Expertise as a leadership process : leadership in future work networks

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Track 7.3 Co-workers and colleagues @ work - Toward a new beginning?

Full paper

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Expertise as a leadership process:

Leadership in future work networks

Abstract

At work, I have discovered how meaningful is the process of experts using leadership in managing tasks, work processes and networks. Diverse and continuous processes between different actors in different projects are constantly evolving. In practice, actions and achievements in meeting goals in different projects are very different. In my research I aim to add new knowledge to the work processes of experts and I aim to look the processes from the perspective of leadership. The focus of the research is on people working in expert positions and who lead processes and networks of people regarding their work responsibilities and goals. New ways of organizing work are emerging both in organizations and in networks. The results of the research can be used to renew leadership in organizations.

Keywords

expert, leadership, work process

Description of the research

At work, I have discovered how meaningful is the process of experts using leadership in managing tasks, work processes and networks. Diverse and continuous processes between different actors in different projects are constantly evolving. In practice, actions and achievements in meeting goals in different projects are very different - why? In my view, the purposefulness of the actions is strongly linked to the abilities and possibilities of the expert who is leading the process and network related to it – their task is to manage the entity, optimize resources,

acquire right people, show direction, give responsibility and power, and be able to react to changing situations. Hierarchy and bureaucracy are a part of that entity as well as development. What are the things and processes that hinder or promote expertise leadership in the work process? This thinking led me to my research topic Expertise as a leadership process: Leadership in future work networks.

Working life is constantly becoming more hectic and more complex, so the importance of leadership is even further emphasized. The shift in work as a whole and also megatrends, including digitalization, are increasingly affecting the future of work. What can one person know and control? What kind of expertise is essential? What are the conditions, qualities and skills that actually predict successful and goal-oriented expertise leadership? These thoughts and reflections led me to my research topic on leadership in future work networks.

In the future of work, more and more employees will work in temporary employment, projects, and freelance / micro-entrepreneurial relationships, networking and teleworking, forming networks around tasks and projects (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2017). These networks are led by experts, who have goals and boundaries for their work and who acquire the knowledgeable people required by the task of the network. In the changing and busy working environment, the network leader's qualities and skills play a key role in performing of the task. The expert must be able to create a common intent, know-how and trust for the network in order to achieve the goal through the collective work.

When the leader and the worker work in different places in a shared task, the performance of the employee is particularly affected by the complexity of the work, the collaboration with experienced colleagues and the leadership experience of the leader (Bonet, Salvador 2017); therefore, the leader's qualities should be evaluated in particular when networking remotely. Czarniawska (2008) uses the term 'control at a distance', which I think is a descriptive concept in the essence of network leadership and expertise. Group collaboration is supported by experienced independence and meaningfulness (Martela & Pessi 2018), so leader enabling responsibility and empowerment contributes to this. Significance at work involves, for example, challenges, creativity and autonomy; and psychological safety is linked to the support of supervisor and co-workers and joint trust (Rashtogi 2018).

At best, remote leadership leads to excellent employee performance; especially if the employee works in parallel with other group members (Bonet, Salvador 2017). Elements related to collective expertise contribute to the emergence of community spirit, and these are, for

example, concrete routine practices, preserving independence, sharing and generosity, story-telling, practices that promote the blending of knowledge and mindsets, hand-making and a loosely organized structure (Koivunen 2005). Creating a sense of community requires the creation of an atmosphere of trust that is associated with both the members of the group, and especially with the leadership. Different leadership activities and behavior result in a different kind of trust: personality-related characteristics inspire knowledge and identity-related trust, and role-related attributes create calculus-based trust (Hasel & Grover 2017), while passive leadership is negative in terms of trust and justice (Holtz & Biyun 2017).

My research 'Expertise as a leadership process: Leadership in future work networks' is attached to leadership research, network research and future of work. The focus of the research is on people working in expert positions and who lead processes and networks of people regarding their work responsibilities and goals. In other words, the research focuses on the continuous process of leadership as a function of experts. The research creates new knowledge about leadership and renewal of organizations. It also contributes to the leadership education in Finland and to support Finland's economic growth and entrepreneurship. The results of the research serve the changing working life and society, taking into account digitalization and other forms of changing employment.
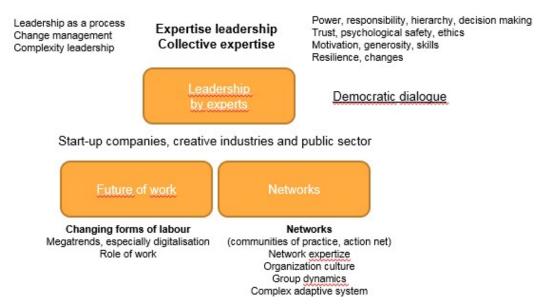
Conducting research

Preliminary research questions are:

- How experts lead their work processes?
- How do experts lead their networks?
- How to build trust in the work processes and networks?
- How do experts manage change and complexity?

