

Marika Tammeaid
**Public sector
leadership
meta-skills**



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Tiivistelmä

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkastelee julkista hallintoa ja julkisen sektorin johtamista metataitojen näkökulmasta. Se tuo uuden näkökulman julkisen johtamisen onnistumisen edellytyksiin, erityisesti ihmislähtöisen julkisen politiikan ja sektorit ylittävän yhteistyön tavoitteiden saavuttamisessa. Julkisen johtamisen metataidot edistävät julkista hallintoa, jolla on kyvykkyyttä dynaamiseen yhteistyöhön hallinnon eri alueiden kesken ja yhteiskunnan toisten toimijoiden kanssa. Tämän yhteistyön tiivistäminen on tärkeää ihmislähtöisen julkisen toiminnan edistämässä rakenne- ja valtalähtöisen lähestymistavan sijaan.

Metataidoilla tarkoitetaan tässä tutkimuksessa toimintaympäristöstä toiseen siirrettävissä olevia ja katalyyttisiä toimijuustaitoja. Johtamisen metataidot auttavat kuratoimaan sosiaalista ja mentaalista tilaa tuloksellisen vuorovaikutuksen aikaansaamiseksi erilaisista lähtöasetelmistä tulevien ihmisten välille. Tutkimuksen taitonäkökulma korostaa sitä, että hyvä julkinen johtaminen on opittavissa ja opetettavissa olevaa taitoa, jonka varassa hyvin erilaiset ihmiset voivat onnistua johtajina.

Metataitojen huomioiminen ja kehittäminen on erityisen tärkeää ja ajankohtaista moniarvoisessa ja kompleksisessa maailmassa ja haastaviin yhteiskunnallisiin asioihin tarttumisessa. Reaktiivisten tai valmiiden hallinnollisten mallien sijaan, metataidot auttavat ottamaan käyttöön inhimilliset kyvyt luovien, uusien ja yhdessä luotujen ratkaisujen löytämiseksi – sekä hallinnon sisällä että yhteistyössä yhteiskunnan muiden sektoreiden ja kansalaisten kanssa.

Tutkimus erittelee metataitojen suhdetta julkisen sektorin johtamisen valtavirtaa edustaviin teorioihin sekä julkisen hallinnon tutkimusperinteisiin. Metataitojen teoreettisen taustan muodostavat voimavara- ja ratkaisukeskeinen ajattelu, positiivinen coaching-psykologia, kompleksisuus ja systeemiajattelu, organisaatioiden oppiminen ja sosiaalinen konstruktivismi. Ne nostavat esiin ihmisen ja ihmisyhteisöjen oppimisen näkökulmaa suhteessa johtamiskäsityksiin ja julkisen hallinnon olemukseen. Tutkimuksen empiiriset havainnot nojaavat Suomen ylimmän virkamiesjohdon haastatteluaineistoon.

Asiasanat: Julkinen sektori, johtaminen, metataidot, yhteistoiminnallinen hallinta, johtamisen kehittäminen, oppiminen, kompleksisuus

Abstract

This dissertation suggests looking at governance and public sector leadership from an unaccustomed public sector leadership meta-skills perspective. It suggests that this change of perspective can be useful in the preparation of public policy and in developing collaborative and human-centred governance that aspires to create public value. Public sector leadership meta-skills accelerate public administration that has the ability for dynamic cooperation between different areas of administration and with other actors in society. This kind of cooperation is important in promoting a human-centred rationale of public administration instead of a structure- and power-oriented approach.

Meta-skills refer to dynamic and processual capabilities of thinking and action that appear in interplay with the context. Meta-skills that help to curate social space for productive interaction would be particularly valuable today to counter the complexity and cross-sectoral challenges in the public sector. Instead of reactive responses, meta-skills can ignite the social and political imagination, reveal multiple choices, varying temporal scopes of phenomena, and make use of the available opportunities to create better solutions.

New skills development is needed in order to enhance public value creation and to place the citizens and civic society at the core of the decision-making and administrative purpose. The skills approach of this dissertation highlights that good public sector leadership is learnable, teachable, and adoptable by leaders with different strengths.

The dissertation discusses the similarities and differences between meta-skills and mainstreaming public sector leadership scholarly approaches. The central background theories for meta-skills are learning and change in the context of complexity and collaborative governance, a Solution-Focused view on change, positive coaching psychology and a virtues approach, organisational learning, an open systems approach, and social construction. The empirical findings of the concept and hypothesis of public sector leadership meta-skills rely on interviews of the top civil service leaders of the central government of Finland.

Keywords: Public sector, leadership, meta-skills, collaborative governance, leadership development, learning, complexity

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something valuable to provide within the fields of public policy and public sector leadership.

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Publications

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Article III: Tammeaid, M. (2023) Reforming public leadership through learning. In Virtanen, P., Tammeaid, M. & Jalonen, H. (2023). *Public leadership: a human-centred approach*, Routledge.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Publication I. Public leadership meta-skills.

This article was co-written by Professor Virtanen and me.

Publication II. Nurturing human-centredness through public leadership meta-skills.

This article is a single-authored chapter of a co-authored book. In addition to the theoretical discussion, the section reports the results and synthesizes of semi-structured interviews conducted and analysed by me.

Publication III. Reforming public leadership through learning.

This article is a single-authored chapter of a co-authored book. In addition to theoretical discussion, the section presents and synthesizes the results of semi-structured interviews conducted and analysed by me.

Publication IV. Upskilling public sector leadership in the context of the new normal of public governance and public policies.

I wrote the manuscript for the original article and absorbed comments from Professor Virtanen and Professor Jalonen. I served as the corresponding author and the conference presenter of this article.

1 INTRODUCTION

- Birgitte Nyborg* - Is there something else I should know as a member of the cabinet?
- Mette Kragh* - What would that be?
- Birgitte Nyborg* - So, it was not that you wanted?
- Mette Kragh* - I think you know why I asked you to come.
- Birgitte Nyborg* - Oh yes... To tell me that Greenland is part of the entity, which belongs to the prime minister. To which I want to add that arctic raw materials belong to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, therefore I find that we both have the right to go into the matter.
- Mette Kragh* - Maybe it is also so that the 56 000 Greenlanders want to decide themselves what they do with their oil.
- Birgitte Nyborg* - Yes, but you know as well as I that if it turns out that there is enough oil, raw materials policy turns very quickly to foreign policy, and then they will not decide for themselves.
- Mette Kragh* - You are not the one who decides if the Greenlanders utilize their oil or not, Birgitte.
- (Long silence)
- Mette Kragh continues* - And I can't have a Minister of Foreign Affairs that plays solo because of her personal climate policy in a matter of such great potential importance than this. So, I ask you to correct this issue for the press as soon as possible, and after that, you have done it, Prime Minister takes over.
- (Long silence)
- Birgitte Nyborg* - So, it was basically for this you invited me up here, to say that it is you who decides.
- Mette Kragh* - You are not the Prime Minister anymore.
- (Long silence)

This discussion is an excerpt from a popular Danish TV drama series *Borgen*¹. It is a discussion between two fictional characters, Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Kragh and Minister of Foreign Affairs Birgitte Nyborg². The drama series *Borgen* is very popular in many countries, and its plots are seen as condensing many recognizable phenomena from the spheres of politics and public decision-making. The number of awards given to *Borgen*,³ has garnered suggests it provides identifiable scenes of politics and public decision-making, despite being fictional.

The above excerpt offers a perfect beginning for this dissertation. The fictional conversation between two political leaders seems to include some ingredients that would be recognizable in the public sector in general. My decades-long work in public service spurs memories of many analogous or comparable discussions inside governmental institutions – in Finland and other countries – between politicians, between politicians and civil service leaders, or between civil service leaders. A common factor in these discussions was that the interlocutors very quickly turned the focus of the discussion to jurisdiction and the right to exercise power i.e., often choosing that reductionist path instead of starting to discuss the issue itself.

The dramatized scene of an oil find in this TV drama series is a good example of the complex issues public administration leaders deal with. Complex issues are characterized by not falling under one public authority, being hard to define, having intertwined effects, and also continuously changing and easily escalating, and furthermore affecting many different actors holding conflicting values (Head, 2022, p. 21-36; Bozeman, 2019; Termeer & Dewulf, 2018). Nevertheless, there seems to be a tendency to try to cram complex issues into the jurisdiction of one administrative sector or another to make complex issues manageable (Head, 2022, p. 35, 48). Episodes of *Borgen* illustrate how such procedures easily lead to more confusion and the deterioration of the relationships between parties due to the exercise of suppressing power. This phenomenon is also recognized in the research literature (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 16; Schön, 1983, p. 43, 349-350).

The range of real-life examples analogous to *Borgen* I have in mind relate for example to sudden environmental accidents influencing several government administrative areas or to long-lasting and multifaceted phenomena, such as Covid-19, and also to small-scale issues like experimenting with using rainwater in

¹ Created by Adam Price, Internet Movie Database, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1526318/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

² Season 4, episode 1 (from 28,40 – 30,02 minutes). Translation from Danish to English Marika Tammeaid.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20220526-borgen-the-greatest-political-drama-ever>

school gardening. When all these matters are addressed with a focus on jurisdiction and exercising formal power, the subject requiring attention can soon become ignored. Consequently, energy is directed to secondary issues rather than finding a solution to the burning issue (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 36-37). Taking the small-scale example of a school gardening project using rainwater as an example, the case can quickly turn to heated arguments on who can or should give permission to drill a hole into a gutter (and take responsibility for that), instead of bringing different parties together for each to play their part in fulfilling the initial objective: arranging an opportunity for school gardening and make it possible to use rainwater for ecological reasons. When the exemplary discussion turns to an exchange of opinions of who bears the responsibility if something unwanted happens, for example, to the structure of the buildings, the initial issue is long forgotten. Instead of taking their role in building a solution together and taking responsibility for the whole, different authorities retreat deeper into their own siloed views for.

Facing complex issues by arguing about the obligations of different authorities and the borderlines of them can be identified as mismanagement (Peters et al., 2022, p. 13). There is also a more fruitful path to choose, that is, dealing with the hazard or challenge itself in a holistic manner and as a topic of collaborative governance, bringing together the different parties around contradictory or crossing objectives as a seed for finding new solutions (Sørensen & Torfing, 2018, p.352; Doberstein, 2016; Sirianni, 2010, p. 42). The examples above illustrate that the legal frame plays an essential role as the foundation of public authority (Peters et al., 2022, p. 1-3) and can hinder governance of safeguarding the well-being of the citizen (OECD, 2022, p. 30; Peters et al., 2022; Tammeaid et al., 2022) – at least if it is the primary perspective on complex, cross-sectoral issues (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 262-263).

A situation where an established operating model is no longer sufficient for dealing with the issues that arise from the working environment has been called a *complexity gap* (Casti, 2012). Research literature proposes at least two possible strategies for bridging the gap: one focusing on simplifying complexity (e.g., Collinson, 2014) and another emphasizing increasing organisational diversity for action (Kirton & Greene, 2017). Both strategies might have pros and cons in different situations, but simplifying complexity is more likely to lead to a dead-end. Simplifying complexity is hard or impossible because complexity is, by definition, a phenomenon involving ambiguity and conflicting views (Head, 2022; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016; Termeer et al., 2015). When this strategy encounters administration, the result is easily a partitioned “society that acts like a clock accurate machine making sure that people and organisations operate in “according

to the rules” instead of “people-oriented and proactive society that strengthens overall well-being and empowerment of the people and businesses” (wordings from National Artificial Intelligence Programme Aurora AI⁴).

Watzlawick et al. (2011) describe this dilemma as the incapability of effecting the desired change due to first-order change attempts, which rather maintain the problem instead of understanding that the system's structure itself must undergo change to get the problem solved (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 38). A compartmentalized government's ability to meet human and citizen needs in the complex world requires what Watzlawick et al. (2011) call second-order problem resolution (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 81, 156-157). This same path of thinking outlines an important theoretical grounding for the theme of this dissertation, *the Solution-Focused view on how human systems change and developing public sector leadership meta-skills that accelerate this change*.

The work of Watzlawick et al. (2011) on human mental research has played a landmark role in the development of the Solution-Focused approach (see also, McKergow, 2021, p. 22-23; Korman et al., 2020, p. 15) and this research explores further the leadership skills that are required for enhancing the ability to construct solution-oriented (not problem-oriented) cooperation, leadership and public policy.

Argyris and Schon have presented a somewhat similar distinction than Watzlawick et al. (2011) within the field of organisational science and professional learning when pointing out that highly skilled professionals easily descend to single-loop learning, although it would be important to ponder when existing governing variables fit the situation and when it is important to engage in changing the field of constancy itself (Argyris, 1991, p. 4-5; Argyris & Schön, 1982, p. 18-19).

What, according to Watzlawick et al. (2011), differentiates second-order problem resolution from first-order problem solving is breaking the mental circle of doing more of the same or choosing between given alternatives and instead harnessing the ability to ask *what* could be done *instead of why* something is happening (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 75-107). Second-order problem resolution also means searching for a fruitful *reframing* of the circumstances and acting accordingly i.e., using the human every-day creativity to step out of the old and into a new framework (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 37).

⁴ AuroraAI is National Artificial Intelligence Programme of Finland working in a network-based manner and promoting smoothly, securely and in an ethically running daily life and business, <https://vm.fi/en/national-artificial-intelligence-programme-auroraai>

Good intentions turning to power conflicts and societal issues becoming stymied by power struggles do not build public trust in public policy and governance (Peters et al., 2022). The above points raise questions about what could be done to build the public sector and governance capacity to deal with complex issues in collaboration across administrative sectors and with citizens and service users (Tammeaid et al., 2022; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). How could we lead our fictional ministers, Birgitte Nyborg and Mette Kragh, to deal with the multi-faceted issue of oil found in an arctic area in another way? A pre-requisite would be understanding the complex nature of the issue and bringing in the different viewing angles and parties involved to look for the common ground and, after that, the possible ways to respond to the situation and shared vision of success in finding the way forward. Repeating these kinds of choices could even develop the capabilities of cross-sectoral collaboration within governance and have long-lasting effects on the collaboration culture. Such scenarios call, however, for relational and change-promoting leadership capabilities not stemming from problem-focused thinking but leading to an ecosystemic approach to multifaceted issues (Korman et al, 2020, p. 16), i.e., it calls for public sector leadership meta-skills that will be studied in this dissertation.

2 THE AIM, CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

2.1 Research agenda and structure of the dissertation synthesis

This research aims to increase understanding of the enablers of succeeding in demanding leadership tasks in the public-sector, especially considering the complex nature of societal issues and their direct and indirect effects on citizens' life. Present-day societies have heterogeneous and pluralistic value bases (Head, 2022, p. 63). Policymaking requires a multiplayer systems view on policy measures and effects (Head, 2022, 86-87; Chiva et al., 2010) and also the capability to run participatory engagement processes that transcend administrative sectors and the public-civic interface (Head, 2022, p. 25, 35, 105). Jun (Ju, 2006) argues that a true understanding of social reality and human relationships require more than instrumental and rational ways of investigating human knowledge and the nature of public administration (Jun, 2006, p. 2).

A shift from managerialist decision-making and target-driven efficiency to a systems and co-creation approach to policymaking (Head, 2022, p. 63) will inevitably require new leadership skills. This general part of the dissertation ties together the findings of the sub-studies I–IV (Articles I–IV) and seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are public sector leadership meta-skills and what is their role in learning and leadership development?
2. How do public sector leadership meta-skills contribute to public sector capacity for succeeding in the governance and leadership of complex, cross-sectoral, and emergent societal phenomena?
3. How public sector meta-skills contribute to the theories and practices of public sector leadership?

The dissertation comprises an overarching thesis and four peer-reviewed, published articles (sub-studies I–IV). All the sub-studies (Articles I–IV) were conducted independently with individual study aims. The study aims, approaches, and theoretical reasoning of each article are presented in Tables 1–4, and the main results of all the articles in Table 6.

The first of the original articles (sub-study I) introduces the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills that emerged from the reflective practice of leadership trainings and discusses the theoretical groundings of leadership meta-skills. The second and third articles (sub-studies II and III) are both theoretical and empirical. Article II (sub-study II) elaborates on the theme by looking at the role of public sector leadership meta-skills as an analytical and practical solution to nurture human-centred public leadership practice. It also presents the main results of semi-structured interviews of civil service top leaders representing all government ministries and some other central government organisations of Finland. Article III (sub-study III) studies the role of meta-skills in reforming public leadership through learning and leadership development. The article examines teaching and learning as change-makers from the point of view of training institutions and everyday leadership development in public organisations. The interviews of high-ranking civil service leaders from Finland's central government provide an important empirical grounding for the article.

The fourth article (sub-study IV) offers further theoretical reasoning on the role of public sector leadership meta-skills in the cultural shift of public sector transformation towards better-consolidated policy interventions, policy coherence and capacity to deal with emergent societal phenomena. This dissertation synthesis seeks to deepen and summarize – on the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical levels – the understanding of the nature of public sector leadership meta-skills developed in the articles (sub-studies I–IV) and their value to public governance.

Sections 3, 4, and 5 in this dissertation synthesis present public sector leadership meta-skills as a phenomenon from a theoretical point of view. First, the evolution of the concept and a summary of the theoretical grounding of each sub-study (Articles I–IV) are presented. Then the research topic of public sector meta-skills is scrutinized via central background theories of this dissertation: a) learning and change in the context of complexity and collaborative governance, b) Solution-Focused view on change, c) positive coaching psychology and virtues approach, d) organisational learning, and e) open systems approach and social construction. Section 4, investigates the topic of meta-skills from the viewpoint of public sector leadership scholarly traditions, looking at what kind of mentions of leadership meta-skills can be found in leadership research literature and how meta-skills appear in leading journals of leadership and public governance. Section 5 summarizes that theoretical scrutiny.

Section 6 focuses on the empirical approach and presents the main results of the sub-studies (Articles I–IV) by illustrating how the findings are grounded in

empirical research. The section also illustrates the contributions of each sub-study to the understanding meta-skills as a concept, the effect of meta-skills on the public sector capacity to govern complex, cross-sectoral issues, and the contribution of meta-skills in leadership development.

Section 7 discusses the findings of the previous sections concerning the initial research questions and the value of the findings in the context of public administration and leadership. Section 8 then summarizes this dissertation's overall conclusions.

2.2 Scientific-philosophical starting points and methodological choices

This dissertation builds upon the idea of post-positivist ontology, stressing processualism and inter-relationality as a determinants of scientific rigour (e.g., Al-Amoudi & O'Mahoney, 2016, p. 29). That commitment advocates the idea of not focusing solely on the question of "what is?" but increasingly on a "what does it do?" form of scrutiny. In terms of Habermas' theory of knowledge and human interest, this dissertation applies interpretative hermeneutics using qualitative methods (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1293-1296). It has a practical interest in contributing an enhancing the understanding of leadership as a phenomenon (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2016, p. 771).

This research combines scholarly knowledge on learning and change with scholarly traditions on public sector leadership and seeks to provide new angles and new solutions to the growing complexity challenges facing public administrations (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 81-81.) Moreover, this dissertation is also characterized by interdisciplinarity, which brings some challenges. For instance, different scientific disciplines create and sustain different registers, where certain words and concepts carry specific meanings and entail background ideas not easily accessible to outsiders or even scholars from other scientific disciplines (Salter & Hearn, 1997, p. 173-174). This dissertation approaches the challenge of a transition problem (Salter & Hearn, 1997, p. 148) by bridging different approaches and explaining the words used unambiguously and always referring to the respective background research. This interdisciplinary approach aims to advance how public sector leadership is portrayed in research and practice. The focus of this research and its relationship to different scholarly fields is presented in the following figure:

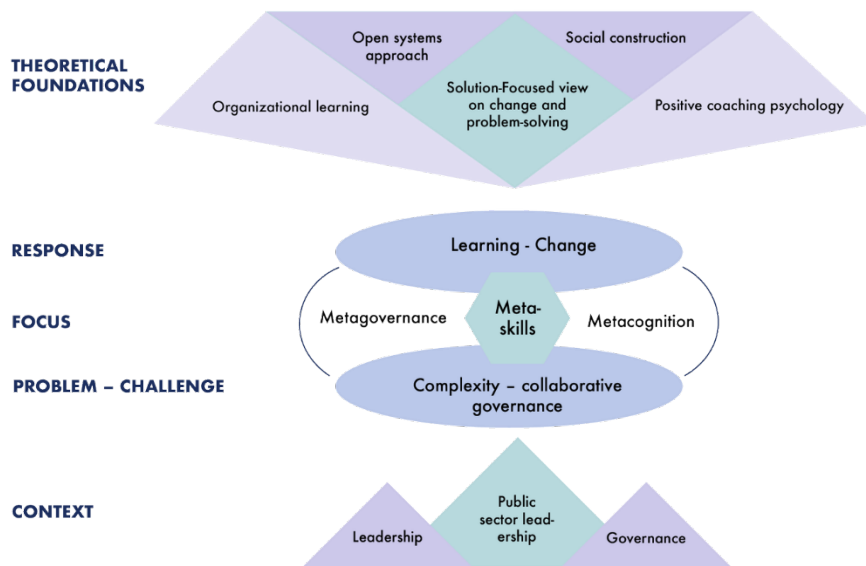


Figure 1. Focus of the dissertation

The public sector leadership working environment, leadership research, and governance discourse form the context of the research. The public sector refers here to those organisations and institutions that build upon the practices of democracy, transparency, codes of ethics, societal functions, or services that are taken care of due to the rule of law, and the equivocal concept of public sector effectiveness (Tammeaid et al., 2022). Public sector leadership comprises of leading the public sector employees (civil servants) as well as executing and implementing public policy interventions at local, regional, national, and supranational levels (Peters et al., 2022, p. 9; van Wart, 2003, p. 221). Noticing that governing structures and traditions differ (Haque et al., 2021), the terms *government* and *government leadership* here refer to central state institutions and primarily to the civil service leaders leading those institutions (Belloir & van den Berg, 2021, p. 51). The terms *public sector* and *public sector leadership* are used here in a broad sense encompassing central, regional, and municipal public institutions and their leaders. Governance in this dissertation refers to the actions of these public authorities and the policy-making of all public sector institutions, from state organisations to regional and municipal bodies (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 26; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018; Kooiman, 1993, p. 1-6).

This dissertation focuses especially on the complexity challenge posed to public governance (Peters et al., 2022) and the increased necessity for collaborative governance (Emerson et al., 2012; Ansell & Gash, 2008) including collaborative action across different line ministries as well as sectors and levels of government, such that the whole of the government and the public sector becomes more than the sum of its parts (also Head, 2022, pp. 54-56). All this requires reframing public

sector leadership and meeting the challenges of renewal, change, and learning within the leadership cadre and public sector institutions in general (Tammeaid et al., 2022; Voorberg et al., 2017).

This dissertation combines insights from the Solution-Focused philosophy and practice (McKergow, 2021; Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. xviii), positive coaching psychology (Govindji & Linley, 2007, Linley et al., 2007), and organisational learning (Basten & Haamann, 2018; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017; Hartley & Benington, 2006; Senge & Scharmer, 1992; Argyris & Schon, 1982, p. 68-69, 87) to present a response with the potential to tackle the challenge of learning and change via meta-skills development. Meta-skills are studied as a way to accelerate leadership development towards public sector capacity for renewal and success in governing in complex circumstances.

The empirical research part of this dissertation comprises semi-structured thematic interviews of top civil service leaders in Finland carried out during 2021 and 2022. These interviews provided a phenomenological lens to the theme by gathering information about interpreting the meaning of leadership as a phenomenon or lived experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1292) in a government working environment. The sample of 22 informants covers all Finnish government branches.

Conducting semi-structured interviews was chosen as an appropriate research strategy in a situation where informants are most likely unaware of the conceptual dimensions of the research object. Moreover, when the research interest focused on studying informants' perceptions and opinions on complex issues, values, intentions, and ideals (also allowing diverse perceptions and meanings to be expressed) a qualitative research strategy exceeded a quantitative survey methodology (Kallio et al. 2016). Thematic interviews provided a way to test the theoretical and conceptual idea of public leadership meta-skills with informants with a long professional track record in public administration (often several decades), mainly in leadership positions and in different branches of government. A survey would have allowed a larger sample, but the possibilities of a survey research to produce relevant results on a concept that is new and foreign to the interviewees could have been insufficient.

2.3 Subjectivity statement

A research ethical issue important to reflect on is that, as a researcher, I am not an outsider to my research object. Principal civil service leaders in Finland are a limited group, and if and when I, in the empirical part of this dissertation, wanted

to interview the top civil servants leading Finland currently, the group of possible interviewees was obvious. My own relationship to the theme and the group of informants was, at the same time, internal and external. I have been a government official, I knew almost all my interviewees beforehand, some of whom had once been my supervisors. During the interviews and when writing the dissertation, I was not under the supervision of any of the interviewees, nor did I have any other level of dependence on them. However, knowing the top executives helped provide the opportunity to interview them.

It is clear that this dissertation's topic relates to my long career in the Government and public sector, especially as a developer of leadership and public organisations. My work experience of over 25 years in different government positions (as leader, manager, expert, advisor, internal consultant, external consultant) in a broad variety of government organisations in Finland, other countries, and also intergovernmental organisations shaped the observations leading to the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills. Without such experience, the leadership meta-skills would not have emerged, or it would at least have taken a somewhat different form. I am quite aware of the dynamics of working environments and internal cultures of the ministries and government agencies, which helped me contextually to understand the contents of the research focus. Designing and facilitating six long-term leadership training courses for 140 top-rank government civil service leaders during 2017–2018 intensified that knowledge (reported in detail in Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). For the same reason, I could interview my informants with a level of trust that would have been difficult for a pure “outsider” to replicate.

Consequently, from a utilitarian point of view, this special relationship helped me implement deep research analysis and probably to ask more relevant questions precisely because I know my informants' operating environment so well. That meant I also heard things I would not otherwise have access to.

Bearing the ethical research aspects in mind, I have taken advantage of this unique opportunity to bring out the experiential knowledge of senior civil service leadership and with that try to contribute to developing public governance and leadership research. This should make the results presented in this dissertation useful, at least within the framework of public administration and leadership, and especially within central government. I have adhered to good research ethics - honesty, care, and accuracy in recording, presenting, and analysing the material and results - as diligently as possible to address the internality/externality challenges.

Bearing in mind the context of the interviews and the empirical validity of the qualitative research data, the empirical part of this dissertation covers the leadership dynamics at the central level of government in Finland. An interesting question is the scalability of the meta-skills conclusions in other governance levels in Finland and in comparing interview results with other countries. This scalability issue will be discussed in Section 5 of this dissertation synthesis.

There are also other angles of my background and relation to the theme that must be recognized. In addition, my initial scientific field, and my long-time occupation as a teacher of Solution-Focused thinking and practice contributed to choosing this research topic and are also inevitably a part of any conclusions drawn in this dissertation.

