. High professional standards
In distributed leadership we need high professional standards and professionals. Showing you professional ability makes people listen to you. It's extremely important, especially for the management to relay on. High professional standards helps to gain trust in the organisation.
4. Shared Vision and values.
A shared vision on the main course of the organisation.
5. Entrepreneurial skills. (initiative)
6. An excellent communication, especially in expressing opinions and sharing knowledge
7. Felt shared responsibilities throughout the whole organisation



European School
Heads Association

This position paper has been discussed during the ESHA biennial conference in Edinburgh by delegates from the Netherlands, Ireland, Scotland, Bask country, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

They agreed on the text but there are some remarks:

- The delegates agreed that it's not only sharing responsibilities but also the recognize what others *can* do.
- Headship differs much throughout the EU. Not every Head is in charge of all duties. ESHA should emphasize that Heads need autonomy to for fill their tasks.
- There are links between distributed leadership and system leadership. It starts with distributed leadership in the school organisation but feeling responsibility for other schools could be of benefit for all.
- Shared decision making takes the team forward and will develops unity in the system

ESHA should influence Brussels to act to state policy makers according to the content of this paper.

ESHA should advise and support the associated associations according to the content of this paper

ESHA should disseminate good practise and other outcomes according to the content of this paper by use of the website and magazine.

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