In the research, the phenomenon is approached from three different perspectives:

1) leadership (responsibility, trust, ethics, complexity and changes);

2) networking (expertise leadership, collective expertise); and

3) future of work (changing forms of labour, projects, digitalization, megatrends).

Leadership in future work networks – Expertise as a leadership process

Leadership as a process
Change management
Complexity leadership

Expertise leadership
Collective expertise

Power, responsibility, hierarchy, decision making
Trust, psychological safety, ethics
Motivation, generosity, skills
Resilience, changes

Leadership by experts

Democratic dialogue

Start-up companies, creative industries and public sector

Future of work

Networks

Changing forms of labour
Megatrends, especially digitalisation
Role of work

Networks
(communities of practice, action net)
Network expertize
Organization culture
Group dynamics
Complex adaptive system

Picture 1. Framework.

1. Leadership

With the complexity and change of work, leadership also needs to change: leadership will require different skills and attitudes in the future than in previously hierarchically organized activities. The transformation of leadership into an enabler will require, among other things, better identifying and strengthening of workers skills as well as making intuitive decisions in constant change. Decision-making courage (Mäki 2017) is part of this. The change in future work will create a demand for leaders who can motivate people, lead networks and understand digitality. This contributes to both business and education, as competence plays an important role in all future visions for Finland (Eduskunnan tulevaisuusvaliokunnan julkaisu 1/2018).

2. Network

Project networks are created to solve a defined task, and their construction takes into account the skills and knowledge required to solve a task, the skills and abilities of the workers, and the ability to achieve the goal. The results come from the network's co-production, where everyone's input and know-how affect the outcome. The leader guides that the network understands the core and strategic goals of the work, supports work and helps with problem solving. In the future, individual human competencies will not suffice to manage the amount of information required by all entities, nor will the individual's time be sufficient to manage these diverse changes. Thus combining the network's skills and leadership are essential.

3. Future of work

The research observes the transformation and change of work and digitalization and other megatrends. Appreciations of the individuals' as well as the dependence of work on time, place and quality of employment are in the process of change. Social responsibility, ethics, morals and values are becoming increasingly important in the future. Transparency and ethically sustainable activities are increasingly building on brand values. In this interpretation and guidance work, leadership plays a major role; through leadership vision of the future is made, stories created, trust and partnerships built, and thus productive business activity is created.

Data collection

Expert leadership is to be explored in different organizations (eg start-up companies, creative industries and the public sector). In the study, experts as leaders are interviewed and further surveyed. The topics raised in the interviews can be covered in a survey conducted for all participants in the research. The research questionnaire explores the topics emerging from the research themes. The aim of the research is to obtain results that show the effective ways, practices and characteristics of expertise leadership in future work networks. The aim of the research is to be both problem-oriented and solution-oriented, ie the goal is to find usable solutions for expert leadership in networks. Research is resource-oriented and research questions are kept open and refined as research progresses.

Persons for the research are searched for by contacting and negotiating with the coordinating actors. These may include, for example:

• Finnish Business Angels Network (FiBAN) or other networks through which Finnish start-ups can be reached

• Federation of Marketing, Technology and Creativity MTL - Creative Industries (Markkinoinnin, teknologian ja luovuuden liitto MTL - luovien alojen toimijat)

• Association of Local and Regional Authorities - Municipalities of Finland and municipal federations, federations of provinces (Kuntaliitto - Suomen kunnat ja kuntayhtymät, maakuntien liitot)

Why this research is important?

This research is important in order to optimize the time individuals spend working to achieve the goals of the organization, all this in more and more complex and constantly changing work and society. Hierarchies of organizations are in change as well as the roles of experts.

New ways of organizing the work are emerging both in organizations and in networks. The results of the research can be used to renew leadership of organizations in the context of future work. The research data produced can be used to bring these models to organizations. In addition, the results can be utilized at different levels of Finnish education system to promote business competence of the country. The goal is that the results of the research can be used to monitor the quality of leadership in organizations. This would contribute to the quality and profitability of Finnish business, both for owners, employees and society. In the public sector, the exploitation of research results would contribute to more efficient and effective use of public funds through management.

In my view, leadership plays a key role in Finnish working life - enabling or preventing individuals from achieving their goals. I feel that the effective use of funds by companies and society is largely crystallized by competent leadership. Future working life will be successful for those who are able to recruit and motivate the best experts into functional, successful entities.

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