My master's degree studies were in the discipline of Economic and Social History in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki. Effects of that background are also evident in this dissertation. As a historian of societies, I tend to pay attention to time and context around any phenomena or behaviour, for example, public sector leadership and place it in the temporal context. In addition, this includes a tendency to see societal upheavals and far-reaching changes as opportunities and enablers of dynamic renewal. Alongside that goes the understanding – inspired by The Annales School – that multiple levels of reality and time exist simultaneously (Le Roy Ladurie, 1975). The Annales School aimed to capture deep structural changes, conjectures, and critical events with different temporalities, which affect how people think, live, and interact. That includes - in addition to the social or political events - more slowly changing narratives, culture, and beliefs as well as the slowest changing features like geography or climate (Clemente et al., 2017, p. 22-23). Influences of this thinking can also be tracked in my reasoning in this dissertation.

Lloyd (2018) mentions Rom Harré as an important figure in his description of the nature of social history, and this can be regarded as a link to my second subjective standpoint: Solution-Focused thinking and practice; where human psychology is regarded more as a discursive and relational practice than something to saturate with internal explanations (Dierolf, 2007). I have worked as a Solution-Focused coach and a teacher of coaches and clinical supervisors for over 15 years. That experience has involved running long-term training courses on these topics at the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education and at several other university centres for continuing education and other training institutions. My focus has been on teaching Solution-Focused thinking and practice to be applied in different roles and professions. That has included also designing and conducting leadership training for leaders from the public, private and third sectors. That

background clearly influences my research work and the way I conduct research interviews, which can be viewed as a problem but also an asset.

Coaches are professionals in interviewing, and the crown jewel of the Solution-Focused approach is the so-called not-knowing position that gives the interviewee full space to describe things precisely from their own perspective without an interviewer contributing any thoughts, assumptions, or ready-made conclusions (Malinen, 2004). Furthermore, an important element in this not-knowing type of interviewing is not just what is said and how the questions are formulated but also the non-verbal communication that clears the space for the interviewee to produce their own ideas and clarify their own thinking. With a background of teaching the not-knowing mental positioning for 15 years, I believe I have mastered it. I think this way of interviewing is very important for the reliability and objectivity of my research. The Solution-Focused approach and its effects on the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills are assessed more closely in Section 3.

Another issue related to my coaching background is more problematic from a scientific standpoint. With a coach's strong focus on resources, enablers, and keys to possible solutions, as well as my professional skills and training related to positive psychology, I tend to pay more attention to issues that promote positive angles and positive performance than to problems or negative deviations. So, in the name of scientific objectivity, I must practice conscious negativity and highlight critical aspects in my dissertation. The silver edge of this challenge is that I can also use my dissertation to point out the difference between critical thinking and a problem-focused approach, which in my experience, is unfortunately not always well understood.

This whole background gives me a particular perspective that includes positive and negative aspects. The background outlined above means my conclusions on the theme of this dissertation do not fall under any automatic belief in objectivity. Anyone lacking a somewhat analogous theoretical and practical background would probably not draw the same conclusions from the same material.

2.4 Predicted contribution to leadership research

This dissertation seeks to introduce a new leadership concept and discuss the contents of an increasingly essential dimension in public sector leadership (Tammeaid et al., 2022; Trondal et al., 2020). Although the dissertation title refers to the public sector, the empirical part of this research focuses primarily on central government of Finland. That choice can be justified by the role of the central government in setting the pace of for all governance and the public sector

(Tammeaid et al., 2022; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 22-25; Bache & Flinders, 2004, p. 198). However, all the findings can be applied to any public sector leadership duties stemming from the rationale of creating public value i.e., serving people and striving to deliver systems change (Bozeman and Crow, 2022, p. 67-69; Hämäläinen, 2014, Williams, 2005). Interview data plays an important role in this research by contributing empirical evidence to complement the reasoning.

An important motivation for the research is seeking to bring some new understanding to the multidisciplinary and diffuse discipline of public sector leadership and introduce a new concept of meta-skills to the multifaceted scholarly field of leadership (van Wart, 2017; Copeland, 2014). The theoretical and empirical research carried out for this dissertation have provided insights that the deployment of meta-skills as a conceptual and practical tool is essential for public administration to achieve its performance goals in the age of prevailing public policy complexities. However, to date, the issues of meta-skilling and meta-skills have rarely been explored in public management and leadership research. Bushe & Marshak (Bushe & Marshak, 2015) point out that interactional approaches seem to be especially effective when there is a need to break prevailing and ineffective ways of approaching a dilemmatic issue and when facing wicked and complex challenges (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, p. 393).

The concept of leadership meta-skills developed in the context of public sector leadership challenged by complex societal issues requiring nonlinear interorganisational networked cooperation to be resolved, provides a potentially interesting concept also to leadership development in other sectors facing the development towards ecosystem-based enterprises (Schoemaker & Kuhn, 2021). The following sections will provide detailed scrutiny of how the concept of meta-skills has been dealt with in research literature and what makes it an essential issue of leadership. Furthermore, emphasizing the role of skills management is crucial in facing the rapidly changing operating environment of public administration and leadership requiring networked learning and connectivity (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 10; Jun, 2006, p. 81-84).

3 PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP META-SKILLS - THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

3.1 General remarks

This sub-section has a three-part structure. The first part presents the concept of public-sector leadership meta-skills and its evolution; the second summarizes the theoretical discussion of the sub-studies (Articles I–IV); and the third complements the theoretical scrutiny by presenting the theoretical foundations of the learning and change response of public leadership (see in Figure 1). The third part also takes an interdisciplinary leap to meet the complexity and learning challenges of renewal and change within the leadership cadre and public sector institutions by combing insights from 1) learning and collaborative governance, 2) Solution-Focused view on change and problem-solving, 3) positive coaching psychology, 4) organisational learning. In addition, the social construction and open-systems approaches are addressed as background theories.

3.2 Evolution of the concept

With regard to the identification and conceptualization of the meta-skills concept, this research constitutes an exploratory journey. First, the research process was firmly linked to designing, conducting, and facilitating six long-term leadership training courses for the highest-ranking civil service leaders in Finland. The courses ran in parallel between 2017 and 2018. A total of 140 top executives from 12 ministries and five government agencies participated in mixed compositions in six separate leadership development courses comprising six modules (11 days) plus individual and team-based work done between the modules (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). The range of public policy areas covered was comprehensive, and the participants represented approximately 80 % of the top civil service ministry-level executives (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 160).

The concept or learning objective of developing meta-skills was not clearly elucidated in the design phase of the leadership trainings but emerged during the training days in the course of reflective practice, as described by Schön (1983, 65-69, 300) in a manner of observation, dialogue with the participants, reflection of the individual and collective development, in communication with other trainers.

Thoroughly understanding the societal and internal challenges governments encounter today constituted an important platform for the pedagogical design of the training courses. For framing purposes, the training planning process included

substantial research exploration and fact-finding topped with study visits, especially to The Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, France, Singapore, and Canada. Bearing in mind cultural differences and different administrative structures and traditions (e.g., Haque et al., 2021; Voorberg et al., 2017), common features were identified in all countries during the training preparation and the training itself. They included, for instance, the weakened predictability of change and its speed; inter-connected decision-making and the need for cross-sectoral collaboration; new leadership ideas; the transformed nature of work challenging both leadership and ways of working; digitalization as an opportunity and challenge, increasingly customer-oriented services and citizen participation in service development, focusing on administrative and service ecosystems (i.e., co-operation between the private and public sectors and civil society); populist agendas challenging representative democracy; and the distress caused by territorial and social polarisation (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 19-21, 165). The mode of training was dialogical and comprised lectures, discussions, and group work. Discussions of collective sensemaking, naming, and reframing (Schön, 1983, p. 40) by the participants, with international experts, and facilitators played an important role in the contents.

The new kind of networked framing required from public governance to tackle the challenges mentioned above has been referred to as *metagovernance* (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021, p. 9; Gjaltema et al., 2020), and this link also explains naming the public-sector leadership skills explored here as meta-skills, that is, skills required for successful metagovernance.

The systematic literature review of Gjaltema et al. (2020) presents four ideal types of metagovernance: metagovernance as networked governance of different domains; multi-level networked governance; metagovernance of multiplicity (i.e. a network of networks); and fourth, combining different forms of governance (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1772-1773). The study concludes that metagovernance has been used in the research literature to relate to both institutionalized, formal and structural governance arrangements and more agile governance arrangements operating “in the shadow of hierarchy” (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1769-1774). Gjaltema et al. suggest using metagovernance as an umbrella term to reflect the practice of looking into the state’s new role in a networked society (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1775). Sørensen and Torfing (2021, p. 9-10) define metagovernance as characterised by 1) collaborative processes without reverting overly to traditional forms of hierarchical imposition based on command and control, 2) collaborative governance without undermining the relative autonomy of the actors that motivates them to participate and invest in constructing a common ground for joint problem-solving, and to 3) using a combination of political, institutional,

financial and discursive framing (hands-off tools) and carefully metagoverning the collaborative process from co-creating the agenda and clarifying the decision-making premises to driving the process to a conclusion (hands-on tools) (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021, p. 9-10). Bason (2017) highlights that metagovernance is shifting from decision-making to future-making, not finding a decision on a policy issue but creating one (Bason, 2017, p. 232). Echoing van Buuren et al. (2020, p. 11), metagovernance can be described as combining exploration and co-creation approaches to public administration to enlarge the solution space, foster creativity, and find novel solutions to problems as a participatory endeavour by using tools of dialogue and interaction.

Gjaltema et al. (2020) note that relatively little is known about how metagovernance is conducted in practice (Gjaltema et. al., 2020, p. 1760), and in some cases, research literature recognises that metagovernance requires new skills of the public sector and its leadership (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 831; Jessop, 2011). What kind of skills development is required is not a widely addressed theme in metagovernance literature, and thus the concept of public-sector leadership meta-skills can fill a theoretical and practical gap. The composition and evaluation of the training courses that acted as the incubator for the idea of meta-skills and a practice arena for metagovernance are thoroughly described in the book *Developing Public-sector Leadership: New Rationale, Best Practices and Tools* (Virtanen & Tammeaid, Springer, 2020). The book describes many special working methods designed for the training sessions to accelerate structural- and mental-boundary crossing over traditional administrative sector lines.

In addition to metagovernance, metacognition is an important route to developing and naming leadership meta-skills as meta-skills. Metacognition more or less addresses the awareness of interactional cognitive processes and the patterns behind them, which is a central ingredient also in conceiving leadership meta-skills. However, there are different scholarly traditions of metacognition (Tarricone, 2011). Approached in a Vygotskian way as a social construction of knowledge (Tarricone, 2011, p. 23), metagocnition acts as an important background idea behind public-sector leadership meta-skills. The Vygotskian view of metacognition highlights that people are capable of change if they are given the appropriate cultural tools and social support (Freeman, 2021, p. 1). This idea underlines the solution-oriented and enabling nature of the concept of leadership meta-skills. Metacognition increases awareness by cultivating a mindset beyond political, institutional, and mental siloes (e.g., Meuleman, 2021, p. 1) and can be developed as a capacity both individually and collectively (Martinez, 2006, p. 699). An important aspect of this development is a co-creational attitude, verbalizing the

cognitive processes, and benefitting from social interaction (Martinez, 2006, p. 699).

Metagovernance in its multiple forms and attention to the opportunities for enabling metacognition across different branches and levels of the public sector, is necessary to address evolving societal phenomena and consolidate policy interventions. The idea of public-sector leadership meta-skills emerged at the intersection of pondering how to develop today's public institution leaders in capabilities that would equip them to face the complex, ever-changing challenges in a non-compartmentalized but holistic and phenomena-based way (Tammeaid et al., 2022). Taking into account the trends affecting public sector administrations in the 2020s revealed six meta-skills important to success in leadership positions and thus worthy of special attention. Those were learning to learn, a systems and dialogical approach, authenticity, and the deliberate development of individual and joint thinking skills, enabling mindset, future perspective and adopting ideas into practice (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 114). This set of public-sector leadership meta-skills was researched and then developed further in sub-studies I–IV (Articles I–IV), a process described below. The understanding acquired on the topic is summarised in this dissertation.

3.3 Theoretical discussion of the sub-studies

This section summarizes the theoretical and conceptual discussion of public-sector meta-skills in Articles I–IV. The theoretical foundations of each article are presented in Tables 1–4 and categorized according to the disposition presented in Figure 1. Each table is followed by a condensed description of the main theoretical discussion reflected in that article.

Table 1. Article I

	Article I: Virtanen, P. & Tammeaid, M. (2021). Public leadership meta-skills. In Farazmand A. (ed.) <i>The Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy and Governance</i> . Springer Nature Switzerland.
Approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce meta-skills as a theoretical and conceptual topic and as a relative newcomer in public leadership studies. 2. Scrutinize the recent literature on public leadership meta-skills. 3. Study public administration as a systemic network and its implications for leadership readiness and capacity to develop society as a whole. 4. Present a typology of public leadership meta-skills.
Research aim	Explore theoretical and conceptual roots of leadership meta-skills.
Theoretical discussion of the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector leadership scholarly tradition (Van Wart 2003, 2013, 2017), • Distributed Leadership (Bolden, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2013),

sector leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meta-Governance (Gjaltema et al., 2019/2020; La Cour & Andersen, 2016), • Metacognition (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Efklides & Misailidi, 2010), • Sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Peng, 2018).
Theoretical discussion of the complexity challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex and Open Systems (Scott 1987; Maguire et al. 2006; Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Reed, 2006; Bardach 2008; Christensen & Laegreid, 2016), • Human-governance paradigm (UK Policy Lab, 2018; Bason, 2017; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020), • Need for new kinds of dynamic and transformative skills and capabilities (Kattel & Mazzucato, 2018; Teece, 2018; Bourgon, 2017; Meredith et al., 2016; Mau, 2015; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020).
Theoretical discussion of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic philosophy (Ansell & Geyer, 2017; Darnell et al., 2019), • Leadership training and organisational learning (Holten et al., 2015; Chiva & Habib, 2015; Seidle et al., 2016; Parry & Sinha, 2007; Jacobs, 2017; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020), • Holistic competency models (Hamlin & Whitford, 2020; Skorková, 2016; Larat, 2016), • Perception, consciousness, and emotions as a part of organisational and systems learning (Bateson, 2016; Roeser & Pesch, 2016; Quirk, 2018; Van der Wal, 2017; Bason, 2017; Freisleben, 2020; Darling et al., 2016; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020), • Positive Psychology and the Role of Positive Emotions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Green et al., 2017; Linley et al., 2007; Fredrickson, 2013), • Systems change as a dynamic learning process (Van Bavel et al., 2012; Burisch & Wohlgemuth, 2016; Cilliers, 1998; Vermeer & Wenting 2018; Termeer & Dewulf 2018; Lähteenmäki-Smith & Virtanen, 2020; Lowe, 2013; Lowe & Wilson, 2017), • Solutions-Focused Philosophy and the role of solutions-focused and future-oriented thinking (Theory of Solution-Focused Practice, 2020; Barret, 2015; Bannik & Jackson, 2011; Malinen, 2004, Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020).
Typology of public sector leadership meta-skills	<p>Learning to Learn (Virtanen & Tammeaid 2020; Senge & Sterman, 1992; Romme & Witteloostuijn 1999),</p> <p>Systemic Understanding (Cronen et al., 2009; Termeer & Dewulf, 2018),</p> <p>Dialogical Approach (Isaacs, 1999, 2007; Gergen et al., 2007),</p> <p>Harnessing Thinking Skills (Mattila, 2001; Sparrer, 2007; McKergow, 2013),</p> <p>Reaching Out to Praxis (Barret, 2015; McKergow, 2021)</p> <p>Enabling Mindset (Capra & Luisi, 2014).</p>

Article I explores the theoretical and conceptual roots of leadership meta-skills. The theoretical discussion of the response to the complexity challenge of public sector and public sector leadership is built on ideas, pragmatic philosophy, and the role of perception, consciousness, and emotions as a part of organisational and systems learning. The article develops the theme of successful learning and systems change by leaning on research on positive psychology and the role of

positive emotions in human capability and flourishing. The solutions-focused philosophy and the role of solutions-focused and future-oriented thinking play an important role in explaining the selection of suggested meta-skills accelerating future-driven, co-creational, and renewal-oriented public sector leadership.

Table 2. Article II

	<p>Article II: Tammeaid, M. (2023). Nurturing human-centredness through public leadership meta-skills. In Virtanen, P., Tammeaid, M. & Jalonen, H. (2023). <i>Public leadership: a human-centred approach</i>, Routledge.</p>
Approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present public leadership meta-skills as an analytical and practical solution for achieving a better level of social impact for public policy and public services in a complex world, that is, a skill set embedded in human-centred public leadership practice, and 2. Study public sector leadership meta-skills in the context of accelerating systems change and enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation, putting government goals into a broader perspective, and encouraging service users to participate in service co-creation and re-design.
Research aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue theoretical discussion of public-sector leadership meta-skills, • Provide up-to-date empirical research of experienced and high-ranking Finnish government officials' perceptions on the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills, and • Gather informants' experiences on hindrances and support structures around using and developing meta-skills in leading people and creating participation forums and opportunities for public service users to meet their service demands.
Theoretical discussion of the public sector leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human-centredness of public sector leadership, referring to the scope of the book the article contributes to (Virtanen et al., 2023), • Meta-skills in the continuum of public sector leadership scholarly traditions of change management and organisational learning (Van Wart, 2017; Bolden, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2013; Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Gjaltema et al., 2019/2020; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2021).
Theoretical discussion of the complexity challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector hardships in adopting a role as an active and future-oriented societal catalyst (e.g., Krick & Holst, 2018; Feiock, 2013; Agranoff, 2006; Annala et al., 2021).
Theoretical discussion of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-constructive theories of knowledge creation and renewal (Cooperrider, 2017; Hersted & Gergen, 2013, Nokaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020), • Co-creation view of systems change (Akilesh, 2017; Ind & Coates, 2013; Papi-Thornton & Cubista; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, 2018; de Smedt & Borch, 2021), • Philosophy and practice of reframing/Solution-Focused approach (Kim Berg & Szabó, 2005; Dierolf, 2014; McKergow, 2021; Bateson, 2015; James, 1890; Varona, 2021; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Tammeaid 2020), • Virtue ethics and strengths approach of positive psychology (Dutton et al., 2010; Fredrickson, 2013).

Typology of public sector leadership meta-skills	Virtanen & Tammeaid 2020, 2021 <u>and</u> Learning to Learn (Kallio, 2020; Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020), The Systems Approach (Stacey, 2010; Ståhle et al., 2020), The dialogical stance (Isaacs, 1999, 2007; Buber, 1937), Thinking Skills (de Shazer, 2016; Kallio, 2020; Malinen, 2004), Reaching out to practice (Bateson, 2015; Kolb & Fry, 1975; McKergow, 2021; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021; Drew, 2021), Enabling Mindset (Grant et al., 2012; Williams, 2005; Ison, 2005; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 107).
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Article II continues the theoretical discussion on public sector leadership, linking it to the human-centredness of public sector leadership. It involves 1) a human-centred leadership style within one's own organisation, 2) the network of organisations forming the public sector and 3) human-centred public policy work involving the end-user and citizen perspective. The theoretical discussion of meeting the complexity challenge is addressed via socio-constructive theories of knowledge creation and renewal as well as the role of pre-assumptions, social support, and co-creational view of systems changes. In addition, interactive leadership, co-creation, and experimental learning as policy design quality criteria are addressed. The philosophy and practice of the Solution-Focused approach and the key function of reframing is presented as part of solution-building alongside the virtue ethics and strengths approach of positive psychology. Article II presents a third version of public sector leadership meta-skills refining the typology of Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020; 2021).

Table 3. Article III

	Article III: Tammeaid, M. (2023). Reforming public leadership through learning. In Virtanen, P., Tammeaid, M. & Jalonen, H. (2023). <i>Public leadership: a human-centred approach</i> , Routledge.
Approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning and training public leadership, developing public organisations, and government as a whole in light of socio-constructive and collaborative approaches, 2. Updating assumptions around learning and development as enablers of public sector change and human-centred leadership reform.
Research aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the theoretical discussion of public sector leadership meta-skills, • Provide up-to-date empirical research on experienced and high-ranking Finnish government officials' perceptions on <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) adopting meta-skills and 2) understanding the ongoing and required shift towards increased cross-sectoral boundary-spanning and the placing of government goals in a broader human-centred perspective.
Theoretical discussion of the public sector leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership capabilities and adaptation to the complexity of the environment (Lowe et al., 2020; Laloux, 2014; Reed 2006; Hämäläinen, 2014; Williams, 2005; Tanskanen et al., 2019; Goffee & Jones, 2000; Zingale & Higl, 2021; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018; Carey et al., 2017; Wilson, 2013, Dwivedi, 2007; Puonti, 2004; Virtanen &

	Tammeaid, 2020; Gershenson, 2014; Hersted & Gergen, 2013, Rosso et al., 2010; de Hollanda et al., 2019; OECD, 2017).
Theoretical discussion of the complexity challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal level (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020; Lowe & Wilson, 2017), • Organisational level (Cooperrider, 2017; Hersted & Gergen, 2016; Jensen Schleiter et al. 2015; McKergow, 2011; Stacey, 2010; Watson 2002; Morgan, 2016; Örtenblad, 2016; Schenck, 2013; Kauffelt & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2011; Bannik, 2006; Sandwith, 1992; Bergman et al., 2016), • Leadership behavioural level (Ibarra, 2021; Törmänen et al., 2021; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Schein, 2013; O'Connell et al., 2012, Green & Grant, 2003; Goffee & Jones, 2000).
Theoretical discussion of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning, teaching and knowledge-creation that accelerate change (Ungar, 2021; Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020; Bateson, 1972; Gergen, 2015; Stähle et al., 2020; Goddard, 2013; Wals & Schwarzin, 2012; Stacey, 2010; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Sparrer, 2007; Järvelä et al, 2010; Maurer-Hankovszky & Szabó, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Kallio, 2020b; Toom & Husu, 2020; Darling et al., 2016; Calleja, 2014, Nivala & Ryyänen, 2019; Erikson, 2014; Presseau et al., 2019; Kriznik et al., 2019; Raelin, 2012; Johnson, 2008; Berg & Carlsen, 2016; Raelin, 2012; Mezirow, 2000; Isaacs, 1999 and 2007; Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Morgan & Guilherme, 2010; Tammeaid, 2016; Martin, 2019; Tosey et. al, 2011; Argyris, 1991; Müller et al., 2017; Hinojosa et al., 2017; Mitchie et al., 2011; Laal et al. 2012; Laal & Laal, 2012; Cane et al., 2012; Cronje, 2021; Johnson, 2008; von Wright, 1992; Moore et al. 2015; Cronbach, 2000; Warwick et al., 2017; Fisher, 2021; Bateson, 2016; Kirkpatrick & Kayser Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kaufman & Keller, 1994; Lowe & Plimmer, 2021; Snow et al., 2021; Taylor et al, 2020; Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Carless 2007; Hämäläinen et al, 2014; Dutton et al., 2010; Törmänen et al., 2021; Argyris, 1991 and 1993, Argyris & Schön, 1978; Mezirow, 2000, Rosso et al. 2000; Caride, 2020; Elliot, 2020; Devine et al., 2013), • Role of perception and working orientation (Cooperrider, 2017; Ciporen, 2010; Chiva & Habib, 2015; Fredrickson, 2014; Bannik, 2006; Priest & Gass, 1997; Grant et al., 2012, Grant, 2011; Neipp et al., 2016 and 2021; Abdulla & Woods, 2020; Medina & Beyerbach, 2014; Cloete, 2010; Lipchik & de Shazer, 2017; de Jong & Cronkright, 2011; Bannik, 2006; Brooker, 2020; McKergow, 2011; Lang & McAdam, 1994; Cronen et al., 1994; Lang et al., 1990; Virtanen and Tammeaid, 2020; Sharry, 2004; Malinen, 2004; Mussmann, 2006; De Jong & Kim Berg, 2013; Kim Berg & Szabo, 2005; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Linley et al., 2010, Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2002; Kegan & Lahely, 2009; Eigel, 2005; Fischer, 1980; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Beverland et al., 2016; Biswas-Diener, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2002; O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Godat, 2005; Tynjälä et al., 2020).
Typology of public sector leadership meta-skills	As in Article II

Article III continues the theoretical discussion by exploring leadership capability development and adaptation to the complexity of the environment. It grounds the

theoretical reasoning regarding public administration in an approach of co-created human-centred learning system. The positioning implies abandoning the view of public administration as a hierarchical, compartmentalised form of implementation “machinery”. The article presents a dual theoretical response to the public-sector leadership complexity challenge. The first involves updating the assumptions around teaching and learning as well as investing in motivation and enabling renewal by taking into account the human way of learning. The second acknowledges the central role of perception and choice of working orientation. The article presents the differences between the problem-focused and Solution-Focused approaches. Moreover, it illustrates the effects of the choice of approach on how people achieve change and renew their ways of working. The article discusses emergent cross-cutting policy preparation as a means for broadening the scope and quality of policy choices.

Table 4. Article IV

	Article 4: Upskilling public sector leadership in the context of the new normal of public governance and public policies Conference proceedings, The 35th ANZAM Conference 2022, 6 -7 December
Approach	The complex nature of societal phenomena bringing along an upskilling challenge of public-sector leadership, and the role of leadership meta-skills in the shift towards collaborative governance.
Research aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue theoretical discussion of public-sector leadership meta-skills, • Analyse the role of meta-skills in accelerating the cultural shift of the public governance transformation towards policy coherence and capacity to deal with emergent societal phenomena based on a topical empirical case from Finland.
Theoretical discussion of the public sector leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different approaches to government and its functions (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Torfing et al., 2020; Fawcett, 2018; Bourgon, 2017; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016; Dahl & Soss, 2014; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Bozeman & Crow, 2021; Martela, 2019),
Theoretical discussion of the complexity challenge	(Termeer & Dewulf, 2018; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016; Head 2022; Termeer et al., 2015; McAlister, 2022; Casti, 2012; Collinson, 2014; Kirton & Greene, 2017; Uhl-Bien & Arena 2017; Gershenson, 2014; Daviter, 2017; Cilliers, 2000),
Theoretical discussion of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Goldstein et al., 2017; Head, 2022; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2021; Torfig & Dias-Gibson, 2016), • Coaching psychology (Linley et al., 2007; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Virtanen et al., 2023; Basten & Haamann, 2018; Tynjälä et al., 2020; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018; Grant, 2019), • Required skills and competences (Goldstein et al., 2017; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Tammeaid et al., 2022; Virtanen et al., 2023; Gergen, 2013; Tynjälä et al., 2020; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018; Hartley et al., 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2021; Murphy et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2020; Galuska, 2014; Garavaglia et al., 2021; Keys et al., 2014; Sharma-Wallace, 2017; Liu et al., 2022; DeRue, 2011; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021; Bateson, 2015;

	Nonaka, 1994; Rosenhead et al.; 2019; Bourgon, 2017; Termeer et al., 2015; Seppälä, 2022).
Typology of public sector leadership meta-skills	As in Article 2

Article IV continues the theoretical discussion around the complexity challenge. The need for upskilling leadership is connected to the traditions of shared leadership, collaborative governance, and positive coaching psychology supporting the collective and systems view of the public sector. Public-sector leadership meta-skills are discussed as enablers of different governance institutions to consolidate their actions supporting unified public policy interventions and building the governance capacity to deal with emergent societal phenomena. The article describes how the understanding that meta-skills are useful when applied in relation to the situation and environment is embedded in meta-skills thinking, and maintain that meta-skills understood in this way are especially useful to combat complex challenges.

Articles I–IV all together discuss the theoretical foundations of public-sector leadership meta-skills. As sub-studies also confirm that the complexity challenges in the public sector and public-sector leadership are broadly recognized. However, the public sector, civil service leaders, or people generally do not adapt and change simply by stating the need for change or describing the features of the changed situation (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 31-39; Jun, 2006, p. 249-250). Acting in a new situation requires learning and creativity on both the individual and collective levels (Rehn, 2019; Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 55; Bandura, 2006, p.169; Jun, 2006, p. 64). From the above perspective, learning is change, and change is learning. Accordingly, the following sub-section scrutinizes the theoretical foundations of the learning and change response i.e., public sector leadership adaptation to the complexity challenge (see Figure 1). The following sub-section does not repeat the theoretical discussion in Articles I–IV but focuses on the main theoretical conceptions behind leadership meta-skills thinking, that is, 1) learning and collaborative governance, 2) the Solution-Focused view on change and problem-solving, 3) positive coaching psychology and 4) organisational learning. The social construction and open-systems approaches are also addressed as background theories.

3.4 Meta-skills, learning, and change in the context of complexity and collaborative governance

3.4.1 Learning and collaborative governance

Research literature uses collaborative governance and metagovernance in varying and sometimes overlapping ways (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1772; Doberstein, 2016). Collaborative governance, as used in this dissertation, refers to collaborative actions in support of policy formation and other cooperation between administrative units or institutions horizontally or vertically, and collaboration at the public-civic interface (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 2832; Emerson et al., 2011). It is a useful concept because it can encompass both collaborative action and collaboration as a skill and acting method. As per Section 3.2, metagovernance (an important theory behind the evolution of the leadership meta-skills concept) can refer to both inward and outward collaboration (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 1765). Its perspective is sometimes more institution- or agency-centred (Gjaltema et al., 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 1766), tending towards institutionalising networks (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 1770). Against this background, collaborative governance is used in this research to refer to tackling the complexity challenge with boundary crossing within the public sector or between the public sector and other sectors.

When we talk about change on an individual or collective level, it always involves learning (Beard & Wilson, 2013, p. 253-254). Gerlak & Heikkila (2011) note in their article about taking a learning approach to public governance that a capacity for collective learning may play a critical role in successful collaborative governance, especially in “public problems that span multiple political or jurisdictional boundaries, often characterized by uncertainty and difficult social trade-offs, by bringing together distinct actors and organisations to produce or manage these shared problems” (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). The study suggests paying attention to two things: first, identifying factors that shape learning through diversified actions, which would include trial and error, learning-by-doing, and information gathering and dialogue, and also learning between group members in a collaborative context (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). The second aspect meriting attention is the product of learning like new shared ideas, strategies, rules, or policies. As part of their findings, Gerlak and Heikkila state that learning is more likely to happen in a collaborative arrangement where leaders engage others in establishing shared goals and organize frequent interaction (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). Rosenhead (2019) points out that the uncertainty of the future (a central finding of complexity theory) indicates that learning cannot mean merely

adjusting behaviour or an affective response to pre-established targets. Instead, it must include reflecting on the appropriateness of the response in light of unfolding events and the assumptions behind the targets (Rosenhead, 2019, p. 14). Shotter and Tsoukas (2014) point out that facing a bewildering situation involves seeking a new orientation in puzzling surroundings and coming to a decision involves moving around within a landscape of possibilities (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014). Important in the process is being spontaneously responsive to the emotions, moral sensibilities, and consequences of different moves (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014). Baber (2018) refers to that process as a re-evaluation of how we see the world (Baber, 2018).

Lowe and Plimmer (2019) call for learning to be placed at the heart of governance in building a complexity-informed public sector capable of improving in terms of achieving better outcomes for people (Lowe & Plimmer, 2019). Emerson et al. (2011) assert that collaborative governance unfolds within a system context that consists of the nature of interactions, including discovery, definition, deliberation, and determination leading to broad engagement. It requires building shared motivation, including trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and shared commitment (Emerson et al., 2011). The third component in the definition is collaborative dynamics generating a joint action capacity, including procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources (Emerson et al., 2011). Although public governance is sometimes considered a symbol of permanence and continuity (Christensen, 2012), change is a normal condition of organisational life because organisations (like any other human communities) are inter-related webs of beliefs, habits and actions (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

In his classical article Nonaka (1994) points out that active learning in organisations always includes the collaborative creation of new information and knowledge. Nonaka highlights the central role of the learning process and of combining individual and collective learning via the dynamics of socialization, externalization, combination, and internalisation (Nonaka, 1994, p. 19). Later, Nonaka and Takeuchi (2021) updated their organisational learning model to encompass the inter-organisational, community, and societal levels. The later study also discussed practices that enable strategies to become more human-centric and future-focused i.e., coping with complexity, adapting dynamically to reality, embracing both/and approaches instead of either/or, empathizing with others, narrating stories, and living with nature (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021).

Dialogical learning as a central mode of knowledge creation was also highlighted by Tsoukas and Chia (2002). In his dialogical model for organisational knowledge creation in direct social interaction Tsoukas (2009) highlighted how relational

engagement with one another is a prerequisite for a productive and valuable dialogue in terms of learning and new knowledge creation (Tsoukas, 2009). He highlights that “self-distanciation” (Tsoukas, 2009, p. 941) leads to new distinctions through three processes of conceptual change, namely: 1) conceptual combination – combining two or more existing concepts, 2) conceptual expansion – combining concepts in a novel way, and 3) conceptual reframing – creating new distinctions by reclassifying an object or shifting emphasis so that a new view on the issue emerges (Tsoukas, 2009, p. 946).

Jun (Jun, 2006), points out that an instrumental, structural and functional orientation to public administration easily leads to wrong focus of on learning programs within public administration (Jun, 2006, p. 305). He suggests that instead of teaching technical skills, that usually is the case, there is a clear need for teaching actionable skills for the civil service cadre. By actionable skills he means reflexive and listening skills that orient and enable intentional collective action (Jun, 2005, p. 249, 305). This shift of focus of learning and development bring along also a difference in change theory behind the interventions of the public administration (Jun, 2006, p. 249-250). Adopting social construction as the viewing angle to public administration and learning shifts the focus of changemaking from using technical and deterministic tools to co-constructing better understanding of the features of the social reality in different cases and situations (Jun, 2006, p. 249-250).

3.4.2 The Solution-Focused view on change

Solution-Focused thinking and practice can be defined as a situation-driven and action-oriented approach, nourishing positive change in thinking, interaction, and action (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 120). Solution-Focused (or solutions focused) approach is based on 1) communication and the idea of reflexive systems, 2) Milton H. Erickson’s unconventional therapeutic work bringing in focus the specifics of each client - their context, strengths, and abilities - instead of diagnosing from an external position – and 3) to an interactional view on human mental research and Brief Family Therapy developed by Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Schazer (McKergow, 2021, p. 15-26). The approach is now used worldwide in coaching, counselling, therapy, education, social work, health care, organisational change, and leadership (McKergow, 2021; Dierolf et al. (eds.), 2020; Bushe & Marshak, 2015, p. 394). For a long time, the Solution-Focused approach has rejected proceeding towards theory building. That is because a central feature of the approach is highlighting the danger of any theory guiding perception and blocking the perception of features other than those the theory postulates

(Sundman et al., 2020, p. 15; Grant, 2011). However, the key foundational ideas of the Solution-Focused approach are well-developed and established (McKergow, 2021, p. 24-25; Korman et al., 2020; Sundman et al., 2020).

The Solution-Focused practice is especially interested in the subject of change as such - how change occurs spontaneously (i.e., in an emergent manner), how it can be promoted, and also why some problems persist. Watzlawick et al. (2011) describe how finding a way out of an unproductive problematic situation happens by changing the way of behaving and thus causing a *change of change* (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 11–12). Watzlawick et al. (2011) point out that problems are often maintained by mishandling difficulties by 1) denying that a problem is a problem and not taking action, although it would be necessary, or 2) taking action when it should not happen, that is, trying to change inevitable circumstances like the generation gap or a certain prevalence of a disease in a population, or 3) taking action on the wrong level, that is, attempting to make a first-order change that maintains or intensifies the problem.

A more-of-the-same type recipe characterizes first-order change that often introduces change attempts within a given frame of behaving (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 31-39). Second-order change lifts the solution from the recursive trap and places it in a different, more useful frame (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 81). Reframing “means changing the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the “facts” of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning” (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 93). Watzlawick et al. (2011) are aligned with Ashby in terms of holding that the structure of a complex system has to undergo a change, which can be affected only by the second-order change level (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 7).

A central way to enable second-order change and reframing to happen in problem solving is the Solution-Focused not-knowing position (Malinen, 2004). From a not-knowing (or an empty head) position everyday structures are studied in an uncategorized way leaving room for creativity and new perspectives and multiple realities to appear (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 125-126). That involves also avoiding prescriptions from an expert position and by being very humble in terms of knowing what could work, that is, providing any general knowledge from outside the situation that would be applied to this particular situation or to a person (Sundman et al., 2020; Bannik & Jackson, 2011, p. 7). A Solution-Focused change of reframing (second-order type of change) can sometimes be regarded as surprising or beyond control. However, that perspective can often be seen to rely on a narrow perspective from a readymade mental or structural box. From the

second-order perspective, they are simply changes from “one set of premises to another of the same logical type” (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 23-24).

Another characteristic factor of the Solution-Focused view is the use of language in stretching the world of solutions, possibilities, and progress (McKergow, 2021, p. 87). Instead of a problem-focused interest in knowing more about problems and describing them in detail, a Solution-Focused interviewing and dialogue explore how language both constructs and constricts our understanding of the world (Grant, 2011, p. 99). This notion strengthens the crucial link between language and action in curating human systems and as a crucial element in learning to think, learn and transform (McKergow, 2011; Lang & McAdam, 1994; Cronen et al., 1994; Lang et al., 1990). A description of what this means in the sphere of Solution-Focused facilitation and leadership is set out by Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020) in a following form: positive curiosity and parity (instead of evaluating from an outside expert position), an attitude of appreciation, concentration and patience, openness to framing and reframing issues in an evolving manner, keeping a sense of proportion, active listening with as few pre-assumptions as possible, shifting the attention from analysing the present problem to building the preferred future, knowing that achieving something is always a process, elevating enablers, resources and growth, focusing persistently on context and hints of the solutions available there (instead of the problem), and recognising useful metaphors and enabling the language use (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 120-121). All these features facilitate resource-oriented and future-driven co-creation. They support a truly shared practice of leadership (DeRue, 2011, p.133–135) and therefore offer an important background rationale for leadership meta-skills.

A distinctive aspect of a Solution-Focused approach is breaking the causal link between the past and future (McKergow, 2021, p. 143). This type of transformative teleology (Askeland, 2009, p. 68) activates unexploited possibilities and creativity (Rehn, 2019). It gears the look to creating a better future and chooses actions based on that (de Vries & Kim, 2011, p. 7) - instead of viewing the situation from the present moment perspective or via a narrow or pre-set goal attainment. Faithfully to complex responsive systems thinking (Askeland, 2009) this way of thinking and acting highlights that future is perpetually co-constructed and created by a value-driven future orientation - only what has not yet happened can be changed, therefore change will only happen from now on towards the future (Sundman et al., 2020). Solution-Focused philosophy and practice can be summarized as consisting of a future intention orientation, disengagement from problem-focused thinking and resource identification and activation (Grant, 2011).

3.4.3 Positive coaching psychology and virtues

Positive coaching psychology is conceived here as including both the Solution-Focused and positive psychology approaches to coaching (also Terni, 2015; Bannik & Jackson, 2011). As a discipline, positive psychology is a scientifically oriented scholarly field based on the seminal work of Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman. That work broke the pathological and disorder-oriented approach to human psychology and developed a value and virtue-based approach instead (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology is an umbrella term encompassing many different areas, including coaching. It has been described as “the science of the conditions and processes that lead to optimal human functioning” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p.104). Positive psychology coaching can be defined as “evidence-based coaching practice informed by the theories and research of positive psychology for the enhancement of resilience, achievement and well-being” (Panchal et al., 2019, p. 51). The key concepts of positive psychology coaching are 1) mindfulness contributing directly to well-being, 2) integrating strengths with unique personality and situational factors, 3) optimism and meaning of life and 4) the value of positive emotions in strengthening resources in physical, intellectual, social, and psychological domains and in building capacity for creative thinking and resilience (Panchal et al., 2019, p. 54-55).

The Solution-Focused view is more philosophically and practically oriented, and as described above, shuns theorising. The Handbook of Coaching Psychology (Palmer & Whybrow, 2019) divides coaching psychology approaches into behavioural and cognitive behavioural approaches, humanistic approaches, existential approaches, being-focused approaches, constructive approaches, and systems approaches. The Solution-Focused approach belongs to the constructive approaches set alongside coaching with personal construct psychology, narrative coaching, and neurolinguistic programming. Positive psychology is presented in the handbook as a significant thread in many coaching practices (Whybrow & Palmer, 2019, p. 3). Despite having different roots, positive psychology, and a Solution-Focus overlap in their efforts to advance human flourishing and fortify strength, virtue, human growth, and meaningfulness (Bannik & Jackson, 2011).

The view that people must leave their comfort zone if they are to learn, develop and transform is widespread (see, e.g., Hollingworth, 2016, pp. 38–41). One of the central contributions positive psychology and Solution-Focus have made to this discussion of renewal is providing a new paradigm for successful and effective change and development. They are more on Vygotsky’s lines (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017) stating that good performance cannot be built on weaknesses but should be

built on strengths. The best and most authentic human capacities identified, appreciated, and realized give the best possible results (Linley, 2007, p. 3, 23). When using their strengths people are at their most creative, energised, and committed both to learning and to applying what was learnt (Linley, 2007, p. 13). Furthermore, the point of organizing and team working is to help a group of people to achieve collectively more than as a group of individuals (Linley et al., 2007; Jun, 2006, p. 253). Appreciating different strengths, identifying unused potential and complementary partnering between people with different strengths give good results in organisations and networks (Linley, 2007, p. 171).

Coaching psychology deals with enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and the work domain. It is underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches (Whybrow & Palmer, 2019, p. 8). Coaching psychology differs from traditional psychology in being interested in revealing what people could be and what would help them move towards their desired direction in a complex world rather than exploring how people are now (Marks, 2011, p. 19; Govindji & Linley, 2007, Linley et al., 2007).

It is essential to note that positive psychology and the solution focused approach do not mean being always positive. They are both positive approaches when compared to taking a problem or a deficit as a starting point of investigation or action. Positive coaching psychology seeks to expose what is helpful, effective, and pragmatic in achieving better performance, coping or co-creating a better future and overcoming the negativity bias often present in human thinking and perception (McKergow, 2021, p. 25; Garcea & Linley, 2011, p. 162). As approaches, they are facilitative instead of authoritative, seek to relieve tensions and validate, affirm, and encourage instead of providing prescriptions from an outsider position (Marks, 2011, p. 19). Positive coaching psychology highlights the discursive and relational nature of interventions or inquiries dealing with human beings. As Rom Harré stated: There are no 'facts of the matter' in some domain of enquiry that are independent of the method and instruments of enquiry and of the concepts that are used in that enquiry (Harré, 1996).

Coaching practice as a reflective and emergent way of working shares common ground with complexity science (Kuhn & Whybrow, 2019, p. 419). Many coaching psychology practices – at least existentialist, personal construct psychology, Solution-Focused approach and coaching based on systems theory – are conceptually aligned with complexity theories yet not widely discussed in research literature (Whybrow et al., 2012, p. 72).

A positive coaching psychology approach that has had a significant effect on the idea of public sector leadership meta-skills is the anti-taxometric approach to

human strengths developed at the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (Linley et al., 2009; Biswas-Diener, 2009, p. 423). It states that prejudged classifications are not helpful in organisational applications and places more emphasis on the individual–organisation interface, where strengths meet the situation that calls for them (Linley et al., 2009). Although several strengths inventories have been developed to assist in strength spotting, Linley (2007) maintains that strengths need to be understood in context. There is no fixed number of top strengths people should or may have, strengths may reside in the background or foreground depending on the context and opportunity to use them, and many situations require using a combination of strengths (Linley, 2007, p. 93). An essential part of the strength focus relies on understanding that different leaders lead differently and can do so successfully. Instead of looking for “a core set of leadership skills, or personality traits, or situational requirements, that define leaders for all time and all circumstances” present day leadership embraces ideas on authenticity and seeing, using, and appreciating strengths in oneself and others (Linley et al., 2007, p.46). Human strengths are the best part of humanity and when strengths are recognized and played to in everyday life, they can facilitate performance which goes beyond the mediocre to reach the heights of the good or even the great (Linley, 2007, p. 5; see also Table 6.).

The development of positive psychology has awoken a new interest in ancient, Aristotelian questions of values and virtues that give both an ethical base and an ambitious target horizon for leadership and public action (Wilson & Newstead, 2022, p. 2). Research on virtues and leadership has shown that leadership striving for ethically desirable behaviours has many benefits beyond ethical considerations, that is, improved organisational harmony, stability and learning, greater employee commitment, empowerment and performance, and an improved ability to navigate change (Wilson & Newstead, 2022, p 2; Dutton et al., 2010, p. 270). These features also affect customer satisfaction, growth, and retention, and can improve financial returns (Wilson & Newstead, 2022, p. 3).

3.4.4 Organisational learning

Organisational learning enables organisations to transform individual knowledge into organisational knowledge (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 1) and co-create new knowledge in interaction with the working environment (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021, p. 7; Nonaka, 1994, p. 14). Argyris and Schön stated in their seminal theory on single-loop and double-loop learning that organisational learning should be looked from action perspective as a function either detaining change or triggering observed effects aligned with strategies and values of the organisation (Basten &

Haamann, 2018, p. 3). There are several theories of organisational learning (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 7-8). An important background theory for public sector leadership meta-skills is learning understood as an active and joint knowledge creation. This view stresses that learning cannot be sufficiently explained as information processing or problem-solving (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 3; Nonaka, 1994 p. 14) but contains an element of co-creation. There also lays the value of meta-skills in developing the public sector capability to address various and changing challenges. Like Mezirow emphasized, transformative adult learning goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and new interpretations and this transformative action can transform the community in which learning takes place (Calleja, 2014).

The concept of single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1982) resembles the Solution-Focused approach of Watzlawick et al. (2011). Both differentiate second-order problem resolution from first- and second-order problem-solving. (See sections 1 & 2.4.2 above). In referring to instrumental or first-loop learning, Argyris and Schön raise a learning response that leaves change strategies, assumptions, or values behind action unchanged. Concerning double-loop learning, they refer to new performance strategies examining trade-offs between different perspectives and analysing underlying beliefs behind different perspectives (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 3; Argyris & Schön, 1982, p. 68-69, 87).

Visser (Visser, 2007), referring to Bateson, presents another kind of view of deutero-learning, reserving it to imply to adaptive behaviour, context, and relationship rather than conscious learning and knowledge creation (Visser, 2007, p. 659). He suggests the term of meta-learning for organisational learning that is discontinuous, cognitive, and conscious and amenable to steering and organizing, and furthermore planned learning for “creation and maintenance of organisational systems, routines, procedures, and structures through which organisational members are induced to meta learn on a regular basis and in which the results of meta-learning are embedded for future use” (Visser, 2007, p. 665). Reaching out from causal models to non-linear complexity models of learning, have been later called also as triple-loop learning i.e., breaking the boundaries of professions, agency, and structure and understanding oneself and the own organisation as a part of a larger system and observing own and organisational operations as part of of a larger whole (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 164; Tosey et al., 2011, p. 293; Yuthas et al., 2004).

The organisational learning theory most closely related to the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills is Nonaka’s (1994) spiral of knowledge creation. That consists of a co-created circle of socialization, externalization, combination, and

internalization (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 3-4; Nonaka, 1994, p. 19). Nonaka highlights that organisational knowledge creation differs from individual knowledge creation and occurs when all the elements of the knowledge creation cycle are present (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20). He also stresses that a failure to build a dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge can create problems and that social processes are required to combine different bodies of knowledge (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20). Nonaka also notes that a catalytic leadership style that facilitates knowledge creation is an important prerequisite for organisational learning (Nonaka, 1994, p. 30-31) and that encouraging dialogue is a highly strategic leadership action (Nonaka, 1994, p. 5). Nonaka does not clarify what kind of skills are needed to run knowledge creation spirals in an organisation. It is, though, implicit throughout his article that knowledge creation needs facilitation, setting an example, and creating a favourable organisational culture for learning (Nonaka, 1994).

Focusing on organisational learning in a knowledge creation sense highlights that organisational adaptability, change, and performance can be addressed through interactional co-creation. That can also be a way to achieve the required responsiveness in governance actions since meta-governance literature also argues that many collaborative governance arrangements operate ad hoc in the shadow of formal hierarchies (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1774). Bushe & Marshak (Bushe & Marshak, 2015) identify eight key premises for shifting the perspective from diagnostic attitude towards organisational learning and development to dialogical and co-creational approach. They stress the understanding that organizations are socially constructed realities, where individual and joint meaning making is a central function, that the language used matters and changing the organisation requires changing the manner of every-day conversations, utilising the inherited self-organizing capacity of human systems, broadening the concept of participation, understanding that transformation takes more an intention than a plan, and remembering that there are no neutral outsiders in the process, but all contribute with their discursive influences and actions (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, p. 395-397).

The complexity challenges of public-sector leadership prompt those interested in formal or organized training and development to ask what kind of learning inside and between organisations could accelerate upskilling and transformation in the public sector. Such training should encourage a coherent response to the new requirements of collaborative governance and cross-sectoral co-learning. The challenges of collaborative governance include establishing policy decision-making and leadership that engage people constructively. That engagement must span the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres (Emerson et al., 2012). Teaching or learning restricted by

the boundaries of public institutions is not an effective vehicle for the required learning and change. Value co-creation seems to require citizen orientation from a civil servant, a positive view of citizens' capability to contribute and the expected benefits of the co-operation (Magno & Cassia, 2015, p. 1161; Jun, 2006, p. 238).

Experiential learning emphasises the sensemaking process of active engagement between a person's inner world and the outer world of their environment (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 51). Beard and Wilson asserted that the principles of good learning include learning being more effective when it is active, learning in a real setting being more enduring than theory-based learning, two-way communication producing better learning results than one-way communication, people learning better when they share control of and responsibility for their own learning process, and learning being most effective when thought and action are integrated (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 274).

Experiential learning as a learning approach incorporates the cognitive and socio-emotional perspectives on learning, helps in taking individual differences into account, and is based on a human-growth-oriented experiential learning process (Kolb & Fry, 1975, p. 34). Experiential learning is similar to positive coaching psychology in valuing establishing a good climate for learning, paying attention to trust building, having a clear purpose and congruence, emphasizing the positive and creating ownership, and client-centredness. It also takes account of the whole person and the complete process of learning and applies what is learned to practice (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 74). It favours activity-based experimental meaning-making and learning-by-doing in direct communication with real-life settings (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 116). Experiential learning takes a holistic approach to learning compared to the behavioural approach relying on conditioning in learning or the cognitive approach treating learning as kin to rational and computational brain processing (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 224). Experiential learning is an active and contextualized process, a two-way road, since "our being influences our knowing of the world around us and the world around us and our knowing influences our way of being in the world" (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 226). Experiential learning can be seen as an asset in making learning actionable (Jun, 2006, p. 249) and in opening up the public sector for co-creational processes with the other sectors and the civic society.

3.4.5 The open-systems approach and social construction

As discussed in sub-sections 3.4.2–3.4.4, the influential theories forming the basis for public sector leadership meta-skills, the Solution-Focused view on change and problem-solving, positive coaching psychology, and organisational learning (see

Figure 1.) each have different scholarly and practical roots; however, they all share common features:

- 1) seeing people as capable and resourceful and stressing that building favourable surroundings tends to give constructive results in terms of human learning, change and development (McKergow, 2021, p. 119-120; Linley, 2007, p. 42; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 2, 61-63; Nonaka, 1994, p. 24-25; Kolb & Fry, 1975, p. 51-56),
- 2) seeing change as requiring action to produce viable outcomes and acknowledging that sometimes action comes first and insight follows (Linley, 2007, p. 13-14; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 18-19; Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 51), and
- 3) representing non-linear and emergent approaches to human development, that is, they are compatible with the characteristics of a complex environment (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Cilliers, 2009).

The characteristics of complexity are defined by Cilliers (2009) as follows: complex systems are open systems, which exchange energy or information with their environment; they consist of a large number of elements that in themselves can be simple; the elements interact dynamically and nonlinearly by exchanging energy or information; there are direct and indirect feedback loops in interaction; complex systems have memory distributed throughout the system; the functioning of the system is determined by the nature of the interactions, not by what is contained within the components; and the system as a whole is also adaptable (i.e. emergent) and cannot be reduced to or predicted from its components (Cilliers, 2000, p. 24).

This open-systems approach – where things happen during an interaction, not in isolation (Cilliers, 2000) – makes organisations and human systems unpredictable and emergent in their handlings (Cilliers, 2000), and therefore also fruitful ground for humans striving to create a better future (McKergow, 2021, p. 90; Hartley et al., 2017, p. 674; Cavanagh & Grant, 2010, p. 54; Linley, 2007, p. 227; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 14-15; Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 253). In the complexity and systems approaches, there is also an influential school striving to model complex processes and by that predict and define the functions of complex adaptive systems (Rosenhead et al., 2019, p. 20-21; Van Der Merwe, 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p.314). However, cross-sectoral collaboration within government and public-sector leadership meta-skills represents an open and adaptive system rationale of systems thinking (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p.314; Cilliers, 1998, pp. 14–16).

The three background concepts here share a socially constructed view of the world (Gergen, 2015) rather than a logical empiricist one (Rabetino et al., 2020, p. 155-

156; Cooperrider, 2017, pp. 100–101). The approach implies that understanding itself is meaning-making rather than relating to prediction and control; the human mind is regarded both as a mirror and a lamp, and perspectives on social phenomena are guided by heuristics, ideas, and actions rather than being stable, reliable and replicable. Instead of seeking objective knowledge, it maintains that values filter our interpretations and the range of possibilities (Cooperrider, 2017, p. 100-101; Jun, 2006, p. 64, 77).

Social construction thus acknowledges many different forms of knowledge and treats people as active information creators, thinkers, and experimenters. Social construction also regards learning and development as primarily targeting altering attitudes and actions and encouraging people to build personal relationships with new knowledge (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 121; Jun, 2006, p. 123). These characteristics enhance the learning capacity of human systems, which happens when connections are seen, functions related to one another, diversity utilised, synergies created, and process-oriented dialogical action is undertaken (Wals & Schwatzin, 2012, p. 15). The result is a way to archive social transformation that extends further out, down, and up than the traditional strategic leadership of a single organisation, collaboration, coalition, or advocacy effort (Bryson et al., 2021).

As an approach to public administration social construction reminds that good governance cannot be transformed to techniques and (presumably) value-free procedures of functional planning, rules of procedure, accounting and budget control, efficient allocation of organisational resources, and hierarchically set performance measures (Jun, 2006, p. 17). When these are put aside, great ideas may rise in case different parties open for exploring possibilities and discourse on the intended outcome (Jun, 2006, p. 43). By exploring other ways of knowing and relating we can better see the limitations of functional rules, procedures and routines (Jun, 2006, p. 45). Dialogical decision and policy-making processes with many stakeholders also predict better success in putting policies and decisions into practice (Jun, 2006, p. 43).

4 MAKING SENSE OF META-SKILLS IN THE BROADER LEADERSHIP RESEARCH CONTEXT

4.1 General notions

As described in the previous section, all sub-studies (Articles I–IV) of this dissertation include a theoretical discussion of how to locate public-sector leadership meta-skills in the multifaceted scholarly tradition of leadership. This section aims to strengthen the knowledge base and to address how recent research on leadership and public governance has discussed leadership meta-skills. The issues are discussed from the viewpoint of 1) public-sector leadership academic traditions, 2) the mentions of leadership meta-skills found in leadership research literature, and 3) how meta-skills appear in the leading journals of leadership and public governance.

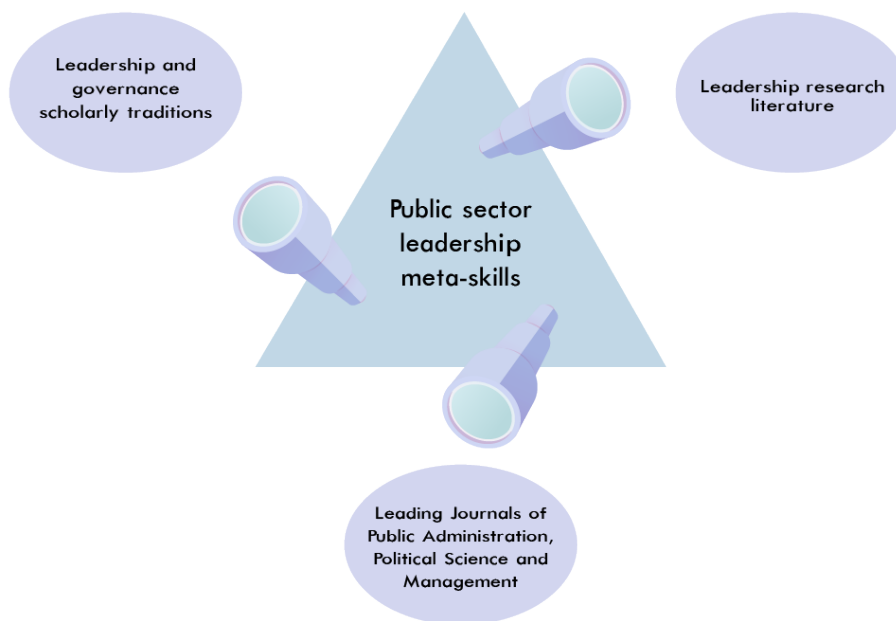


Figure 2. Setting meta-skills in a broader leadership research context

In conjunction with the evolution of the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills and when exploring the concept further in the sub-studies (Articles I–IV), the indication is that the meta-skills approach is a novel one. The purpose of this sub-section is to determine if that is the case.

4.2 Scoping meta-skills in the context of public sector leadership and governance

The perception of what constitutes good leadership has fluctuated over time and as societal circumstances shift (Wilson, 2013; Tholen, 2011, p. 33). In her historical analysis of the form and formation of different leadership discourses of leadership, Wilson defines the periods of major theoretical paradigms in leadership science. The mid-1850s to the late 1940s were the time of the great man/trait theory. The late 1940s to the late 1960s period was according to Wilson (2013) marked by an interest in leaders' behaviour. The late 1960s to the late 1970s was an era of situational/contingency models highlighting that since the nature of work differs, the way to lead must differ. The period from the late 1970s to the present day has been the era of new leadership (Wilson, 2013, p. 65). The period of new leadership can be divided into three main research lines presenting charismatic, visionary, and transformational leadership, which refer back to recurrent features of the leadership discourse (Wilson, 2013, p. 5, 65).

Great man theory espouses that some people are born to be leaders. Consequently, little space was available for learning and development as a leader (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 54). Trait theory also highlights a leader's personality and individual personality traits. It has continuously been very influential, although its dominance in the public leadership scene began to wane in the second half of the twentieth century (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 54; van Wart, 2004, p. 218). Situational/contingency theory was the first dominant theory to shift the focus from the leader to the environment and to building the capacity to match leadership styles to different circumstances (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 54). Transformational or visionary theory started to look at leadership from more actionable point of view and as a capacity to generate followership and change (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 54).

Against that historical background, leadership can be seen as something that can be tailored to respond to different priorities and is always in dialogue with the values and norms of the particular time (Wilson, 2013). It is worth noting that other ways to observe and theorize leadership have always paralleled the major theoretical approaches to leadership in any period (De Cock et al., 2013). Those include forerunners of human-centred and relational leadership like Mary Parker Follett (1868–1933) (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 36; Salovaara & Bathurst, 2018) and Geoffrey Vickers, VC (1894–1982) (Ison, 2005). A more recent example is servant leadership, which suggests the service mentality is the ultimate rationale of leadership inside and outside the organisation (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 36; van Wart, 2003, p. 218).

Throughout different times public sector leadership has distinctively pursued a strive for good governance (Fawcett et al., 2018; Hussain, 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2007, p. 179). Part of that has involved creating and maintaining boundaries of missions, resources, capacity, responsibility, and accountability that have become long-standing hierarchical management structures (Fawcett et al., 2018). In many countries in northern Europe, the development from feudal and aristocrat-governed societies started to slowly transform into a bureaucratic/universal state in the mid-nineteenth century. The transition was spurred by establishing both the first state administrative structures and some level of schooling for the people conducting state administrative duties (van Meer et al., 2015; Rothstein, 1998). This reform represented a remarkable advance towards fairer, more efficient, and more predictable governance instead of governance by inherited nobility and a social system based on individual loyalties (Fawcett et al., 2018; Rothstein, 1998). Max Weber was the main actor to rationalise these principles as the guiding standards of public administration at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the heart of this shift was the idea of lawfulness, and the focus of the training and background of the early-stage civil servants was some form of education in the law (van Meer et al., 2015; Rothstein, 1998).

Weber's ideas of legality and legitimacy (Cotterrell, 1997) remain influential in the realm of public administration and governance (Virtanen et al., 2023; Martela, 2019, p. 21). However, the functions of government expanded in the latter half of the twentieth century. Civil servants were recruited from more diverse backgrounds, the understanding of fulfilling human and societal needs broadened from equality before the law to promoting well-being, and complex, horizontal ways of working and interwoven service networks materialized (Fawcett et al., 2018; Virtanen et al., 2023). That has also meant greater cross-disciplinary engagement in public policymaking, broad participation in the ideal of governance, and prompted a demand for new skill sets for public-sector leaders (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 334, 344-398; Fawcett et al., 2018; Fox Freyss, 2015).

New Public Management starting from late 1980's was the first attempt to renew the ethos of the traditional bureaucratic public administration with ideas of broadening public accountability and establishing organisation based on best practices (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 40). New public management intensified the economic view on efficiency in public duty and services and also led to the marketization of public services in many countries (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 43; Lowe & Wilson, 2015). New public governance followed approximately ten years later, shifting the focus towards open systems and cooperation coordination and governance models (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 45; Bourgon, 2017). Although there have been serious attempts to renew public administration and public sector

leadership, the bureaucratic division of labour, clearly defined hierarchies and the tasks based on expertise still have a powerful position in organising public administration (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 44; Fawcett et al., 2018).

Now public administration and public sector leadership “is being negotiated, remade and contested” in the face of increased complexity, multiple policy actors, new information systems and digitalisation, and networks based on trust, self-organisation, and decentred authority (Fawcett et al., 2018). Collaborative and human-centred governance have become topics of interest because the public sector is now viewed as a systems-based network closely connected to societal phenomena and institutions rather than as predefined administrative implementation machinery (Virtanen et al., 2023). From this point of view, how public institutions maintain their classic interest in institutional autonomy becomes secondary (Fawcett et al., 20218). The more important issue is how the public sector and public leadership enhance public values, in the form of serving people and striving to achieve democratic ideals (Bozeman and Crow, 2022, p. 67-69).

Alongside these developments, it has become obvious that public governance or public-sector leadership cannot continue to approach its tasks through a one-dimensional approach of legality and legitimacy; or any other single perspective (Van der Wal, 2017; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). Jun (2006) has presented in his comprehensive work on social construction and public administration a severe concern that instrumental-technical rationality reduces governance to structural and functionalist views of management. He distinguishes the action-oriented socio-constructive pragmatism from instrumental pragmatism of traditional tool and structure driven approaches to public administration (Jun, 2006, xxii).

Public-sector leadership requires juggling conflicting dilemmas based on multidimensionality, complexity and inherent, conflictual problem, value and objective settings that cannot be erased or solved as such (Head 2022, p.21-35; Termeer et al., 2015). That situation has awoken interest in connective and ethical leadership that can facilitate decision-making and change in the complex world (Lipman-Blumen, 2017; Tholen, 2011, p. 34). There has been fragmented interest in the effects of this shift in the rationale and skill set of public sector leaders in approaches of value-based leadership as an answer to financial greed, corruption and other unethical practices revealed (Copeland, 2014), the integrity of leadership on individual and group/organisational level (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009), new managerial roles and dynamics (van der Wal, 2017, p. 51; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020), theory-practice-gap in public-sector belief systems (van der Wal & Yang, 2014), as well as in theoretical discussions of public-sector innovation (Lewis et

al., 2018; Wouter et al., 2016; Hartley et al., 2013, Hartley, 2005) and collaborative governances as ecosystems (Kinder et al., 2021; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016) and importance of virtues and character for contemporary leadership (Wilson & Newstead, 2022), and what Tholen (Tholen, 2006) calls a Public Virtue Approach (Tholen, 2011, p. 34). All these approaches can be characterized as currently being under development rather than dominant approaches in research and part of the everyday understanding of public-sector leadership.

Trottier et al. (2008) describe the shift in the public sector from more position-based transactional leadership to transformative and distributed leadership as significant (Trottier et al., 2008, 319, 329). The shift has improved employee satisfaction (Trottier et al., 2008, 319, 329), motivation based on competence, autonomy and meaningfulness, coordination closer to the actual conjoint work tasks and organisational learning based on a better flow of information and knowledge at organisational levels and concerning the surrounding environment (Jakobsen et al., 2021, p. 5). Important ideas spanning the various understandings of distributed and shared leadership practices are that 1) leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person or authority, 2) taking a collective and systemic framework in respect of organisations, and 3) conceiving leadership as a social process (Hanna et al, 2021, p. 82; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2021, p. 3; DeRue, 2011, p.133-135). These are all important factors from the perspective of leadership meta-skills strengthening the ability to lead together with cross-sectoral leadership competencies and seeing leadership as interaction, influence, mobilization, and direction (Jakobsen et al., 2021, p. 1-2).

The characteristics Hanna et al. (Hanna et al., 2021) attach to emergent leadership i.e., lateral influence and temporal duration characterize also cross-sectoral public sector leadership (Hanna et al., 2021, p. 81). They, however, limit emergent leadership foremost to individual level, and refer to shared leadership as the form of a more collective approach to leadership. Jacobsen et al. (2021) suggest that a distributed leadership perspective adds to the public administration literature, especially by enhancing sensitivity to planned and nonplanned leadership always co-existing in organisations (Jakobsen et al., 2021, p. 2). The same notions are highlighted by adaptive leadership, which is akin to meta-skilful leadership. Adaptive leadership has highlighted the role of informal leadership processes that generate adaptivity and new solutions, engage people across differences and facilitate recombination (Uhl-Bien, 2021, p. 151; Murphy et al., 2017, p. 695). In addition, the research literature of adaptive leadership features leadership capabilities like relationship building, open-mindedness, building interactive dynamics, and social capital as important ingredients in successful adaptive governance (Wilson et al., 2020, p. 27; Galuska, 2014, p. 35). To an extent, the

research literature on adaptive leadership focuses more on identifying structural and policy mechanisms increasing the adaptability of the governance (Garavaglia et al., 2021; Keys et al., 2014).

This sub-section builds upon the work of van Wart in holding that meta-skills have common features with various forms of collaborative leadership (Virtanen et al., 2023, p. 101), and especially with community change management and organisational learning (Van Wart, 2017, p. 177). These approaches on their behalf belong to the *cultural school* of leadership and organisational formation (Mintzberg, 1998, p. 143), stressing that the reverse picture of power is the culture (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999, p. 25). Uniting for all these traditions is an interest in enabling organisations, practitioners, and service users to work together in a more cooperative and trust-based manner (Van Wart, 2017, p. 177).

4.3 Scoping meta-skills in leadership research literature

In addition to looking at leadership scholarly traditions from a meta-skills point of view, I searched the literature in four databases to determine what is generally understood by leadership meta-skills. The conclusions are reported in this sub-section.

A search of ProQuest (proquest.com), without any time limits, produced 126 hits (June 10th, 2022). Most hits were related to employability, specialist, or student development and, more generally, to learning at the interface of theory and practice. A few articles refer specifically to increasing complexity in the background of the need to study meta-skills. In addition, future orientation and thinking styles are mentioned in some of the articles. The database of Emerald Premium eJournals (formerly Emerald Insight, emerald.com) produced 94 hits (June 10th, 2022). Most overlapped with the previous ones. Searching the ScienceDirect (ScienceDirect.com) database produced 113 hits (June 10th, 2022), here too, most overlapping with previously discovered records. All three databases combined produced 13 articles relating to leadership and/or defining meta-skills in a manner that was of interest in the context of this dissertation. A subsequent Web of Science search added two articles to the selection. The following table illustrates how these 15 articles have viewed meta-skills in the leadership science context:

Table 5. Mentions of meta-skills in leadership research literature.

Number of articles presented after the theme divisions.

Nature of meta-skills		Why needed?		What in leadership?	
Dynamic, adaptable, and transferable skills	2	Paradox management, increasing complexity, leading under uncertainty	5	Communicating, interpersonal skills	5
Skills that enable one to develop new skills	2	Strategic development	2	Engaging others in the future vision	2
Background skills that unite knowledge and skills	2	Changing working life	2	Metacognition	2
Ways of addressing other people and situations	2	Employability	2	Creativity	2
Reflective capacity	2	Resource fluidity in changing environment	2	Innovation	2
Indicators of future performance	1			Leading paradigm shifts	1
<i>Articles: Brown, 2003; Holten et al., 2015; Bridal, 2004; Brix Olesen et al., 2021; Ambrozová et al., 2016; Gergen, 2013; Barkas et al., 2020; Baber, 2018; Value walk, 2017; Saunila et al., 2015; Vilkinas & Cartan, 1993; Muñoz, 2013; King & Badham, 2019; Yildiz & Aykanat, 2020; Chesbrough, 2010.</i>				Multisectoral alliances	1
				Emotional maturity	1

In conclusion, we can see that meta-skills are mentioned in a very limited number of leadership research articles. Leadership literature mentioning meta-skills seems to support the idea that meta-skills are transferable skills promoting flexibility and relational abilities. The available research also supports the idea that leadership meta-skills appear on both the individual and collective levels and are necessary components of adopting a learning attitude and triggering adaptive and creative action. The need for networked governance and the active role of leadership in tackling the complexity challenges gets support from these articles.

An especially interesting finding from the literature review was that King and Badham (2019) and Baber (2018) linked meta-skills to metacognition. King and Badham (2019) defined meta-skills as necessary abilities for leading under uncertainty. King and Badham's *mindful leadership development matrix* (2019, p. 11) defines meta-skills, meta-abilities, and meta-qualities as a leader's observable behaviour demonstrating individual wisdom. They link meta-skills to an awareness of oneself and others in defining and negotiating individual and relational purpose. The study links meta-abilities to self-regulating behaviour and meta-qualities to open, curious, and compassionate responses to challenges (King & Badham, 2019). King and Badham assert these individual skills also facilitate the emergence of collective mindfulness and collective wisdom (King & Badham, 2019).

Baber (2018) deals with the issue in the context of executive education and calls for leadership education that takes into account the changing nature of work, managerial roles and developing capabilities to lead in the paradigm shifts to come. He includes metacognitive skills, creativity, innovation, and career-supporting meta-abilities to meta-skills (Baber, 2018). In addition, Holten et al. (2015) link meta-skills to a holistic approach to learning. The study points out that leadership meta-skills are adaptable and transferable and are conveyed through communicating, translating visions, and engaging employees in goal-attainment. Moreover, meta-skills are important skills to develop in a changing working life context (Holten et al., 2015).

Metagovernance is not mentioned in the articles mentioning meta-skills, but Yildiz and Aykanat (2020) present meta-skills as organisational competences of strategic sensitivity, leadership cohesion and resource fluidity and link the need for them to contradictory situations (Yildiz & Aykanat, 2020). Chesbrough (2010) works on the same lines and discusses the role of leadership meta-skills in raising organisational innovation capacity, maintaining unity among the leadership team, and the ability to reallocate resources to support new models as leader's meta-skills (Chesbrough, 2010).

Kenneth Gergen (2013) describes meta-skills as generative skills. Gergen highlights meta-skills when describing the human ability to choose from multiple potential ways to address other people and situations, picking up the “voice that you really ought to have present” when seeking to create good relationships (Gergen, 2013).

4.4 Scoping meta-skills within the fields of Public Administration, Political Science and Public Management

The limited number of articles mentioning leadership meta-skills prompted further database searches to establish how meta-skills or an equivalent have appeared in leading scientific journals within leadership and public-sector research. I conducted this search on June 19th, 2022, in the Web of Science database and it covered the previous five years. The list of leading leadership, management and public sector journals identified via SCImago Journal Rankings (June 17th, 2022, www.scimagoir.com) is included as Appendix 3.

The obvious novelty of the concept of public-sector leadership skills and the meagre results of the previous search prompted extending the search to cover all articles mentioning *skill/skills*, or *capability*, or *competence* in the *public sector*

or *governance/government* and within the search terms of *leadership* or *management*. Human skills and competences can be approached and labelled in many ways. In common language use, skills, capabilities, and competences are often used as overlapping or alternative terms for the same issue. The terms are used in different ways in scientific discussion depending on the scholarly field and the associated understandings. The use of these terms in this dissertation is Presented on Key terms (in the end of the dissertation).

The search (conducted on June 19, 2022) produced 151 articles, the majority belonging to the Web of Science categories of public administration, political science, and management. Twenty-five articles were deleted from the sample because they were duplicates or belonged solely to the business environment. An additional search in the same 17 journals on June 20, 2022 using *people skills*, *communication skills* or *future skills* as alternative terms for meta-skills (ALL=((Public-sector OR govern*) AND (leadership OR management) AND (people-skills OR communication skills OR future skills)) produced five articles, of which two were duplicates, and one was not relevant to the theme. Consequently, two articles were added to closer scrutiny. In this search, the timespan was 1986–2022.

This combination of searches produced 128 articles, and their abstracts were duly examined and thematically categorised (see Appendix 4). Most of the 128 articles had their theoretical background in knowledge management or knowledge transfer and the concept of institutional capital, including human capital (Busscher et al., 2022; Barkas et al., 2021). The search results indicate that knowledge transfer (and institutional capital as part of it) are the influential present-day theories of skills in leadership and in public administration. Another finding was that the vast majority of the research articles studied public sector from the perspective of cities or local governments, and very few explored central government.

Following the review of the abstracts, 24 articles were chosen for scrutiny. The articles were chosen based on their possible value from a leadership meta-skills perspective. One article (theme area: supranational governance) was dropped in this phase due to being of only minor relevance to the theme of this dissertation. Consequently, 23 articles from 17 leading journals within the field of leadership and the public sector published during the previous five years were analysed. The findings most relevant for scoping the theme of public-sector meta-skills are summarized below. In addition, a table of the key considerations of the 23 articles on leadership competences and skills to develop is included in Appendix 5.

Two articles (Connell et al., 2019; Van der Voet & Lems, 2022) point out that metagovernance and addressing complex problems demand new skills and leadership abilities. Among those skills and abilities described was developing the capacity to combine facilitation, management, and interaction with a capacity for self-regulation and constructing a “discursive storyline which defines problems and possible solutions” (Connell et al., 2019, p. 3). Van der Voet and Lems (2022) maintain that while behavioural theory proposes that satisfactory policy solutions can be identified by searching for suitable models for complex problems, the solutions must be created and designed (Van der Voet & Lems, 2022). Complex problems call for an understanding of the circumstances likely to produce creativity in administration instead of the often-seen mechanistic approach based on an efficiency orientation of doing the same things better and cheaper and with that decreasing capability for creative policy responses (Van der Voet & Lems, 2022). They find out that in situations of perceived threat for negative performance, decision-making authority tends to become “more centralized, and formalization and standardization will increase, bringing about a so-called mechanistic shift”, which limits public organisations’ capacity to adapt to adverse circumstances (Van der Voet & Lems, 2022). The same study emphasises developing the capacity to both adapt to and generate creative policy responses (Van der Voet & Lems, 2022).

Four of the articles link the need for new public-sector leadership abilities to the co-generating of public value (Trivellato et al., 2019; Brown & Head, 2019; Capano & Woo, 2018; Maggetti & Trein, 2022). Brown and Head (2019) state that this dynamic shift must occur despite problems around hierarchical upward accountability and the narrow focus on expert knowledge (Brown & Head, 2019). Both Capano and Woo (2018) and Maggetti and Trein (2022) advocate wide-ranging problem-solving capacity and the appropriate timing of policy design processes (Capano & Woo, 2018; Maggetti & Trein, 2022).

Ten ⁵ articles address the networked governance necessary for better policy integration. Five ⁶ articles approach the theme more from the angle of organisational development. De Jong et al. (2021) point out that networked governance requires public-sector managers to develop a new strategic capacity to think and act strategically across organisational boundaries. Carlisle and Gruby (2019) scrutinise the role of developing an adaptive capacity in successfully working with polycentric systems with cross-cutting jurisdictions. Slayton and

⁵ Carlisle & Gruby, 2019; Andrews et al., 2021; Yates & Hartley, 2021; Lee & Park, 2020; Rietig & Dupont, 2021; de Jong et al., 2021; Busscher et al., 2022; Hileman & Bodin, 2018; Arnold & Long, 2019; Slayton & Clark-Ginsberg, 2017

⁶ Zhang et al., 2020; Hansen, 2021; Ali et al., 2018; Ferrer-Serrano et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019

Clark-Ginsberg (2017) maintain that the broader implication of the complex world calls for governing public risks by going beyond regulation. The study uses the US energy sector and cyber risks as examples and advocates engaging the private sector in forming “communities of interest” (Slayton & Clark-Ginsberg, 2017).

Busscher et al. (2022) report that institutional design strategies can create either a virtuous or a vicious circle. The study identifies three roles that a network manager can take: a convener, a mediator, and a catalyst (Busscher et al., 2022). The role of the convener is to facilitate the collaboration of stakeholders and structure deliberation (Busscher et al., 2022, p. 477–495). Additionally, conveners safeguard information flow and legitimacy and act as stewards of the collaborative process enabling social capital and political capital to develop (Busscher et al., 2022, p. 477–495). Mediators “nurture relationships” by managing conflict, brokering, facilitating discussion, and encouraging positive exchanges between stakeholders. Catalysts help to identify and realize value-creating opportunities and build wide mental ownership of the issue. Busscher et al. (2022) point out that network management requires capabilities to adopt all three roles and that institutional design strategies are crucial for successful network management (Busscher et al., 2022, p. 477-495).

Some of the articles discuss the political nature of the working environment of public-sector leadership (Andrews et al., 2021; Yates & Hartley, 2021; Hileman & Bodin, 2018; Arnold & Long, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Yates and Hartley (2021) look at beyond general notions of the importance of networking and coordination skills and suggest political astuteness is a key meta-competency. They include personal & interpersonal skills, reading people and situations, building alignment and alliances, as well as strategic direction and scanning to crucial political capabilities of public-sector leaders. Arnold and Long (2019) highlight the opportunity to adopt a long view of policy processes while remaining alert to emerging opportunities (Arnold & Long, 2019).

The articles by Hansen (2021) and Ali et al. (2018) are an exception in that they highlight qualities like warmth, friendliness (Hansen, 2021), and familiarity (Ali et al., 2018) as civil-servant skills that generate citizen trust in government and public service delivery as well as an important platform for knowledge exchange (Hansen, 2021; Ali et al., 2018).

Zhang et al. (2020) link the need for new public sector leadership capabilities to lifting democratic values over bureaucratic values (Zhang et al. 2020). Schmidhuber and Hilgers (2021) link the need for competence development to the ideals of open government and stress that both ability and willingness are needed for key actors to move beyond traditional organisational borders and

collaborate with the external environment to develop solutions (Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021). Torfing et al. (2020) approach the issue from the ideal of innovative, democratic, and transparent government (Torfing et al., 2020). They maintain that collaborative innovativeness requires nurturing the diversity of views, ideas and forms of knowledge and establishing a common ground for joint learning. They stress the role of hands-on leadership over hands-off institutional design as an important success factor in securing collaborative innovativeness. Public leaders may take different roles in collaborative innovation processes, but leadership that promotes, encourages, supports, and facilitates collaboration while stimulating transformative learning and creative problem-solving, is central to success. Torfing et al. raise the question of balancing innovation and the democratic and transparent quality of the process (Torfing et al., 2020).

Despite the merits of the articles presented above, leadership skills/capabilities/competences appropriate to tackle the societal, complexity, and co-creation challenges do not form a coherent theoretical topic within the field of public governance or leadership. However, the new type of requirements for leadership to succeed in policy formation, co-creation and in generating public value is recognized in the research literature. The majority of the articles illustrate the development trends within governance and present some descriptions of new leadership qualities or objectives. Few articles go to the level of leadership skills, and even less to discuss how these new skills are acquired and developed.

5 CONCLUSIONS OF THE THEORETICAL SCRUTINY

To summarise the theoretical scrutiny of Chapters 3 and 4, the complexity challenge of public governance and public-sector leadership is widely recognized and, to some extent, also described in the research literature. Best (2012) summarizes the issue, stating “Ambiguity persists even in bureaucratic organizations” striving for standardization, bureaucratic rationalization, and measurable results (Best, 2012). The discussion around the complexity challenge is cross-disciplinary and includes many different scholarly discursive lines within the fields of leadership research, public administration, political science, and management. The Covid-19 pandemic intensified interest in cross-sectoral governance and policy interventions, as is evident from the number of published articles.

How the public-sector and public-sector leadership adapt to this new situation, what new skills and capabilities should be developed, and how that transformation would be enabled are topics less frequently addressed in the research literature, making it a poorly understood phenomenon. Public-sector leadership meta-skills, as such, is a novel and randomly mentioned issue in leadership research. The main lines of research on skills, capabilities and competencies in leadership and public governance relate to knowledge management, knowledge transfer and the concept of institutional capital, including human capital (Busscher et al., 2022; Barkas et al., 2021). This paradigm, rooted in the business world (Rabetino et al., 2020, p. 158), takes a resource-based view of capabilities providing a competitive advantage. In other words, a human capital perspective on economic value creation (Mahoney & Kor, 2015) addresses capabilities primarily as an institutional feature raising organisational capacity (Chesbrough, 2010; Hartley & Benington, 2006). New leadership skills are sometimes mentioned in general terms of people management or communication skills (e.g., Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018, p. 101) but seldom specified from the perspective of how leaders obtain, develop, and demonstrate these skills in practice. These theoretical discussions also rarely specify how relationships of trust are established, curiosity and diversity of people, strengths and organisations utilized, and favourable conditions for co-creation enabled (Hartley & Benington, 2006, p.107).

The meta-skills approach provides a concept to fill this knowledge gap. It encourages discussion of the understanding of human learning, change and collaboration, especially in the working environment of the public sector and public governance. In that environment, knowledge is co-created, and sometimes also contested between political, civil service, and civil society actors (Van Gerven, 2019, p. 504-504; Van der Meer et al., 2012; Hartley & Benington, 2006, p. 107).

The role of public-sector leaders “intertwines not just with organisational politics but also directly with the work of politicians, public policy, and the public” (Hartley et al., 2015, p. 197-198; Hartley & Allison, 2000). The mandate and aspiration of this new knowledge creation and public-sector leadership is to create public value (Hartley et al., 2017).

Section 3 illustrates how the meta-skills approach leans itself to theories of open systems and social construction, the cumulated learning from the philosophical and practical approach of the Solution-Focused approach, and the scholarly fields of positive coaching psychology, virtues and organisational learning. The need for this interdisciplinary leap is grounded in the notion that research streams on collaborative governance and metagovernance are considered to underscore the role of mutual exchange and learning (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1771; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, p. 826). Jun (2006) points out that even Weber stressed the role of meaningful relatedness in public administration, and continues that the overcoming the dysfunctions of bureaucracy and hierarchy require harnessing interactive, intentional and creative social design characterized by multiple actors, withholding both short and long-term horizon and sharing responsibility (Jun, 2006, p. 2, 6, 64, 80, 94).

Some scholars have outlined something akin to meta-skills when introducing the concept of (new) public-sector leader roles to the research literature. These contributions include new roles as a storyteller, a resource weaver, a systems architect, and a navigator; evolving roles of a commissioner, a broker, and a reticulist; and long-standing roles as a regulator, a protector, an adjudicator, and an expert (van der Wal, 2017, p. 22-23). Furthermore, three public-sector leadership roles are dominant, especially in the literature on collaborative governance and public-sector innovation i.e., the roles of a convener, facilitator, and catalyst (Torfing et al., 2020, p. 294; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2017; Hartley et al., 2013). Salovaara and Bathurst (2018) on their behalf described roles involving “power-with practices” of letting-go, engaging others, and building on facilitative and horizontal leadership. In addition, Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) highlighted the leadership behaviours of brokering, connecting, facilitating, and energizing.

The remaining and partly unanswered question and a knowledge gap is what kind of skills and capabilities are needed to successfully take these new roles and what could and should be done to achieve upskilling of public-sector leaders in these mandates. A step in this direction was taken by testing the concept and hypothesis of public sector leadership meta-skills with high-ranking government and civil service leaders in Finland. These empirical findings will be summarized in the next section of this dissertation.

6 META-SKILLS AND PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP – AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH

6.1 General notions

As the theoretical section revealed, the research literature related to meta-skills focuses more on describing when and why meta-skills are important in public-sector leadership but offers fewer ideas on what meta-skills are in practice and how they can be developed. However, the context-bound nature of meta-skills is supported by the research literature (King & Badham, 2019; Holten et al., 2015; Linley et al., 2009; Biswas-Diener, 2009, p. 423).

In order to understand better the relevance of the concept of meta-skills in equipping civil service leaders to address complex challenges in a non-compartmentalized, holistic, and phenomena-based way (see sub-section 3.2) highly experienced public-sector leaders were a natural choice for a test group due to the nature of their work duties and broad experience. The subjects also had a good vantage point across the whole gamut of the government's functions. Their views were studied in order to answer this dissertation's research questions (see sub-section 2.1.). The main results of Articles I–IV are summarized in this section.

6.2 The empirical approach to public sector leadership meta-skills

The current research is informed by semi-structured theme interviews with 22 top civil service leaders in the time frame between December 2020 and June 2021. The main question in the interviews was whether the framework of public leadership meta-skills seems valid and/or important from the point of view of the informants. The group of informants was composed to evenly represent all areas of central public administration in order to test the concept in a sufficiently versatile and comprehensive way. With this research logic, the concept of public leadership meta-skills - developed in the course of reflective practice - was also exposed to the option that it is wrong, incomplete, or irrelevant as a conceptual and theoretical framework from the point of view of public-sector leaders themselves.

The sample of informants was compiled based on the anticipated relevance for the topic of this dissertation. That selection process sought to ensure the informants were 1) central government leaders with extensive experience in ministerial-level leadership duties, and preferably also representing; 2) a broad range of government leadership experience spanning several government ministries or

cross-governmental coordinative roles, and furthermore; 3) the sample as a whole was to represent all 12 government ministries in Finland and; 4) with the best possible gender balance among the informants.

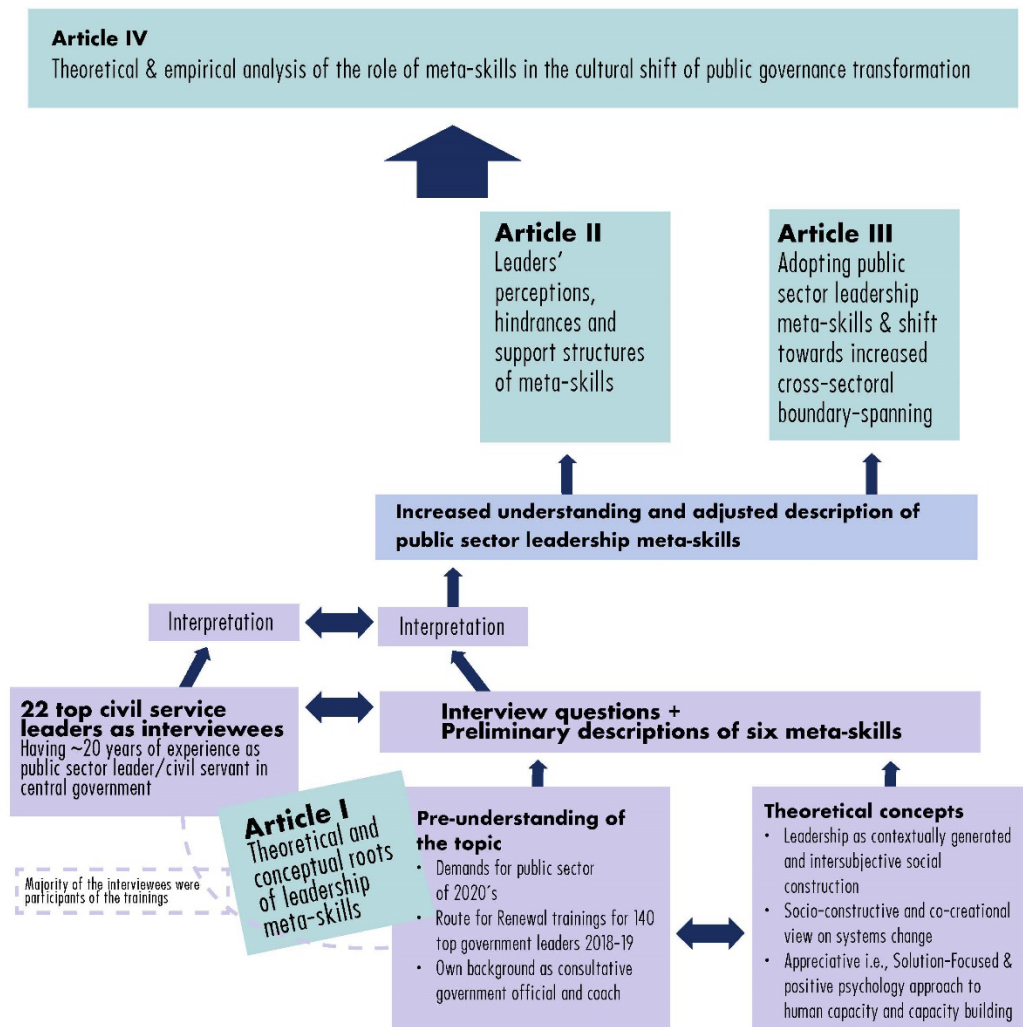


Figure 3. The empirical approach to public-sector leadership meta-skills⁷

As a result, all informants were experienced civil service leaders (Appendix 1). Three were a Secretary-of-State or Under-Secretary-of-State at the time of the interview, and four more had held one of those positions in the recent past. Eleven of the informants were Directors General in a government ministry at the time of

⁷ Clarification regarding the years indicated: Planning of the training courses started at 2017, six parallel courses run from 2017 to 2018, the concluding analyzing took place 2019 and resulted with publishing the book Virtanen, P. & Tammeaid, M.: Developing public sector leadership: new rationale, best practices and tools. Springer, 2020.

the interview, and two more had previously attained that rank. At the time of the interview, three informants worked for a central government institution other than a ministry or government agency (in Finland or abroad), and all of them had previously held a central leading position in one of the ministries. Three informants led a government agency at a Director-General level and had previously held a substantial cross-governmental coordinative role.

The proposed interview structure accompanied the invitation sent to all informants beforehand. The initial communication also included a general definition of meta-skills as leadership skills transferable from one context to another and important regardless of the administrative field or the nature of leadership function. Furthermore, the informants were appraised that a hypothetical assumption was that the impact of meta-skills in public leadership was to improve the public-sector capacity for renewal and broaden the scope of policy choices. Additionally, six meta-skills were introduced in the following way:

Learning-to-learn: Continuous learning and development at work and in the organisation's practices. Maintaining an interest in issues outside of one's own substantive areas at work and in other spheres of life.

Systems approach: Public administration, society, or any human community is viewed not as machines or entities based on mechanistic cause-and-effect relationships but noticing that many parallel realities are present all the time; systems are influenced by one's actions/choosing modes of action.

Dialogical stance: Reciprocity and equality are both an attitude and practice of interacting; making room for different views and interactions.

Thinking skills: The ability to critically examine one's own and common beliefs and established ways of thinking. The desire and ability to examine things from multiple perspectives and to promote innovative thinking.

Reaching out to practice: The ability to search for and create methods of policy implementation in accordance with the goal (also other than regulation or government funding), act as part of networks and ecosystems, experiment, and ensure good conditions exist for putting things into practice.

Enabling mindset: Highlighting the strengths, abilities, and enablers of progress (instead of deficiencies and shortcomings). Conducting leadership and policy actions with people and for the benefit of the people in an appreciative way (not with a power-over attitude).

The interview questions focused on establishing: 1) if the informants recognized leadership meta-skills and; 2) their impressions of the six listed meta-skills; 3) how important they considered meta-skills are in their work as public-sector leaders;

and 4) whether possessing those meta-skills has helped them in their work or whether lacking them has complicated that work.

Furthermore, if the informants recognized meta-skills, the interviews sought to elicit how and where the informants developed those meta-skills; whether that development was a conscious action; and if they considered it important that meta-skills be developed across government/public administration more widely, and if so, using what kind of measures. The last question of the interview structure was an open call to the informants to add whatever they had in mind about the issue.

Since the majority of the informants had participated in the long-term leadership training provided to the whole cadre of high-ranking civil service leaders of the central government of Finland that took place between 2017 and 2018 (i.e., about three years before the interview) and which played a central role in the emergence of the concept of public-sector leadership meta-skills (see sub-section 3.2.), it is valid to ask if the training sessions affected the informants' view of the issue. In the name of intellectual honesty, it must be admitted that, to some extent, the question remains unanswered. However, it can be recognized that by the time of the leadership training, the concept of meta-skills was not yet formed or spoken aloud and that the three informants, who had not completed the training, did not provide substantively different answers from the others.

6.3 The main results of Articles I-IV

Table 6 presents the main results of Articles I–IV from the point of view of grounding the findings in empirical research. It also lists the contributions of each of the sub-studies to the understanding of meta-skills as a concept, the effect of meta-skills on the public sector capacity to manage complex, the cross-sectoral issues, and the contribution of meta-skills to leadership development:

Table 6. Articles I–IV, main results

Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Aim			
Explore theoretical and conceptual roots of leadership meta-skills. Present a typology of public leadership meta-skills.	Continue theoretical discussion and test the concept of public sector leadership meta-skills with highly experienced public sector leaders.	Continue theoretical discussion, provide up-to-date empirical research on leaders' perceptions on adopting and developing meta-skills.	Continue theoretical discussion, analyse the role of meta-skills in governance of wicked, complex, and intertwined problems.
Empirical grounding and research interests			
<i>Preliminary concept</i> of meta-skills based on reflective practice during six long-term leadership training courses 2017-2018.	Interviews of highly experienced public sector civil service leaders: <i>If and how do they recognize, define, and use public sector leadership meta-skills?</i>	Interviews of highly experienced public sector civil service leaders: <i>If and how to develop public sector leadership meta-skills in public sector and in leadership training and development?</i>	Summarizing the findings of the interviews from the point of view of <i>adapting to complexity challenges and succeeding in collaborative governance.</i>
Contribution to the understanding of meta-skills as a concept			
Makes leadership shared and variety an asset. Enhances positive and trust-based leadership in organisations and networks. Boosts self-organizing in human systems by putting weight on strengths and positive development.	Refer to dynamic and processual leadership capabilities. Appear in interaction that seeks common target and creates conditions for success. Support for the definition and importance of public sector leadership meta-skills. Six meta-skills researched form an entirety creating a platform for transforming the 'hard codes' of organisational culture and ways of working, that is, social norms, budgeting, type and extent of the data and information used in sense-making and decision-making. Small details of communication and collaboration make the meta-skilful difference and turn a task into a joint endeavour.	Strengthen future-driven, collaborative, and relational transformation processes and lower the threshold for boundary crossing. Lead towards an active view of the world and leadership instead of a problem-focused and passive structure-bound stand.	Creates a shared, relational, and interactional space leading to the dynamic generation of capacity for joint sensemaking and action. Facilitates good trans-contextual collaboration and promotes integrative change and renewal. Shift the perception of leaders and their colleagues from restrictions and a narrow perspective (profession, statutory, sector-specific) to embracing possibilities, available resources (tangible, intangible, explicit, tacit) and the creation of longer-term and joint goals with vertical and horizontal congruency.

Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Contribution to the understanding of the effect of meta-skills on public sector capacity for governing complex, cross-sectoral issues			
<p>Different parts of the public policy system relate better to each other. Imagination, communication, and context are essential parts of public sector decision making. Meta-skills impact systems change by hosting, creating conditions, and interacting; use both structural and human-bound interactional paths. Meta-skills increase public sector resilience, future oriented thinking and phronesis.</p>	<p>Strengthen future-oriented far-sightedness. Success in taking the challenge largely depends on individual leaders; long-standing hierarchical structures give scarce support. Possibility to use meta-skills reveals a lot about the nature of the organisational culture. Challenges of cross-sectoral administrative collaboration in the centre; citizen/civil society view requires strengthening.</p>	<p>Meta-skills fortify collaboration and co-creation, recognising the multiple voices within public organisations, the government and in society. Improves the public administration's capabilities to renew its own ways of working in pace with emerging societal phenomena and needs-based public services agenda.</p>	<p>Meta-skilfulness helps to notice and identify occasions when cross-sectoral collaboration is needed, turns the complexity challenge into actionable skills that can be learned, trained, developed, and harnessed, dealing with complexity requires noticing the role of meta-skills and developing them. Nurture learning as an everyday duty and possibility required for developing collaborative governance capacity.</p>
Contribution to the understanding of meta-skills in leadership development			
<p>Meta-skills benefit both from structural and dynamic trans-contextual learning. Building on human and co-constructed ways of learning creates positive learning spirals with cultural ripple effects. Investing in meta-skills supports individual and joint agency, the emergence of new understanding, and new ways to be and act in the world.</p>	<p>Includes a detailed table of practical examples of nurturing and developing meta-skills in government/public leadership. Investing in co-creation capacities increases opportunities to achieve phronesis.</p>	<p>Training meta-skills provide a level of preparedness to face varying challenges in leadership. Require learning processes that are incubators of opportunity and renewal, consist of cross-sectoral training groups, have 'thought-shaking' and future-oriented contents, Solution-Focused thinking, and facilitation by the trainers, sufficient longevity, focus on leading people, and understanding citizen or service user demands. Leader's interest in developing oneself. Structural learning mechanisms to enhance meta-skills are needed, and identifying them in recruitment and appointment procedures.</p>	<p>The interface of skills and context relays in the centre of meta-skills identification. Requires coaching psychology view on what helps leaders to develop towards the desired direction in the complex world. Promotes leadership as a systems and shared endeavour building joint targets from the viewpoint of the end-user/citizen.</p>

6.3.1 Some additional notions of sub-studies I-III

All the findings of the empirical part were not central to the research interests of the articles, but since they are interesting in the context of this dissertation synthesis some additional notions are made here.

The main results of Article I established a pre-understanding of public-sector meta-skills as a topic (see Figure 3) and offered a preliminary description of six central meta-skills of public-sector leaders. The main theoretical and empirical reasoning behind the interest and the concept of public-sector meta-skills suggests that adopting a systems approach to change and the development of leadership meta-skills reduces the burden of leadership uniformity, that is, finding one model, solution, or shared understanding of a situation. Instead, conceiving society as a system introduces the need to agree on future goals to improve how different parts of the public policy system relate to each other.

Public-sector leaders understanding complexities is a prerequisite to working toward societal goals which make sense from different positions and viewpoints. Instead of trying to funnel down a shared opinion or definition, the meta-skills approach underlines the variety of human perception and context. It harnesses these layers of action to benefit a wider process of transition. Developing meta-skills contributes to developing capabilities that can impact systems change by hosting, creating conditions, and interacting. In order to increase that capacity, three substantial shifts are required in public-sector rationale: 1) from structure focus to human focus, 2) from governance to collaboration (reaching out to new modes of meta-governance), and 3) from knowledge transfer to co-creation.

Article II presents public-sector leadership meta-skills as enablers of human-centred change that activates both known and unrevealed knowledge and capabilities residing in people. The unanimous support for the idea of public sector leadership meta-skills given by the informants was a pleasant surprise in the interviews. The table “Public leadership meta-skills definitions by the top Finnish civil service leaders” in Article II also presents the additional ideas and amendments to the concept by the informants. For example, a suggestion was made to add self-compassion as the seventh meta-skill of a public leader since, despite the best leadership efforts, things do not always improve with colleagues, different stakeholders, politicians, and media. The informants also raised the importance of learning as part of every civil servant’s duty, the possibility of using collaborative ICT platforms to process information together and of having a dialogue with remote units, stakeholders, and civil society, as well as valuing and

holding regular “lessons learned” moments in the working community. They also suggested making use of opportunities for coaching, development, and feedback. That would entail getting better at involving staff and others, making an effort to learn the coaching leadership style, and to learn from others. Arranging time for thinking was emphasized as crucial for good leadership, and the type of work humans should do instead of routine duties such as reading piles of statements, signing routine permissions etc., for which algorithms are better suited.

Article III concentrated on presenting the kind of learning and development required to enhance public sector capabilities for renewal and increased meta-skilfulness in its actions. Article III maintains that learning is an important catalyst for human-centred societal change in times when leadership development has increasingly become something that is accomplished together in dialogue with other people by solving common societal, institutional, and organisational challenges. Learning and development serves its purpose when conducted in a collaborative and co-creational manner. An awareness of leaders’ and trainers’ own thinking and mindset make a difference and affects the results in a great deal.

Article III reports four things the informants raised regarding public leadership training with a view to develop meta-skilfulness of public sector leaders. Those were, horizontal (i.e., cross-sectoral) training groups developing a shared culture within the government), ‘thought-shaking’ and future-oriented content, sufficient longevity instead of trying to change the world/mindset/government “in two hours”, and focusing on leading people and understanding citizen or service user demands. The informants thus confirmed the findings of Article I regarding sufficient leadership training and development.

6.3.2 Summarizing notions of sub-study IV

Article IV summarises the theoretical and empirical analysis of the role of meta-skills in the cultural shift of public governance transformation towards embracing meta-skills. This key figure presented in Article IV comprises the interactional and dynamic nature of meta-skilful leadership and the cultural shifts they accelerate. The cultural shifts are composed of crucial shifts in perception and the motivational base:

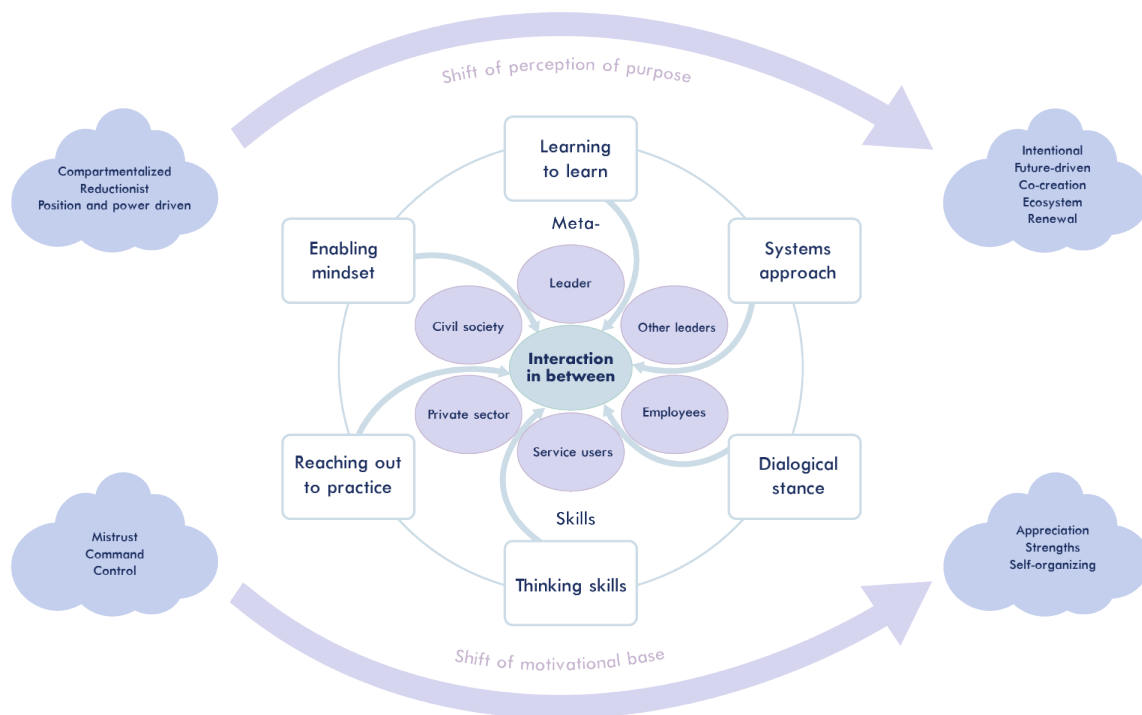


Figure 4. Public leadership meta-skills as enablers of a cultural shift of governance

The meta-skills approach views leadership as genuinely shared; it takes a collective and systemic framework as the starting point and is, therefore, suitable for navigating the complex world marked by intertwined issues. The article maintains that taming wicked problems – or even noticing the challenges they bring – is barely possible without acquiring meta-skills. True reciprocal collaboration across governmental siloes and sectors does not happen in isolation. It requires updating the ways we see leadership, perceiving the role of meta-skills, and gearing the focus of public sector leadership development to improving meta-skills.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 General notions

The previous sections outlined the concept of public-sector leadership meta-skills as a theoretical and empirical subject in light of Articles I–IV and in a wider theoretical scope. In this section, the findings are discussed with a view to establishing what makes meta-skills noteworthy regarding complexity challenges and as a perspective on public-sector leadership. In addition, the following section interrogates what the approach might contribute to leadership research and how the original research questions were answered.

7.2 The distinctiveness of public-sector leadership meta-skills

It may seem that signalling the importance of relational orientation, an appreciative attitude, and everyday leadership behaviour are self-evident features taken into consideration in regard of good leadership or demanding government transitions striving to provide societal impact and public value (Hartley et al., 2017). However, as seen above in Section 3 – scoping the theoretical discussion around public-sector leadership and governance – this seems not to be the case. Other issues dominate the academic discussion and research on public-sector and leadership and the approach to leading public-sector in general.

Additionally, the overriding orientation in leadership research and practice is a focus on leading just one organisation. This orientation is strengthened by the compartmentalized Weberian view of the public sector (Torfing et al., 2019, p. 798; Fawcett et al., 2018). Although public and private organisations cannot be dealt with in a dichotomic way (Bozeman, 2013, p. 170), this can also be seen as the private-sector influence on leadership thinking (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2022, p. 2). Unlike in the public sector, private-sector companies often compete for a position in the market (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2022, p. 2; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 73, 109). Succeeding in public sector mission takes, however, a broader look striving for creating public value in cross-roads of citizen needs and different values and viewing-points (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1761; Termeer & Dewulf, 2018). Public sector leadership is at its best about succeeding together (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 110). This feature of public sector leadership has grown in importance in the latter half of the twentieth century, as societies have adopted a broader role in promoting well-being (Fawcett et al., 2018; Virtanen et al., 2023). In the powerful years of new public management, private sector ideas

of effectivity and countability influenced the public-sector (Hartley et al., 2013, p. 821). In an era of growing complexity, it could be that the public-sector ethos of cross-sectoral eco-system building (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 165) and the new leadership skills demanded by that (Tammeaid et al., 2022; Fawcett et al., 2018; Fox Freyss, 2014) could advance an interesting concept of collaborative leadership, which might also be valuable to the private sector.

Bozeman and Crow (2021) point out that the question of the existence of an identifiable public value and ways to achieve it in public policy and decision-making has been an ever-ongoing discussion. The characteristics for creating a good future in social systems (Kristjánsson et al., 2021, p. 4; Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 155-157; Lang et al., 1990) or public value is that it seldom can be based on any ready-made solution or one universal principle. A public good or public value is usually co-produced considering the particular circumstances and crossing aspirations of each case (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 15; Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). It involves learning concerning what works and what does not; and then adapting and stewarding the process based on observed success (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 202-206). Bozeman and Crow (2021) point out how with societal issues that inevitably involve different actors with conflicting values, rigid personnel or institutional roles, or decision-making happening on purely on an ideological base can hinder public value creation (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 51; see also, Bär et al., 2020, p. 6-7). Mutable and context-sensitive pragmatism seems to provide the best basis for future-oriented public value creation and interactional decision-making (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 51, 334; van Buuren et al., 2020, p. 8; Termeer & Dewulf, 2018; Ansell & Geyer, 2017; Darnell et al., 2019).

Public governance, using creative thinking, starting from user needs, and the contexts, behaviours, and emotions of those affected and valuing the process as highly as the output, has been called the design approach (van Buuren et al., 2020, p. 8). The context and task-sensitive design approach considers that citizens' perceptions of their own role in receiving services are nuanced and complex (Hartley et al., 2017, p.675). The concept paints a different picture of public policy work than the traditional one of viewing public policy as a policy cycle consisting of stages from problem definition to informed policy selection. It does not examine public policy-making as bounded optimization based on translating evidence-based knowledge into solutions (Van Buuren et al., 2020, p. 11). For leadership, this shift takes replacing the traditional view of leading as providing solutions to problems with an understanding of leadership as a process of working "with people to find workable ways of dealing with issues for which there may be no known or set solutions" (Hartley et al., 2000, p. 369). Accordingly, the design approach to governance requires a shift in mindset in the public sector and its leadership

(Bason, 2017, p. 51-51). This research highlights that the design approach to public governance is not so much embedded in increasing only the amount of service design or deliberation processes – or any other tool-driven and often problem-focused approaches – but requires investing in creating a mindset that views society and leadership as an interactional space. The transition also requires investment in building the skills essential for gearing the leadership towards a capacity for joint sensemaking and action. That investment would provide a broader grounding for human-centred governance striving for public value as a functional rationale rather than individual design projects.

The complexity-bound need for cross-sectoral co-creation in the public sector can be called ecosystem-building (Kinder et al., 2021; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016), networked governance (Busscher et al., 2022; de Jong et al., 2021; Connell et al., 2019), collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012), or metagovernance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021, p. 9-10; van Buuren et al., 2020, p. 11). Whatever the term assigned, it characterizes the imperative of succeeding in public-sector leadership as a co-created and shared effort. It is hard to envision succeeding in this shift without meta-skilfulness. The idea of public-sector leadership meta-skills provides a way to tackle the necessities of present-day public policy design and process-oriented leadership by building the required skills and capabilities.

7.3 Characteristics of public-sector leadership meta-skills – answering the first research question

The first research question stated in this dissertation was: What are public sector leadership meta-skills and what is their role in learning and leadership development? Answering that two-part question necessitated scrutinizing meta-skills in light of leadership scholarly traditions, searching for mentions of leadership meta-skills in leadership research literature, and looking at how meta-skills appear in leading journals on leadership and the public sector. It was summarized that meta-skills are randomly mentioned in leadership research literature as transferrable skills promoting flexibility and relational abilities (Gergen, 2013). In addition, the research literature has highlighted the need for networked governance and the active leadership role for tackling the complexity challenges. However, meta-skills per se do not form any scholarly theory within the field of public governance or leadership. This dissertation serves to introduce a relatively novel topic to the field of public governance and leadership. Another notion based on the research articles was that the majority of the articles dealt with the challenges of municipal and local governance and few with central governance.

One merit of this research might be that it adds something to the less researched field of central state governance, the part of governance that has both long-term and wide-ranging effects on public-sector rationale as a whole.

Some researchers in the fields of leadership, governance, and organisational research have presented findings portraying a kinship with meta-skills. They include Nonaka, who maintains that active learning in organisations always includes collaboratively creating new information and new knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Tsoukas (2009) contributes the dialogical model of self-distanciation leading to conceptual re-framing (Tsoukas, 2009), and Gerlak and Heikkila (2011) point out that collective learning may play a critical role in success in collaborative governance settings (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). Furthermore, Lowe and Plimmer (2021) suggest learning be placed at the heart of complexity-informed governance (Lowe & Plimmer, 2021). Van der Voet and Lems (2022), in turn, highlight that the ability to create and design solutions is central to dealing with complex problems instead of trying to find a solution among the known ones (van Voet & Lems, 2022). Connell et al. (2019) advocate networking capacity (Connell et al., 2019), and on the same lines from an organizational standpoint are several parallel scholarly streams of knowledge management theory (Busscher et al., 2022; Barkas et al., 2021). If knowledge management in the public sector is defined as suggested by Hartley and Benington (2006), that is, as depending primarily on establishing “relationships of trust, curiosity and respect for diversity between people in different organisations, and the painstaking creation of the conditions necessary to cultivate, graft, transplant and fertilize the new thinking and the new practice that is appropriate to the specific context, conditions and conjunctures prevailing in that given organisation at that moment in time” (Hartley & Benington, 2006, p. 107), meta-skills can serve as essential accelerators for these developments.

The emerging new type of public sector leadership has also been approached via new leadership roles by Uhl-Bien (2021), van der Waal (2017, p. 22-23), Salovaara and Bathurst (2018) and Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018). An elaborated list of leaders’ new role-taking constituting required functions in creating public value has been presented by Bozeman & Crow (2021). They identify roles of visionaries, assemblers and coalition-builders, implementation leaders, negotiators and peacemakers, conservers and maintainers, revisionaries, and creative destroyers as required functions in creating public value (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 361-365). Within the field of collaborative governance, “new leadership” has been defined via conveners, facilitators, and catalysts roles (Busscher et al., 2022; Torfing et al., 2020, p. 294; Torfing & Días-Gibson, 2017; Hartley et al., 2013).

In general, the previous research literature focuses more on describing when and why meta-skills (or something akin to them) are important but gives fewer ideas on what meta-skills are in practice, what kind of skills are needed to successfully fulfil the new roles, and how to develop those skills. To fill this gap, this research utilized the findings of Solution-Focused thinking, positive coaching psychology, and organisational learning – all of which are theories or concepts about human learning and change both on the individual and collective level. In short, meta-skills are transferable, context-sensitive, and learnable interactional skills of shared leadership that enable co-creation.

7.3.1 Taking the critical view

The concept of meta-skills can be criticized in many ways. Just picking other background theories would have resulted in different perspectives and consequences. Looking at the public sector through a legalistic and structural lens (Torfing et al., 2019, p. 798) or as a political constellation (Johansson & Vakkuri, 2019, p. 8; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016, p. 104; Dahl & Soss, 2014; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007), or pointing out leadership skills gaps, analysing the success of normative learning and pondering pros and cons of centralization and decentralization of administration (e.g., Jansen et al., 2021) or seeing leadership as a sphere in which to conduct negotiations over power and influence with opponents (Johansson & Vakkuri, 2017, p. 85) would have reinforced existing narratives and brought different results. Meta-skills as a concept provides a different viewpoint on public sector leadership. By striving to be precise about the theoretical base of the reasoning and explaining what makes this choice important and timely, this dissertation intends to reveal something not clearly present in leadership and governance discussion and research so far.

Despite the traditions of looking at the public sector as a political and administrative structure (Johansson & Vakkuri, 2017, p. 21), governments and all public-sector institutions comprise human interaction and activity (Bandura, 2006, p. 173). They are also human learning systems (Lowe & Plimmer, 2021), and as such, they act, change, and develop as a result of human learning and human dealings. That is the grounding for highlighting the human way of learning and developing in the context of public sector leadership and development. The search for administrative formality may give an illusion of control within societal complexity, but its strategic successfulness and applicability to different situations can be questioned (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 99; Casti, 2012).

The meta-skills approach sees public-sector leadership along the same lines as Bandura in his agentic theory of co-evolutionary human development, adaptation,

and change (Bandura, 2006, p. 164-165). This view highlights human being as contributors to their circumstances, and the two-way-bind between human agency and social structure. Bandura (2006) presents four core properties of human agency: intentionality guiding human pursuits, forethought giving a temporal extension to agency, self-reactiveness motivating and regulating the way from thought to action, and self-reflectiveness forming the metacognitive capability of the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions (Bandura, 2006, p. 164-165). He highlights that most human functioning is socially situated and interactional and that successful learning and development require favourable psychosocial conditions (Bandura, 2006, p. 165-169). Bandura differentiates three modes of agency: individual, mediated, and collective; all are important for adaptation, action, and change (Bandura, 2006, p. 164-169). Public-sector leadership meta-skills can be seen to foster the dynamics generating all these three modes of agency as leadership action.

One can ask if it is over-positive or naive to highlight the relational and developmental angle of public sector leadership in the middle of sometimes dramatic events and strong power games of world politics (Tammeaid et al., 2022, p. 84). However, such realism strengthens the importance of recognizing the value of leadership meta-skills more widely. No-one can be dialogical on their own. The space, possibility, and circumstances for a reciprocal dialogue can be created as an individual effort by a leader or anybody else. Nevertheless, a dialogue occurs only when others come along on the same reciprocal terms (Morgan & Guilherme, 2010). The more meta-skilfulness is developed and spread, the better different sectors, viewpoints, and people will work together. The same applies to viewing any policy issue in an intertwined systems-oriented frame instead of a narrow execution frame driven by a functional or sectorised rationale. As a mediator, a leader with advanced meta-skills can lead the group to the verge of new horizons, but becoming a co-creator requires adopting individual and collective agency. Sometimes the best that can be achieved is settling with the circumstances that a possibility for participating in a shared and reciprocal learning space for the wider system and its parts was given, although not taken.

Emphasising the good and making space for eventual potential in a problematic or complex situation may sound paradoxical (Waardenburg et al., 2020, p. 388). That, however, is the clue to positive psychology and the Solution-Focused approach: increasing the prospects of success by seeing people as capable and resourceful until proven otherwise. Additionally, it is key to construct favourable psychosocial surroundings that bring out the best in people (McKergow, 2021, p. 119-120; Linley, 2007, p. 42; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 2, 61-63; Kolb & Fry, 1975, p. 51-56). Changing the mode of own agency towards relational and enabling

behaviour in a situation makes use of the emergent possibilities associated with the people and the situation at hand (Linley, 2007, p. 13-14; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 18-19; Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 51; Cilliers, 2000, p. 24). Proficient meta-skilfulness does not, however, guarantee success in all situations. Proficiency gathers the available resources to use and increases the likelihood of success. If the possibility for the good to emerge is not given, it is not known what favourable could have happened. On the other hand, beginning from distrust and doubt reduces the chances of success from at start. As a concept, meta-skills recap that we can always choose how to proceed, and those choices affect the possible results. Leadership employing meta-skills strengthens those human qualities that enable complex systems to demonstrate second-order learning (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 7). The second-order and learning and problem resolution start by asking *what* could be done instead of why something is happening. It enables *change of change*, that is, scrutinizing challenges in a non-compartmentalized way for a human system to develop its functional structure outside a readymade mental or structural box (Watzlawick et al., 2011, p. 11-12, 23-24).

An essential element of public sector leadership meta-skills is that they are learnable, coachable, and trainable as skills, rather than to be defined as personality traits. These qualities imply that different leaders can develop their proficiency in meta-skills, and meta-skills can be built on different strengths (Linley, 2008, p. 155-157; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 1-2, 40-43). Nevertheless, developing and applying meta-skills requires a pro-active attitude (Bandura, 2006, p. 164-165) or the human capacity to respond aptly, as Geoffrey Vickers put it (Williams, 2005). In the context of leadership training and development, the meta-skills of provide both a concept and a practical basis on which to develop the public sector leadership skills required in a complex world. As comparison, conducting public sector leadership development and training by echoing problem-focused models can on its turn diminish possibilities for renewal (Bannik, 2006, p 1-25; Priest & Gass, 1997).

7.4 Contribution to governance and leadership in complexity – answering the second research question

This dissertation vindicated a theoretical concept by combining the open-systems approach and background theories on social construction, complexity and collaborative governance and then testing its assertions with front-line experts – highly experienced public-sector leaders. Theoretical and empirical approaches were employed to answer the second research question: How do public sector

leadership meta-skills contribute to public-sector capacity to succeed in the governance and leadership of complex, cross-sectoral, and emergent societal phenomena?

Prior research indicates that leadership meta-skills tend (in the terminology of Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018) to enable organisational adaptability and process-oriented dialogical action (Wals & Schwatzin, 2012, p. 15). This study maintains that attitude and mindset, in combination with interactional skills, are important ingredients of public policymaking. When human beings and the world are complex, changing patterns of organisation should be regarded as a normal condition of organisational life, including in the public sector (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Examining the beliefs, habits, actions, and aspirations of leadership is important because organisations (as with any other community of humans) are webs of human agency (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Lapunte and Suzuki (2020) report in their comparative study of public sector leaders in 19 countries, that beliefs and attitudes tend to influence intentions and outcomes. They found that working in politicized administrations and having a law degree decreases pro-innovative attitudes among public sector leaders (Lapunte & Suzuki, 2020, p. 454-455). Hartley et al. (2015) call for public leaders to create what is valuable for the citizen and put forward political astuteness as a key component of creating public value (Hartley et al., 2015). The same study presents a leadership skillset including strategic direction and scanning, building alignment and alliances, reading people and situations, interpersonal skills, and personal skills (like self-awareness of one's motives and behaviour) (Hartley et al., 2015, p. 199). Their definition of interpersonal skills includes *soft skills* and *tough skills*, the first of which includes making people feel valued and the latter, in addition to negotiation skills, includes coaching, mentoring, and handling conflicts in a constructive way (Hartley et al., 2015, p. 199). In another article, Hartley (2005) stresses the need for governance innovations (Hartley, 2005). She categorises government innovations in addition to product, service, process, or position innovations as strategic innovation manifested in new goals or purposes of the organisation, new forms of citizen or stakeholder engagement, and rhetorical innovations introducing new language and new concepts (Hartley, 2005, p. 28). According to Hartley (2005), the role of the public leaders in traditional public administration is as a "clerk and martyr", in new public management it is as an "efficiency and market maximiser", and in networked governance, an "explorer" (Hartley, 2005, p. 29). In this regard the value of meta-skills can be seen in enhancing the explorer skills of public-sector leaders.

The idea of scaling deep by Moore, Riddell and Vocisano also comes close to meta skills by describing change-making as reframing stories of change beliefs and norms, the mutual sharing of knowledge, investing in transformative learning processes and establishing communities of learning and practice (Moore et al., 2015). Undertaking large-scale systems change in society usually requires seeking alternative resources, building networks and partnerships, and broadening the frame of the viewing window (Moore et al., 2015). Glenda Eyong, a pioneer of complexity science in human and organisational systems, reminds us that if work loses its connection to a larger purpose, it soon loses its relevance (Eyong & Jenkins, 2020) and that goes for public-sector leadership as well.

When examining the perceptions of experienced and high-ranking public-sector leaders of public sector leadership meta-skills, the unanimous support for the concept, importance, and content of public sector leadership meta-skills was an encouraging surprise for this research. In addition to reporting on the role of meta-skills in public sector leadership, the informants raised a tricky question of where and how public sector leaders have an opportunity to learn and develop meta-skills. Neither formal education nor in-service training seem to support that learning.

Leadership meta-skills based on the Solution-Focused approach and positive psychology form a skill set strengthening actors' mental, physical, and social resources (Fredrickson, 2013). That skillset also includes enhancing ethically desirable behaviour, organisational harmony, and learning, and also employee commitment, and improved empowerment and performance (Wilson & Newstead, 2022, p 2; Dutton et al., 2010, p. 270), and working in a more transdisciplinary way (Medina & Beyerbach, 2014). All these are important qualities improving organisational cultures, working life and organisational performance. The core idea of highlighting meta-skills as essential capabilities of public sector leadership is however to take one step further from looking only at organisational performance. That is cracking the traditional manager or organisation centred approach (Hartley et al., 2017) and achieving both better, human-centred administration and public value creation - seldom produced within the boundaries of a single organisation.

7.4.1 Clarifying the request for meta-skills in collaborative governance - Case Finland

The informants interviewed in this research were highly experienced public-sector leaders. They worked in all the Finnish government ministries and some other central government institutions. They presented several ways in which they used,

developed, and strengthened the six studied leadership meta-skills in everyday organisational life and public policy planning.

In order to find out something about the consequences of meta-skilful leadership – or the absence of it – an additional set of interviews was conducted in Spring 2022. Thirteen people were interviewed on the basis of their leading or coordinating role in development projects pursuing new policy, administrative, or service outcomes as a cross-sectoral endeavour. In theoretical terms, these programmes, processes and reforms can be called ecosystem-building (Kinder et al., 2021; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016), networked governance (Busscher et al., 2022; de Jong et al., 2021; Connell et al., 2019), collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012) or metagovernance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021, p. 9-10; van Buuren et al., 2020, p. 11). Whatever terminology is applied, all represent forms of cross-sectoral co-creation aiming to deliver public value.

Four of the interviewed informants represented a ministerial collaborative action with a national-level work orientation and a policy target of cross-sectoral co-operation both within the public sector and with civil society (Turner, 2016). Two of the informants represented a national field-specific work orientation, four of them were building a new regional administrative level in different parts of the country in conjunction with ongoing national social and health care services reform⁸, and three informants represented companies and associations active within the field of social-economic business (Turner, 2016) by providing social services in co-operation with municipal, regional and national authorities (Figure 5, Appendix 2).

The group represented the web of organisations that should work productively together to fulfil the ideal of a democratic, human-centred, innovative, involving, and co-shaping the public sector (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2022; p. 1; Bozeman & Crow, 2021; Hartley et al., 2015, p. 198). All of the endeavours of the informants were directly influenced by government capacity and willingness to act in a new dialogical way by bringing in roles like a collaborator, a process steward, service provider, developer, and an innovator to the government's intervention logic - in addition to more traditional roles of a legislative regulator or a funder (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 47-50). The change goals of all of these endeavours called for a networked collaboration of different organisations.

⁸ More about The National Social and Health Care Services reform in Finland: <https://soteuudistus.fi/en/frontpage>

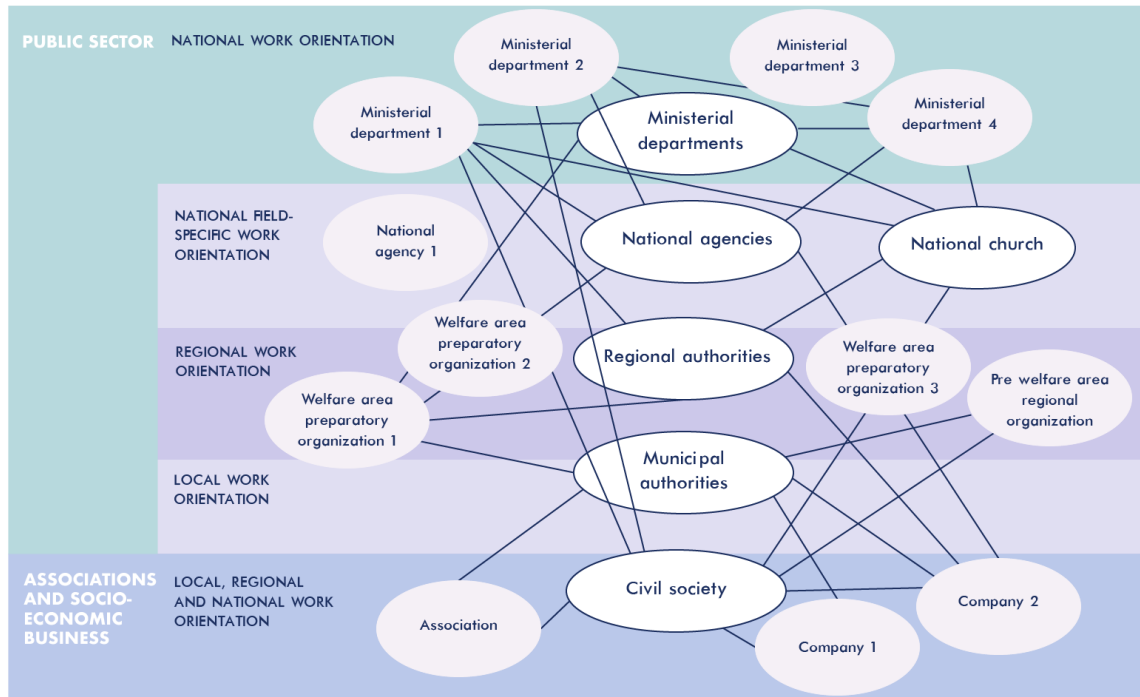


Figure 5. The background organisations of the informants of the interviews of collaborative governance

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview questions focused on eliciting a) the rationale behind the need for cross-sectoral coordinative efforts, b) meta-skills the informants had noticed advancing thinking, action, or the interaction required to achieve the desired change goals, or alternatively c) as leading to failure. The interviews revealed first that collaborative governance requires thought leadership and initiative power. The initiator can be anybody – even an outsider. Second, the civil service leaders’ role is important in steering the process when putting things into practice, and third, all six public-sector leadership meta-skills scrutinized in this dissertation were mentioned in one form or another by the second group of interviewees.

The informants’ answers were quite similar regardless of the background sector or organisation of the informant. However, the answers seemed to vary depending on the informant’s position. Nine informants represented the director level and were responsible for the whole endeavour. They presented more positive opinions about boundary-crossing and the opportunities for renewing existing procedures. Three of the informants were operating at rather a sub-project level of a vast cross-sectoral endeavour. Their answers were more structure and process bound. This tends to support the idea that leaders have both more possibilities and more

responsibility in initiating renewal and promoting the public good (Bozeman & Crow, 2021).

The informants mentioned courage, curiosity, appreciation, authenticity, and patience as central leadership qualities when new partnerships are created and maintained. In addition, process-supporting discussion skills, and broadening language use instead of defining language were frequently mentioned as important aspects of leadership meta-skilfulness. The informants highlighted that meta-skills are processual skills central to successful collaboration and ecosystem-building.

When acted upon, meta-skills generate mutual trust and a value base that extends to the programme or collaboration process itself and to its over-all targets. By that meta-skilfulness increases the possibility of success in a demanding endeavour. The informants also highlighted that one leader does not have to master all meta-skills, by appreciating different strengths and identifying the potential for complementary partnering (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 259- 263; Linley, 2007, p. 171), leadership becomes shared and gives better results. Without a significant leadership contribution, new possible openings can, however, easily not progress beyond the ideation level.

An important result of these interviews looking at real cases of collaborative governance was that cross-sectoral collaboration to advance the development and delivering of public value is still pioneering work, at least in Finland. Motivation and understanding the value of cross-sectoral collaboration is not a problem. However, development is hindered rather by a lack of the practical skills required to establish a shared, relational, and interactional mental space, which is central to renewal (e.g., Ayres, 2018). Another important hindrance the informants reported is an aspiration of individuals and organisations presenting themselves or their organisations as effective, productive, or renowned. That seems to happen regularly to the detriment of joint objectives, and the trend is often supported by the traditional performance management systems used in the public sector. Forming shared future targets that guide the work conducted in the public sector organisations is a skill that should be nurtured as a leadership meta-skill and supported by administrative procedures.

The interviews indicated that the widespread project thinking in the public sector is often focused on separate project endowments, defined project running times and measuring the results and impacts of the project itself. As a result, projects are too often run as separate activities, which consequently do not accelerate the intended change in the wider system. Such approaches can actually reinforce sectorized thinking and action. The same mindset also allows leaders to

concentrate on fulfilling obligations instead of contributing to wider efforts to deliver public value.

The results of the additional interviews among coordinators of cross-sectoral endeavours were in many respects similar to the interviews of the 22 public-sector leaders. They also revealed that the policy-level work conducted in ministries is far removed from the world of the citizen and civil society in general, although there are some exceptions. The ideal of human-centredness is accepted and supported, but the deeds and skills to facilitate participatory policymaking are limited. The second set of interviews encouraged ministries and other public sector organisations to expand collaboration from the very start of a policy designing process and already then build it on the principles of reciprocity, joint ownership, and participation on equal footing. The informants suggested that the above process would require a learning mindset, conscious development of meta-skills, and applying the positive experiences gleaned from pioneering programmes. Meta-skilfulness of the public sector leaders and the chairpersons of working groups is key to achieving the change results assigned to collaborative projects, according to the informants with considerable effects on coordinating cross-sectoral endeavours. Leaders set the example and create the mindset with small everyday deeds in meetings and other encounters. If talking time or the weight of contribution depends on a title, leadership does not fulfil its role in advancing collaborative governance.

An important issue to raise is that the interviews indicate considerable mental bureaucracy resides within the public sector. That manifests, for example, in asking for a leader's permission for every move or in creating committee structures with a focus of accepting the resolutions proposed by other committees. Such behaviour keeps civil servants busy and gives an illusion of control but is not effective use of human potential, nor is it an effective way to deliver real change. The experienced coordinators of cross-sectoral endeavours advised establishing what the lightest possible structure for a programme would be. However, that type of thinking is not encouraged in traditional administrative culture, and some civil servants might initially consider it alarming. Maintaining a structure should not override the purpose of producing the best possible results for the citizen within existing monetary or other boundary conditions (Bozeman, 2013, p. 176-177).

One more finding of the interviews was that the public sector drive for impartiality and neutrality, can result in private-sector aversion. Based on the limited sample, it is not possible to say to what extent this is a Finnish phenomenon, but the informants from associations and socio-economic businesses had discovered that associations are accepted as partners in policy formation and service development

better than companies. Although companies deliver wellbeing services in the country with public money, in practice, they are easily excluded from the information flow, development endeavours, and collaboration, other than contract-based delivery of narrowly defined services. There are models available for fruitful public-private partnerships and procurement fulfilling the impartiality requirements set for the public sector (Torvinen & Ulkuniemi, 2015) but the administration seems reluctant to use them. That means an important part of civil society is overlooked in terms of the ideal of democratic, human-centred, innovative, involving co-shaping public sector (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2022; p. 1; Bozeman & Crow, 2021; Hartley et al., 2015, p. 198).

This sample of additional interviews on the features of collaborative governance is small but does provide a picture of mature public governance (OECD, 2022, p. 14) in a transition from a primary structure-bound bureaucracy towards adopting the opportunities for cross-sectoral collaborative governance. In a complex world, public policy processes should increasingly be understood as a self-organizing system in which adaptive abilities at all levels of governance are important (Butler & Allen, 2008).

7.4.2 How representative is Finland as a case example?

Based on general knowledge, it can be anticipated that meta-skills and their use could differ in different administrative cultures, traditions, and societies in different parts of the world. Comparative research on the role of public sector leadership meta-skills in different countries could complement the research on public sector leadership beliefs, habits, actions, and aspirations. The limitation of this dissertation is that the empirical testing of the concept was limited to Finland, and one can ask how representative testbed Finland is.

According to the OECD (2022), Finland is internationally recognized for its accomplishments in public sector reforms and its focus on constantly improving its public governance. It is a country characterized by high trust in public authorities, respect for the rule of law, and high levels of administrative ethics (OECD, 2022, p. 14). Finland can therefore be considered a good example of a mature public administration with high aspirations for good governance and free from elementary problems of the legitimacy of the public sector. In a comparative survey study of 19 European countries, Finland ranked among the least legalistic administrations alongside the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark. That position is compared to the legalistic public administrations of France, Belgium, Italy, Croatia, Austria, and Germany (Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020, p. 459). That grading is however based on the level of legal employment status and number of

senior managers with a law degree (Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020, p. 459), not on actual operating methods. The same study scores Finland at the higher end of surveyed the countries in terms of change orientation but just under the average in terms of risk-taking. The Finnish administration is among the less receptive to new ideas and creative solutions along with those of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and Italy (Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020, p. 458). Analysis of the politicised nature of public administration place Finland in the middle group of countries together with the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Lithuania (Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020, p. 459).

The findings of Lapuente and Suzuki (2020) are somewhat in line with a survey about the preferred working culture answered by 100 top executives of the central government in Finland in 2017-2018 (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 165-166). The leaders were asked about 11 characteristics of the government of the 2020s, including the following: being closed or open to new influences, working either in an organisation-and-structure-driven or a citizen-and-customer-driven way, and working in a siloed fashion or in a cross-agency and cross-sectoral manner (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 165-166). The findings of that inquiry depict the central administration in Finland as quite heterogeneous, and the results on being open to new influences, active in innovating new ways of working, and in cross-agency cooperation are very much ministry, agency, and unit dependent. This finding implies that as culture-shaping factors, organisational cultures and individual leadership skills play a central role in administration and develop it either in the direction of a renewal orientation or retaining on normative bureaucratic structures (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p.165-167).

7.5 Contribution to theory and practice of leadership – answering the third research question

The third research question of this dissertation asked: How public sector meta-skills contribute to the theories and practices of public sector leadership? Public-sector leadership meta-skills can be considered essential when leadership can no longer be regarded as a one-person or one-organisation endeavour. This type of leadership ranges from theoretical conceptions of distributed leadership (Jakobsen et al., 2021) to networked and self-organized leadership (Martela, 2019; Vermeer & Wenting, 2016). Meta-skills explore and provide a concept of actual skills needed to accelerate interorganisational and generative learning (Chiva et al., 2010). As a concept, public sector leadership meta-skills suggest adopting a systems approach to change and acting upon ideals of not only distributed but truly shared leadership (DeRue, 2011, p.133-135).

Meta-skills are practical and actionable skills, they reduce the burden of leadership uniformity, that is, finding one model, solution, or uniform understanding of a situation. Conceiving of society as a system introduces the need to agree on future goals in a manner that different parts of the public policy system better relate to each other (Bozeman & Crow, 2021, p. 378-380). The evolution of the concept reveals that meta-skills define a skillset that is crucial to succeeding in meta-governance. This assumption stands up to theoretical and empirical scrutiny.

As learnable skills and competences that can help public sector leaders to succeed and develop within complexity, echoing Hartley et al. (Hartley et al., 2014), relational and co-creational meta-skills are not soft skills but tough people skills, which improve interaction and can be harnessed and developed (Hartley et al, 2014, p. 199).

Head (2022) distinguishes different forms of complexity to be considered in the public sector (Head, 2022, p. 120-121). Those forms include the overall knowability of the nature of the problem, structural complexity, knowledge fragmentation, interest-differentiation and the importance of framing and sensitivity to power-distribution in circumstances of “sharply divided” interests (Head, 2022, p. 120-121). By reflecting public sector leadership and governance traditions against the complexity challenge, and moreover, looking at theoretical and practical options to enable the required individual and collective learning, this dissertation has contributed to the challenge with special regard to six meta-skills: learning-to-learn, the systems approach, the dialogical stance, thinking skills, reaching out to practice, and the enabling mindset. Each of those skills facilitates effective trans-contextual interaction and promotes integrative change and renewal. That group of meta-skills was empirically confirmed to be essential for public sector leadership skills of the 2020s by experienced and high-ranking government leaders in Finland.

It is important to note that despite elevating a group of vital and timely meta-skills as a concept, meta-skills accentuate the mutable interface of skills and context. Meta-skills are transferrable from one context to another and useful as applied in relation to the situation and environment, and therefore more in line with complex challenges.

Public sector leadership meta-skills are an important ingredient in preparing the ground for public institutions and public governance that is constantly learning and adapting alongside its every-day work. This is a way to ensure that the public sector has the capacity to serve society and tackle the complex problems it faces in the spirit of collaborative governance. Therefore, it is important that leadership meta-skills are recognised by leadership coaches and trainers fostering leadership

development in the public sector. As skills development subjects, they contribute to the understanding of the useful contents of public-sector leadership trainings. Since lecturing on the need for change is insufficient to catalyse change and learning, this dissertation has based its argumentation on the human way of learning and developing as seen in the theories of the open systems approach, social construction, the solutions-focused view on problem-solving, positive coaching psychology, and organisational learning.

Perception, consciousness, emotions, imagination, and context are often forgotten but strongly related parts of organisational and systems learning and integral components of solution building and skills development. The Solution-Focused approach, central to the reasoning of this dissertation, highlights a snowball effect caused by minor changes of thinking and action leading to other more significant changes. The strengths and virtues approach, another central approach in this dissertation, highlights the shifts making room for manoeuvre in changing challenges and circumstances by overcoming the negativity bias often present in human thinking and perception. This philosophical and theoretical basis of leadership thinking improves collaboration between different people. Public sector leadership meta-skills strengthen enabling governance by breaking away from mechanistic reason–effect thinking, highlighting the importance of the values through which we see others, and elevating the opportunities for action-oriented systems change. When doing so, people and organisations often have more resources, fewer hindrances, and more room for action than first thought. That also makes the opportunity for the public sector leaders to leave people, organisations, and the public sector in a slightly better place.

When examined in this way, tackling the complexity and collaboration challenges of public sector leadership requires skills that 1) create shared, relational, and interactional mental spaces leading to joint sensemaking and action, 2) shift the perception from compartmentalized, reductionist, position-based, and power-driven leadership to more future-driven, co-creational and renewal-oriented leadership, and 3) the motivational base of the change from mistrust, command, and control to appreciative, strengths-based and self-organizing.

The empirical part of this dissertation reveals that this upskilling manifests in how public-sector leaders make observations, in their thinking style, their chosen form of goal setting and view of good performance, and in building a positive and resource-oriented base for driving change. The six meta-skills featured in this dissertation form an entity where all meta-skills reinforce one another in public-value-oriented leadership culture and public decision-making.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation suggests looking at governance and public sector leadership from an unaccustomed public sector leadership meta-skills perspective. It maintains that this change of perspective can be useful in the preparation of public policy and in developing collaborative and human-centred governance that aspires to create public value.

Meta-skills encapsulate the idea of dynamic and processual capabilities of thinking and action that appear in interplay with the context. The current dissertation is grounded on sub-studies I–IV, as well as theoretical and empirical examination, and maintains that recognizing and developing public sector leadership meta-skills is important for the following five reasons:

1. Good leadership is a learnable skill set

According to the scholarly approach, the great man and trait theories of leadership belong to the first half of the twentieth century. However, today's research on public leadership and governance still often includes leader-centric interpretations of public sector leadership or refers to charisma and personality as key success factors of good leadership. The research literature also includes many descriptions of the results leadership should ultimately produce, but how those successes are to be achieved remains largely a black box.

The meta-skills approach emphasises that meta-skills are tough interactional and thinking skills and, as such are learnable, teachable, and adoptable by different leaders with different strengths. Meta-skills that help to curate social space for productive interaction would be particularly valuable today to counter the complexity and cross-sectoral challenges in the public sector. Progress in public sector ways of governing requires an interest in how human communities learn, develop and change. Systems change is a shared endeavour that requires individual skills, although it is not a position-related or individual-oriented process.

2. Successful metagovernance requires leadership meta-skills

Investing in meta-skills development is a topical challenge since leading under conditions of complexity requires reciprocal collaboration within vertical and horizontal government structures. Governing models that function well merely from the administration's point of view are no longer sufficient. The public value created for the citizen and the civic society should be at the core of the decision-making and administrative processes. This shift requires new skills and leadership

abilities of clarifying aims, collaborating across sectors, harnessing policy imagination, and enhancing mutual exchange and learning.

Meta-skills are an important amendment to the scholarly and practical understanding of collaborative governance and metagovernance. They support the leap from decision-making to future-making by enlarging the solution space and collaboration, fostering creativity and cross-sectoral joint action.

3. Administrative path dependency should be recognised

Path dependency is a common topic in complexity science. In the context of governance, a sufficient amount of path dependency comes from the customary internal procedures of public administration. Meta-skills can help to recognize and change these procedural habits, extend the space for manoeuvre, and realign the rationale of decision-making to the original purpose of public institutions for serving people and societies and to the direction of anticipatory change-making. Meta-skills shift the focus of leadership to exploring the purpose of administrative acts and arrangements and arouse the shared agency to notice the opportunities for betterment.

Instead of reactive responses, meta-skills can ignite the social and political imagination, reveal multiple choices and the temporal breadth of phenomena, and make use of the available opportunities to create better solutions. Successfully navigating a paradigm shift requires expanding the number of people thinking in a new and experimental manner.

4. The change must be led, even if the leadership is detached from the person

Highlighting meta-skilful and shared leadership, where many people can simultaneously engage in leadership, followership, and partnership roles, does not mean that leadership as such becomes irrelevant. Leadership resides in shared design principles like attitudes, targets, guidelines, and in meta-skills. Leadership then becomes merely a way of being, coordinating, and setting an example.

Meta-skilfulness helps different kinds of leaders engage in developing shared capabilities and commitment. In a dialogical and collaborative interaction, an act and its consequences are dynamically nested and bolster a positive spiral. To create connected communities out of heterogeneous ingredients is an important leadership task amidst the complex challenges characterised by competing values, norms and information bases.

5. Dealing with complexity requires situated intervention

Traditional approaches to public administration tend to intensify the universality/specificity clash within complexity by striving to standardize government ways of working with statutory, procedural, and structural measures. Leadership meta-skills that focus on collaboration and the purpose-oriented, future-driven dynamics of the issues and interventions can serve as a way to break the unconstructive dichotomy. Meta-skills, as such, do not link to any particular set of policy instruments. Societal circumstances, leadership situations, and boundary conditions vary within the public sector and sometimes necessitate using more traditional approaches - at other times, more design-based or mixed approaches. This non-categorizing and non-structure-bound approach, foreign to many streams of structurally oriented public administration and policy science, is typical of the Solution-Focused approach to change, which is an important background theory of this dissertation. Harnessing meta-skills provides an agile alternative to the traditional structure-modifying and problem-focused approach to developing the public sector.

8.1 From execution to solution-building

In general, tackling the complexity challenge does not mean only adapting to overall environmental forces but, to a large extent, taking an active approach to co-evolving and solution-building with others. Meta-skilfulness when conducting policy processes is a way to appropriately broaden participation in policy formation from the point of view of the policy targets to be fulfilled. Meta-skilfulness highlights that human-centred and public-value-oriented work orientation can be harnessed even in difficult circumstances, unfavourable structures, and in the presence of awkward boundary conditions – and it is at the disposal of public sector leaders to do so. Meta-skills direct attention to what unites people or stakeholders instead of what divides them. This type of platform-building is seldom represented in the research literature. It is, nevertheless, crucial to enabling the desired progress in public value creation.

This research contributes to the theories and concepts of public sector leadership by providing a conceptual and practical way for leaders to strengthen those human qualities that enable complex systems to demonstrate second-order learning and direct them to examine and develop their own way of functioning. This step could also have helped the fictional characters of Borgen – whose dialogue opened this dissertation – find a mutually beneficial way to deal with the complex problems they faced, instead of retreating deeper into their siloed and power-driven views.

Finding ways to accelerate second-order learning, decision-making, and systems change is important in the face of societal issues involving many different actors. Leadership meta-skills can be characterized as learnable micro-skills igniting collaboration and therefore influential in making change in macro contexts.

When formulated as practical skills, meta-skills offer tangible tools to help public sector leaders to succeed in broadening the spectrum of leadership skills demanded by broadening the range of horizontal collaboration, stakeholder involvement and policy integration. Furthermore, the meta-skills approach emphasises making us of the mental and practical creative potent of combining the viewing angles of different government sectors, citizens, and other stakeholders. Both of these features bear an important message for leadership training and development conducted within the public sector. Equipping public sector leaders with the skills required to operate successfully in complex circumstances should currently be the main goal of leadership development and a target that fundamentally alters the content of leadership training. It also requires gearing a critical look to trainers' mindset and the way learning is facilitated. The epistemic beliefs behind leadership development are an infrequently discussed but important topic to which this dissertation aims to contribute. The goal of investing in meta skills is to strengthen solution-oriented (not problem-oriented) cooperation, leadership, and public policy.

This dissertation did not manage to become an exhaustive presentation of leadership meta-skills. It functions instead as an introduction to the issue that can potentially be important for a public sector facing complexity challenges. This research has paved the way to develop the topic and contributed to the multifaceted scholarly field of public-sector leadership. It is hoped it will also attract more scientific attention to the skills development required to deal with complex societal challenges.

8.2 Further research agenda

This dissertation aspired to introduce the concept of public leadership meta-skills and elaborate the theme with theoretical and empirical research. It is, however, clear that leadership meta-skills as a research topic remains in its infancy. This dissertation has shed light on meta-skills, especially in the civil service leadership of central government institutions. In future, it would be interesting to extend the scope of empirical studies on meta-skills to other parts of public administration and study how meta-skills manifest in the leadership of government agencies and on a municipal and regional level. In addition, it would be interesting and

important to extend the examination of meta-skills to other countries, different cultural and socioeconomic contexts, and administrative traditions. Furthermore, studying political leadership from the point of view of meta-skills would be very welcome because the success of political and civil service leadership depends greatly on each other in a democracy. The leadership meta-skills research topic is generic and expanding the scope of examination to the leadership of the private and third sectors could reveal important and interesting similarities and differences.

It would be important to study the role of leadership meta-skills in different kinds of policy formation, implementation, and public value creation challenges to learn more about the potentially rewarding subject. Furthermore, research on how the atypical and creative solutions of meta-skilful collaborative governance manifest in different policy processes, how they co-exist with more traditional top-down approaches, and what dynamics are created in such mixed and fluid situations would be welcome. That would extend the research base from studies based on leaders' self-reporting towards reviewing the effects of meta-skilful leadership.

Highlighting the importance of meta-skills does not suggest that the traditional functional skills of public sector leaders, such as strategy mapping, budgeting, or administrative-procedural skills, have suddenly become irrelevant or must be replaced. However, taking meta-skills seriously reveals the traditional ways of approaching and applying a leadership skill set in a new light. It also suggests that administrative models might be less generic and transferable and thus more context-bound than traditional management systems thinking suggests. Seeing the importance of meta-skills and consciously developing them is a way to preserve dynamic learning at the heart of public governance and to extend policy design to include cross-sectoral approaches, policy consolidation, and the greater involvement of civic society.

Research on positive and integrated psychology suggests it is probable that leadership meta-skills can play a role as enablers of good workplace relationships and foster flourishing working cultures within public sector institutions (Wilson & Newstead, 2022, p 2-3; Dutton et al., 2010, p. 270; Casciaro et al., 2015, p. 1164-1169). This interesting and important field of study is not, however, the primary focus of this dissertation and would deserve research attention in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Informants

The sample of informants was compiled based on anticipated relevance for the issue that is, according to the following criteria:

- 1) central government leaders with extensive experience of ministerial-level leadership, and preferably also representing:
- 2) a broad range of government leadership experience spanning several ministries or government branches or cross-governmental coordinative roles, and furthermore;
- 3) the sample as a whole was to represent all 12 government ministries in Finland and;
- 4) with the best possible gender balance among the informants.

As a result, all of the informants were very experienced civil service leaders. At the time of the interview,

- Three held a Secretary-of-State or Under-Secretary-of-State position, and
- Four had held those positions in the recent past.
- Eleven were at Director General level at one of the government ministries and two had held that position before.
- Three worked for another kind of central government unit than a ministry or government agency (in Finland and abroad), and all of them had previously held a central leadership position in one of the ministries.
- Three had held mainly Director-General-level positions in different government agencies and also had substantial cross-governmental coordinating roles.
- Ten informants were women and 12 men.

1. List of informants and their affiliations at the time of the interview

Informant	Leadership function	Background
1	Secretary-of-State	Life-long ministerial leadership career.
2	Secretary-of-State	Over 30 years of leadership experience from several government branches.
3	Under-Secretary-of-State	Over 30 years of leadership experience from different government branches.
4	Director-General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience.
5	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience.
6	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, around 20 years of public sector leadership experience, five years of ministerial affiliation and long experience of municipal public sector leadership.

7	Director General	Government agency affiliation, around 30 years of leadership experience from ministerial and government agencies.
8	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, around 20 years of leadership experience.
9	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience from different ministries.
10	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of experience from different branches of government.
11	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience from public service.
12	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience from different public organisations.
13	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, over 20 years of leadership experience from different ministries.
14	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, 20 years of leadership experience in public service.
15	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, around 15 years of leadership experience from government agencies and ministerial organisations.
16	Director General	Ministerial affiliation, around 15 years of leadership experience in public service.
17	Director General	Government agency affiliation, over 20 years of experience in leadership and leading coordinating positions.
18	Director General	Central government unit affiliation, around 25 years of leadership experience.
19	Director General	Government agency affiliation, around 20 years of leadership experience from ministerial and government agencies.
20	Director General	Government agency affiliation, around 40 years of experience in both ministerial and government agency leadership.
21	Director General	Government agency affiliation, around 20 years of leadership experience from different government branches.
22	Director General	Government agency affiliation, around 30 years of leadership experience.

2. Branch of government of the interviewees

Government branch at the time of the interview	Number of informants
Finance	3
Defence	2
Education and Culture	2
Foreign Affairs	2
Social Affairs and Health	2
Transport and Communications	2
Agriculture and Forestry	1
Economic Affairs and Employment	1
Environment	1
Interior	1
Justice	1
Prime Minister's Office	1
Other central governmental units	3
	22

Appendix 2 Informants of interviews of cross-sectoral endeavours

The interviews were conducted as virtual, recorded interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes between February 2022 and April 2022.

	Type of cross-sectoral development endeavour	Position	Background
Informant 1	Human-centred digitalization	Programme Director	10+ years in leadership positions
Informant 2	Renewal of working culture towards co-design	Director of Development	25 +years in national development positions
Informant 3	Regional partnership agreements	Special Government Advisor	20+ years in regional development and EU cohesion policy issues
Informant 4	Coordination and accessibility of government services	Project Adviser	10 years in government service
Informant 5	Family support services	Senior Advisor	10 years of leadership experience
Informant 6	Preventing juvenile crime	Director of Development	10+ years of project coordination experience
Informant 7	Establishing a well-being services county	Change Director	20+ years of experience in regional reforms
Informant 8	Establishing a well-being services county	Chairperson of the Board	15 years of experience in different public leadership positions at municipal, national and international levels
Informant 9	Establishing a well-being services county	Project director	10 years of leadership experience in cross-organisational development projects at the municipal, regional, and national level
Informant 10	Establishing a well-being services county	Development Coordinator	15+ years in organizing social services
Informant 11	Company providing socio-economical services	Director of Development	25 years of leadership experience in public, private and NGO sectors
Informant 12	Company providing socio-economical services	Director of Development	20 years of leadership experience in public, private and NGO sectors
Informant 13	NGO providing socio-economical services	Executive Director	20 years of leadership experience in public, private and NGO sectors

Appendix 3 Journals searched

Leading Journals of Leadership and Public Sector (17.6.2022) https://www.scimagojr.com/	
Journals searched (last 5 years)	Search terms
Administrative Science Quarterly Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory Public Administration Review Journal of European Public Policy Journal of Policy Analysis and Management Public Management Review Policy and Society Policy Studies Journal Review of Public Personnel Administration Policy Sciences Research and Politics Public Administration American Review of Public Administration Governance Regulation and Governance Policy and Politics International Public Management Journal	Public sector OR governance/government AND Leadership OR management AND Skill/s OR capability OR competence

Appendix 4 Thematical distribution of articles

Thematical distribution of the 128 articles categorized	Number of articles	Number of articles chosen for closer analysis from public sector leadership meta-skills perspective
Wicked problems	18 (of which 12 Covid -19)	3
Citizen participation	17	4
Administrative structures and arrangements	12	1
Network competences	9	5
Contemporary competences (like e-leadership)	7	1
Public private partnership and co-production	7	1
Policy design and policy outcomes	6	1
Financial management and financial contracting	6	
Innovation capacity	6	2
Leader's features	6	3
Corruption and transition economies	5	
Supranational governance	5	1
Testing management tools and models	5	
Civil service motivation	4	
Human Resources	4	1
Politization of the working environment	4	1
Employee wellbeing	3	
Theoretical leadership approaches (public sector)	3	
Public service delivery	1	
Total	128	24

Appendix 5 Key considerations of the 23 articles on leadership competences and skills

Who	Because of	(Leadership) capacity	As skill/s
Connell et al., 2019	Meta-governance to address complex problems	Capacity to combine facilitation, management, and interaction with self-regulation	Constructing a discursive storyline which defines problems and possible solutions
Van der Voet & Lems, 2022	Complex and wicked problems	Capacity to adapt & capability for creative policy responses	Creating and designing new solutions
Trivellato et al., 2019	Generation of public value	Interaction between individual and organisational capabilities	-
Brown & Head, 2019	Co-production of public value	New kind of public leadership	-
Capano & Woo, 2018	Robust policy design processes of complex environments	Polycentric decisional process, political & technical capacity	-
Maggetti & Trein, 2022	Coordination problems magnified by Covid -19, policy integration	Wide-ranging problem-solving capacity and timing	-
Carlisle & Gruby, 2019	Polycentric systems, cross-cutting jurisdictions	Adaptive capacity	-
Andrews et al., 2021	Resource-challenged, politically risk-averse governments & institutional pressures	Senior management teams as a questionable management innovation	-
Yates & Hartley, 2021	Formal and informal politics is an integral part of the public sector leadership context	Political capabilities as a meta-competency of political astuteness	Personal & interpersonal skills, reading people and situations, building alignment and alliances; strategic direction and scanning
Lee & Park, 2020	Internal management, interbranch coordination, and policy formulation/implementation	Administrative competence and political influence on ministerial leadership	Coordination skills
Rietig & Dupont, 2021	Climate policy integration	Institutional capacity	EU presidential leadership styles
de Jong et al., 2021	Networked governance	New strategic capacity	Think and act strategically across organisational boundaries
Busscher et al., 2022	Establishing institutional capital & institutional design strategies	Network management capabilities	Convener, mediator, and catalyst
Hileman & Bodin, 2018	Collaborative approaches to governance, increased complexity and increasing decision-making venues	Successfully came together to address different, but interrelated policy issues and management tasks	Networking skills
Arnold & Long, 2019	Fast-evolving, uncertain, contested, and pressurized policy arenas	Visibility, legitimacy, institutional capacity, creating and empowering constituencies, activation of stakeholders	Long view of the policy process and simultaneously remaining alert for opportunities afforded by pressurized policy dilemmas
Slayton & Clark-Ginsberg, 2017	Governing public risks by going beyond regulation	Engage the private sector in the formation of communities of interest	-
Zhang et al., 2020	Tension between bureaucratic and democratic values	Managerial confidence in organisational response vs citizen participation	-
Hansen, 2021	Public service delivery & citizen trust in government	-	Warmth (e.g., friendliness) and competence (e.g., effectiveness) of public employees

Ali et al., 2018	Project-based efforts	Increase the intensity and frequency of social interactions for opportunities to exchange knowledge	Familiarity, communication, proximity, and trust
Ferrer-Serrano et al., 2021	Competitive advantages in knowledge transfer, continuous improvements	Absorptive capacity	Broadening of networks
Zhang et al., 2020	Role of policymakers in recognizing and valuing the guiding, supporting, and coordinating role of formal institutions	Enrich capital forms to release the legitimacy pressure on stakeholders	-
Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021	Open government ideals	Inside-out and outside-in knowledge transfers	Ability and willingness to move beyond traditional organisational borders and collaborate with the external environment to develop solutions
Torfing et al., 2020	Innovative, democratic, and transparent government	Hands-on leadership for collaborative innovation	Nurturing the diversity of views, ideas and forms of knowledge and establishing a common ground for joint learning

Key terms

Skills - capabilities – competences

Competence meaning obtained ability to be (professionally) good and skilful in doing something,

Capability meaning inbuilt readiness and willingness to tackle something, also in the future, as well as develop in performance, and

Skill/skills marking external manifestation of competence or capability or thinking style.

Inbuilt in this definition are that preferences, context, and incentives affect the effort and skills applied in any task, and that the multiplicity of skills that characterize human diversity contribute to creating flourishing lives.

Behaviour/deeds are usually results of combination of skills, knowledge, and habits. When we master something, there is usually a strong strengths component involved.

Strengths are natural, internal human capacities (while competences are more external). When somebody masters something, that usually involves a strong strengths component involved.

In *the Solution-Focused* practice skills are portrayed as existing and variable human resources manifested in interaction between human beings and seen as transferrable from one sphere of life to another.

Cambridge Dictionary of English; Heckman & Corbin, 2016;
Linley, 2008, p. 155-157; Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 1-2, 40-43.

Publications

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Public Leadership Meta-skills

Synonyms: Forms of collaboration; Joint sensemaking; Leadership metacognition; Shared leadership

Definitions

As societal complexity deepens, public leadership meta-skills become ever more important. Leadership meta-skills refer to generic leadership competencies (and skills) which are by nature both individual and representative of the collective capital of those in public administration leadership positions. Meta-skills are the essence of developing today's public institution leaders since they constitute joint sensemaking, knowhow, and competencies which cut across organizational boundaries within government, public institutions, and public organizations, ignoring the compartmentalized sectors and organizational silos within public administration.

Introduction Public institutions and organizations make their contribution to society through the democratic process, based on political goal setting, with the help of stakeholders and cooperating partners (and service providers), delivered by the performance of public administration personnel – and, via the subject of this entry, through leadership practices.

The focus of this entry relates to leadership meta-skills which is a theoretical, conceptual, and empirical topic and a relative newcomer in public leadership studies. Despite the fact that the evolution of public sector leadership and management studies has been a lengthy one – both in terms of theory and practice – there is definitely a scarcity of research evidence about leadership meta-skills (on the genesis of public sector leadership; see e.g., VanWart 2003, 2013, 2017). This entry explores what leadership meta-skills in the domain of public

governance, policy, and administration are, why they are important, and from where do they evolve, as well as the practical implications of this from the development of leadership meta-skills in the context of public government, policies, and administration.

The motivation behind this entry is to further scrutinize the recent literature on public leadership meta-skills including our own work, for example, Tammeaid et al. (2021) and Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020). Public leadership metaskills, we have argued, refer to generic leadership competencies (and skills) which are in nature both individual and representative of the collective capital of public administration leaders constituting joint sensemaking, know-how, and competencies cutting across organizational boundaries within government, public institutions, and public organizations, ignoring the compartmentalized sectors and organizational silos within public administration. From this perspective, public leadership meta-skills are not government branch-specific but rather overall skill requirements for all leaders in public administration. Learning to learn, taking the learned into practice, and critical thinking are among those meta-skills that are discussed in Virtanen and Tammeaid (*ibid.*), for example.

It should be noted however that the question of meta-skilling and meta-skills has been discussed to some extent in the leadership literature. A relevant example being Holten et al. (2015) who presented a model for an effective leadership training program that ingrates elements related to human biology, holistic learning processes, and the ingredients of transformational leadership elements within the context of change management. For these scholars, the notion of meta-skills refers to a set of skills which managers “can use and adapt to the changing demands and conditions of modern work life.” Like Tammeaid et al. (2021) and Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020), Holten et al. (2015) underline the point that meta-skills are elementary in bringing the lessons learned from training back into practice into the “real life” of organizations and the enabling role these metaskills bring about to the habitus of the public sector leader – that is, if public leaders do not possess this ability, the consequences can be seen in the performance, motivation, and enthusiasm of their organizations.

One key motivation for exploring public leadership meta-skills is the need to determine per se the new rationale for public leadership. This new rationale calls for more cooperation, bridge-building, and joint sensemaking across the bastions of government topped with the need to conceive resilience not only as a adaption mechanism to acute and severe societal crises (such as COVID-19, for instance) but also as a distinct and specific policy goal. When New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG) emerged as mainstream management paradigms in the 1990s, the global context for public institutions was radically different than it is now. Although it is perhaps somewhat controversial to say that the complexity of society has increased, today public institutions face complex societal problems (which are manifest on a global scale) and undergo more profound contesting from media, political actors, and populism than ever before. The operating environment of public institutions and public leaders is thus pretty much different than it was only a couple of decades ago. Today, public policy planning based on reductionism, narrow definitions of societal problems, and dividing critical societal issues into “governable pieces” is not only flawed, but it makes no sense from a wider societal perspective. The solution to wicked societal problems cannot be solved in a single policy domain but in collaboration with input

from multiple policy sectors. Complexities in society as well as the volatility of change and the ambiguous role of societal shocks require cross-sectoral thinking and action, something which cannot be split to separate pieces. As such, this development calls for an understanding of what public leadership meta-skills can provide – an understanding that the whole public administration from all levels of governance (transnational, national, regional, and local) forms a systemic network, where a readiness and capacity to interact with the society has to be developed as a whole not in parts.

Consequently, the aforementioned changes in the operating environment of public institutions have brought about new challenges for the delivery of public services. These are the art of developing and putting forward the diversity of co-creation mechanisms and models, introducing a new accountability logic addressing the role of service users as key players in judging the value and merit of public interventions, and building cooperation networks to maintain and innovate service-dominant logic practice throughout the structures of public administration. These drivers of change point to the necessity of thinking differently and thinking together at the upper levels of top civil service. What is needed is a new kind of cognitive diversity which results from cross-sectoral professional leadership training, multilevel dialogue, and cross-boundary collaboration between public institutions, business, and nongovernmental sector which pinpoint and underline the essence of leadership meta-skills as defined above.

Secondly this entry explores the theoretical and conceptual framework behind the leadership meta-skills distinctive to public institutions. Thirdly, the typology of leadership meta-skills is presented and discussed. These meta-skills constitute a comprehensive set of leadership skills that are interlinked and can be learned but only if there is the will to learn. Section “Practical Implications” discusses the practical implications of learning, nurturing, and scaling meta-skills in public institutions. These meta-skills contribute to systemic change in government and public institutions taking us through the mechanisms of the human-centered approach to leadership and the understanding of society as a complex entity. The fifth and final section “Conclusions: Synthesis and Further Research Agenda” sums up the findings of the entry and, in addition, sets out the research agenda necessary to learn more about public leadership meta-skills.

Theoretical and Conceptual Lenses to Leadership Meta-skills

This section explores the theoretical and conceptual roots of leadership meta-skills. The section is divided into four subsections, the first section “Distributed Leadership, Meta-Governance, Metacognition, and Sensemaking” concerns the leadership phenomenon and organizational agency, the second section “Systems Thinking” systems thinking as an approach to conceptualize societal change, the third section “Positive Psychology and the Role of Positive Emotions” the role of positive psychology and positive emotions, and the fourth section “Solutions-Focused Philosophy and Building a Better Future” the role of solutions-focused and future-oriented thinking as the fundament of organizational agency.

Distributed Leadership, Meta-governance, Metacognition, and Sensemaking (a) Distributed leadership is about sharing leadership practice, tasks, and responsibilities. It is closely related to concepts such as “shared,” “collective,”

“collaborative,” “emergent,” and “co-” and “democratic” leadership. According to Bolden (2011), the concept (and practice) of shared leadership proliferated rapidly among academic circles as well as professional practice (especially in the field of education) around 20 years ago. Common across all different variations of shared leadership practice is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person or authority. Another common feature in the diversity of definitions of shared leadership is beginning from a collective and systemic framework in respect of organizations, thus conceiving leadership as a social process. An interesting question here is: how well distributed leadership as a practice fits with organizations undergoing change? According to Fitzgerald et al. (2013), for instance, good and solid preexisting professional relationships underpin the capacity of distributed leadership to implement service improvements in service organizations implementing change. Conversely, poor professional relationships, insufficient team building, and conflicts erode the concerted capacity of distributed change leadership. This finding suggests that the whole organization has to be geared toward leadership distribution in order to succeed in implementing organizational changes in a proper and successful manner. From the perspective of leadership meta-skills, the distribution of leadership is a relevant approach since it captures the idea of leading together with cross-sectoral leadership competencies.

According to Gjaltema et al. (2019), (b) metagovernance did not attract considerable attention in the public management literature until the last few years. Originally, meta-governance appeared in public management studies during the 1990s as an “organizational” or “thematic” solution to governance failures enhancing the accountability, transparency, and trustworthiness of governing networks and the proper use of public funds and resources. Moreover, one established the use of the concept referred to in rather general terms such as the “governance of governance or the organization of self-organisation.” Based on their recent systematic review and conceptual analysis on meta-governance practices, Gjaltema et al. (2019) conclude that meta-governance is “. . . a practice by (mainly) public authorities that entails the coordination of one or more governance modes by using different instruments, methods, and strategies to overcome governance failures.” The essence of this definition is the different mechanisms and practices meta-governance adopts in coordinating and maintaining publicly delivered and/or funded activities in society. This requires cross-governmental approaches to leadership which, in turn, establishes a new type of relationship through meta-governance dynamics between government, governance, and the leadership of public institutions (e.g., La Cour and Andersen 2016).

To a certain extent, (c) metacognition is a conceptual parallel to distributed leadership. It conveys the idea of being conscious about what we think about how we and others think which is similar to the notion of distributed leadership (“being aware of what I think about leadership and what others think about that”). According to Metcalfe and Shimamura (1994), for instance, metacognition is “cognition about cognition” or “knowing about knowing” which comes from the root word meta in metacognition referring to as “go beyond.” Albeit metacognition refers to the overall consciousness of individual and collective thought (i.e., knowledge about cognition); it also has a more specific dimension that relates to learning and problem solving (i.e., regulation mechanisms that govern the use of cognition). Both of these components of metacognition are relevant when

problematizing the nature of leadership meta-skills. The practice of these regulation mechanisms has remained a consistently hot topic of academic debate over disagreements about the architecture of the mind, its epistemology, and the ethical aspects of reading one's mind (see also, Efklides and Misailidi 2010).

In simplified terms, (d) sensemaking refers to participating collectively through a process in "which active agents construct sensible events and structure the unknown" with the aim of achieving collectively more than people would do by themselves (Weick 1995, pp. 4–5). So, sensemaking is about bringing collective meaning to events that take place in an organizational setting. Making sense of collective terms – and following Weick (*ibid.*) – is about creating one's identity, handling issues and events together and retrospectively in a social process in an ongoing manner. Thinking in terms of public leadership and leadership meta-skills in particular the ability to make sense of the operating environment is central to strategic sensitivity. From the perspective of strategic management, strategic sensitivity and strategic imagination more or less replace traditional strategy formulation and bring strategic thinking into play as the everyday organizational collaboration practice of public leadership (see also Peng 2018).

Systems Thinking

The strength and value of leadership come alive in interaction – in interaction between human beings and collective institutions. The underpinning logic here relates to conceiving public institutions as forming a systemic network. Systems approaches have a long history in organizational and public policy studies: understood and conceived from the perspective of systems, organizations, and public policies have been conceptualized in their environments as "rational, natural and open systems" (e.g., Scott 1987; Maguire et al. 2006). Over the decades, for instance, general systems theory (GST) has affected greatly these domains of scholarly work. Scott (1987, pp. 85–86), for instance, has argued that this has been the case because a large and growing number of organizational scholars tended to look at GST as a source of learning in terms of designing organizations – e.g., their workflows, control systems, planning mechanisms, and efforts to improve organizational performance – and how best this could be set up in order to carry out their missions. Drawing heavily on GST, systems design gradually entered the field of public policy. According to Von Bertalanffy (1968, p. 32), there are models, principles, and laws that apply to generalized systems or their subclasses, irrespective of their particular nature, the nature of their component elements, and the relations or forces between them. It is however important to note here that looking from an organizational perspective, there are a variety of ways to approach organizations as systems.

Reed (2006, p. 26) argues that this conception of organizations as social systems entered the field of organization studies in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. This was followed by the evolution of GST, originally developed within the scholarly fields of biology and physics which, in turn, provided considerable conceptual inspiration for the subsequent development of what is now known as socio-technical systems theory and "soft system" methodology, and which actually dominated the field of organizational studies until the late 1970s and the early 1980s. This development reflected a wider renaissance of utopian thinking which presumed that the functional analysis of organizations as social systems would pave the way for the new conceptual and theoretical foundations of a new science

of society. Seeing organizations as systems can be categorized in multiple ways, but analytically these varieties fall into two main categories: closed and open systems. Closed and open systems share common features but differ from each other significantly. For instance, closed systems are responsive only to changes initiated by their own elements, whereas open systems receive inputs from its external environment. Open systems interconnect with other systems, thus laying the foundation for complex systems that are hard to predict because they are often very difficult to understand (e.g., Bardach 2008, pp. 338–339, 353–353).

In summary then, a complex system is an emergent and open system, and a comprehensive entity comprised of a large number of parts dynamically interacting with each other in a nonlinear way, with each part behaving according to some rule or force that relates it interactively to the other parts. Public institutions and organizations – and the sectors of public policy – are closed systems when we focus on organizations from the inside. Furthermore, public organizations operate also as open systems since they are – in real life – interlinked with institutions and forces that take place outside of public administration and connected with other institutions and environmental complexities that surround them from the outside. It is noteworthy to remember then that the transformative approach to public sector change considers change in a similar manner to that of open systems as they are open and adaptive to environmental pressures, utilizing different adaptation mechanisms to cope with change (e.g., deterministic, optional/negotiable, isomorphic, or pragmatic adaptation depending on the strength and nature of environmental pressure (see, e.g., Christensen and Laegraid 2016)).

Positive Psychology and the Role of Positive Emotions

Since Peterson's and Seligman's seminal book (2004), positive psychology has provided a new conceptual frame for better understanding how human beings, organizations, and work change by looking at the role of positive emotions, individual strength-based competencies, and individual and collective resilience processes and models (mental adaptability) (Green et al. 2017). Positive psychology has reversed the pathological approach to human well-being and capabilities to sustaining virtues, strengths, possibilities, and human growth. Positive organizational scholarship is still in its developmental phase, but interest in actions that lead to positive processes and outcomes in organizations is as important for public sector organizations as it is for any other sector. As such, the strength-based approach generates promising answers to the deadlocks encountered by traditional competence management and transformative ability approaches.

Organizations building on strengths are characterized by their approach to utilizing the resources and enthusiasm of every employee, digging up unused potential for the use of the organization, basing the advancement and the evolution of tasks more on what the employee would like and could do than what he/she has done thus far, investing in facilitating good teamwork, making use of the diversity of people instead of standardized job descriptions, encouraging creativity and innovation, seeing problems more through the lens of mismatch than the lack of gifts, and encouraging employees to live a life suitable to oneself (Linley et al. 2007). All of these are also important features in orchestrating systems change in organizations and societies.

In her “broaden-and-build” theory, Fredrickson (2013) described what positive emotions mean to people’s learning and the way they act. When overcome by negative emotions is like walking while wearing blinkers: observations and thinking are narrowed and the ability to learn from the situation is limited. On the other hand, feelings of positive curiosity accelerate the ability to learn and create new kinds of thinking and action even in challenging situations and with only fragmentary elements.

Broadening positive emotions and building on them is an important part in strengthening psychological, physical, and social resources and widening the flexibility of operations. The ability to engage in critical thinking is important in analyzing information and making reasoned judgment, while positive emotions help in observing any matter from multiple perspectives, taking different types of knowledge and experience into account, identifying and testing different alternatives, and considering their pros and cons. So, critical thinking should not be conflated with criticism, ruling out uncustomary observations and viewpoints and deteriorating relationships.

From the perspective of public leadership then, it is crucial to understand the importance of the positive emotions behind human activity and in developing a genuine interest in people, their ways of thinking, and their different realities. Systems thinking and the transformative approach to public sector change as well as leadership in public organizations can gain a lot from positive psychology in releasing positive human potential in societies and in public sector organizations.

Solutions-Focused Philosophy and Building a Better Future

Solutions focus (or solution-focus) is a vivid global practice in all professions dealing with people, yet it is not often described from the point of view of theory building. The reasons for this lie in the people-centrism nature of the solutions-focused approach which takes people’s experiences, worldviews, and values as the starting point for all interventions. Solutions focus highlights the priority of practice, since “practice is something no one can do away with. Humans can stop thinking and reflecting or even be fully unaware of their doings, but they cannot stop practice” (Theory of Solution-Focused Practice 2020).

Solutions focus builds on ideas of cybernetics, complexity, communication, feedback, social constructivism, and language philosophy, namely, the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Originally it was developed by therapeutic practices of Milton H. Erickson and the theoretical development, clinical practice, and empirical research of Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer (Theory of Solution-Focused Practice 2020). Over the last 30 years, it has been applied across many areas of society, like leadership, human resources, healthcare, school, work design, organizational development, training, and coaching.

As a social constructivist approach, solutions focus abandons the enlightenment-based assumption that there exists an unbiased mind and objective facts that are waiting to be discovered in human and social behavior (Barret 2015). Instead, it reminds us that interactions and perceptions are context-bound and subject to individual reflections. No problems, issues, or successes arise in a vacuum; attention must always be paid to the context. And if we want to make a positive difference, to building a favorable context. What we perceive affects what we think

and what we think is portrayed in how we act. Meaning is created through social interactions, and that goes also for words having no fixed sense. Language is always used in relation to different contexts and other persons, and knowledge is first and foremost an interactive social achievement, not a private accomplishment.

In addition to seeing people as “holistic systems in interaction with systems,” solutions focus makes a fruitful basis for skills development, leadership, and systems change by seeing people as enactive, capable, and resourceful – especially when invited to interaction nourishing their best features and virtues. This is a remarkable paradigm shift to appreciating the knowledge, experience, and strengths in different people and basing further development on that instead of orientation toward filling people’s supposed skills gaps.

Building on what is working in human existence and interaction, solutions focus puts into action the things that a latecomer, positive psychology, researches (Bannik and Jackson 2011). The solutions-focused approach stays away from offering explanations from power or expert positions and underlines the importance of creating and hosting an interactive space where the best human features are nourished. This is done by nurturing collaborative and dialogical relationships and practicing the so-called not-knowing position (Malinen 2004) by withholding judgment in terms of drawing consequences and staying actively curious of the way in which another person perceives the world.

The solutions-focused approach is cognizant of the fact that all interaction involves several contexts (personal, social, legal, political, cultural), stretching the human ability to engage in de- and recomposing, while framing and reframing from multiple viewpoints is at the heart of learning and development. In problematic situations the solutions-focused approach offers a “context of solutions” through open- and future oriented questioning. Solutions-focused questions address, indirectly, the context that has created the problematic situation and explore possibilities for new understandings and new kinds of action to emerge (BTA-Practice Definition Group 2020).

So, instead of imposing external views or learning on a person, the solutions focus aim is to widen the view of possibilities and rearrange the knowledge and learning residing in people and groups. For deep learning and systems change, solutions focus practice offers conversational tools enabling people to become aware of their own possibilities, to strengthen people’s agency, and to enable meaningful change. Solutions-focused philosophy and future orientation create a basis for addressing difficult issues and processing conflicting views in a manner that stimulates renewal.

The Typology of Public Leadership Metaskills

Selection of Leadership Meta-skills in a world of intertwined issues and interconnected societal problems, an important emerging question is how to raise and renew public leadership capabilities in order to face the various trans-contextual societal challenges on the one hand and, on the other, lead the transformation toward the needs of a changing world. These challenges call for the turn from the traditional leader-centered approach of change and capability building to systems thinking, networked leadership, and a more relational

approach. Developing as a leader is a personal lifelong process which deserves constant attention and reflection, but an important part of leadership is also to enable others – personnel, colleagues, and cooperation partners – to develop, and to learn so that organizational practices are transformed to generate better administration for citizens and clients.

In every role in the public sector, it is important to reach out to other contexts and strive to understand how things look from the perspective of others. For civil servants previously accustomed to taking care of their own plot inside the legislative frame, coming to the edge of their own competence can be distressing and often raises concerns over desirability and permission. It is an important mission for public sector leaders to clear space for transformation, variety, experimental tryouts, and new ways of working.

Leaders' actions have a profound impact on organizational cultures as well as the public sector's ability to renew itself and achieve good results. Public sector leaders are in a position to redesign public administration structures and workflows in order to take advantage of, for example, more joint working platforms and cross-administrative approaches which respond better to the current needs of citizens and act as enabling catalysts in societal development. Organizations learn through both individuals and collectives (Chiva and Habib 2015), and they learn in a timely fashion only if enough learning loops are embedded in everyday processes of organizations and networks. For leadership, this means shifting the focus to developing meta-skills both as personal skills and organizational practices, i.e., capabilities that are overarching and transferable from one sphere to another. Metaskills are important in building the readiness to tackle varying issues regardless of the public sector branch.

Sometimes meta-skills are approached by publishing listings of “working life” and “future skills” and renewing them regularly (e.g., World Economic Forum). However, vital meta-skills are always dependent on the contexts in which people operate. Therefore, it is not fruitful to spend too much time discussing which skills are included on such lists and which are left out. It is more important to understand the nature and importance of meta-skills and their role in generating renewal and good results. Meta-skills that seem to be particularly important for public sector leaders in a fluctuating and complex world are dialogical positioning and an enabling mindset, learning to learn and harnessing thinking skills, taking a systems approach, and putting things into practice. All of these facilitate good trans-contextual interaction and promote integrative change and renewal.

Learning to Learn

From a foresight and future perspective, there is one meta-skill that outranks all others: learning to learn (Virtanen and Tammeaid 2020; Senge and Sterman 1992). Learning cannot be portrayed as something that happens mainly at school or university and only during the earlier years of life. Good leadership is a constant process of learning. Changing the world and its operating environment requires a change in the way of thinking and acting. Everyday challenges can be seen as learning challenges for individuals, teams, organizations, and networks. They require reflection and the building of renewing learning loops individually and jointly as well as positively curious minds and persistence in overcoming obstacles and failures in building new knowledge. Critical questions in all leadership tasks

include: How do I learn myself? Do I take time for it? Broadly enough? And how do I help my organizations and networks to learn from different sources of knowledge (cumulating experience, client interface, data, scientific research, tacit knowledge, foresight, creative approaches). In the context of systems change, learning to learn is the ability to view one's own activities as part of a larger context and finding new and constructive ways to be and act as part of the emerging entity. Organizations in transformation need third-loop learning (Romme and Witteloostuijn 1999), which is not memorizing but creating.

Systemic Understanding

Acting intelligently in a complex world calls for understanding that no human community is a machine or other entity based on mechanistic cause-and-effect relationships. Instead, there are many parallel realities present all the time. Individuals and collectives have their own, multiangled perspectives, and the whole is made up of individual and shared narratives (Cronen et al. 2009). Achieving change is always a process and requires a new kind of joint sensemaking, interaction, and feedback loops. In the systems approach, the illusion of ability to control human systems and societies is replaced by understanding that every part of a systemic entity affects the whole as in a game of dominoes. Action as part of the system can be enabling or opportunity-reducing. Instead of describing and mapping the properties of the system, it is more important to see each other as part of the system and ask what we want to create together as part of the system. The fastest way to bring about change is to set in motion many small parallel processes that lead in the same direction (Termeer and Dewulf 2018).

Harnessing Thinking Skills

Narrow conceptions of knowledge and a desire to solve complex issues with one mechanical approach or power are still common features in public administration. Harnessing thinking skills helps to overcome these rigid mental models. At the core of this transformation is the meta-skills of questioning your own and common beliefs and established practices in a constructive way. Thinking skills refer to metacognition, i.e., the ability to understand how one thinks and how other people construct their thinking, including how motives, beliefs, and emotions guide thinking, how decisions and choices are made, how they could be made better, how to test the reliability of the data and different scenarios, how to practice creative and intuitive thinking, and how to reinforce mental resilience.

The solutions-focused practice of framing and reframing (Mattila 2001; Sparrer 2007) is both a practical and deep-seated way to develop one's perceptual choices and mental flexibility. Framing chosen for dealing with different issues affects a great deal of possible viewpoints and outcomes. Testing with different framings can lead to useful reframing, accelerating change. When a solution is co-constructed in interaction with reflection and open questions, it has already cultivated the subcultural and habitual ground of behavioral change. It is also important to note that since language defines our thinking, the use of language is also an instrument of thinking skills (McKergow 2013). Human beings and organizations make constant choices over how they describe issues, incidents, and significant others. Choosing excluding and negative definitions reduces opportunities for good interaction and favorable outcomes, while choosing collaborative language and definitions creates cooperation.

Dialogical Approach

To succeed in leading people and enabling them to realize their capabilities to their full potential presupposes abandoning hierarchical and autocratic relationships. People usually have different roles in organizations and networks, but any collective functions best when it is a place for human working with human, not positions or statuses colliding with each other. The dialogical approach itself does not strive to new actionable solutions but merely seeks to widened understanding of different experiences and contexts, building bridges between them. Isaacs (1999, 2007) defines dialogue as an art of thinking together and an actionable skill, which improves the conditions for any cooperation or change.

Joint sensemaking happens through dialogue, and therefore dialogue is both an approach or mindset and an everyday skill used to create a dialogical environment giving freedom of thinking and expression for everybody and consequently maintaining interaction on an equal basis. As an everyday skill, it contains reciprocity in terms of giving time and appreciation to relationships and interaction. Gergen et al. (2007) have, for instance, emphasized dialogue as having often unrealized levels of coordination and insight originating from relational responsibility, self-expression, affirmation, coordination, reflexivity, and the co-creation of new realities that help people to function in systems in a way that is fruitful for themselves and others.

Enabling Mindset

An enabling mindset – rather than a problem and deficit focus – is the breeding ground for seeing and taking new opportunities, creating new ways of working and interaction, and, even more importantly, appreciating the natural transformative capacity human beings and communities have. Organizations should pay greater attention to how than what, when it comes to common procedures, and focus on cultivating the enabling mindset. Human beings and human collectives are complex by nature, and no living system can be completely controlled. This basic rule of thumb in relation to complex human systems is useful to bear in mind also in the daily life of organizations and leadership. Echoing Capra and Luisi (2014), living systems can, however, be disturbed, and therefore it is important to ensure that the disturbance practiced (e.g., by leadership) has a positive effect.

Change begins with the assumptions people bring with them. Paying attention to the strengths and capabilities of the components of a systemic whole increases the functionality and developmental capacity of the human system. On the other hand, paying attention to the shortcomings and deficiencies of the components of the system reduces the functionality and development opportunities of the system. No systemic whole is irreversible in terms of reducing it to its parts, and, as such, it is the interaction of the parts that makes it unique. The ways of working and interacting in organizations are man-made and constantly evolving. The quality of the interaction determines the functionality of an organization. Starting from what already works and learning from that, expanding successes and building on resources produces very different change results from those attained by avoiding failure or diagnosing problems. Planning by backcasting from the preferred future brings remarkably different results compared to looking at the past or focusing on describing why a problem exists. Although organizations and other human

communities are not machines, there is a historic ballast of organizational scholarship to treat them like they were.

Investing time and effort in good interaction and common platform building, opening up new viewpoints and possibilities, and building in intrinsic motivation require an enabling mindset and seeing human diversity as an asset. It also brings a different view on competence development taking it from filling competence gaps based on external assessment to setting goals together and supporting growth. An enabling mindset pays conscious attention to positive deviations and builds on them.

Reaching Out to Praxis

Many people have good and even innovative ideas, but putting them into action is a meta-skill that deserves special attention and practice. The idea of separating, on the one hand, planning and implementation and on the other strategic and operational management does not work in a systemic and networked world. That is also the reason why most of these plans gather dust on shelves instead of changing much on the everyday level. The way decisions are made is of great importance. Likewise, the implementation process and the means chosen have a significant impact on success in reaching strategic goals, as well as on people's experience and behavior. No one can completely control a living system, so the only thing that can be influenced is our own actions in the system.

Promoting systems change is an organic process starting from inviting people to take part in the change, allowing for individual ways to participate, cultivating a process feeding the change in practice, staying curious and open to learning opportunities that appear along the way, and learning from the process while running. From a system's point of view, leadership can best be described as utilizing one's opportunity to influence in a particular situation or from a particular role within the system.

In principle, leaders' opportunities to show an example and enable change are greater than others. Two important ways of putting things into action in the systemic world are purposefulness and experimentation. The first meaning, primarily, explores the desired future in order to see in which direction the system wants to move and building a way forward instead of continuing with analyzing cause-and-effect relationships. The latter – experimentation – means taking an experimental attitude to discovering possible futures by action learning and experimentation.

There is a long tail of enlightenment supposing that thinking and reflection – “strategic planning” in governance terms – come before action. Social constructionism and enactive cognition have reminded that the process can also work in reverse (e.g., Barret 2015; McKergow 2021): knowledge and action are linked; cognition is embodied and includes also nonlinguistic meaning-making. Experiments and design thinking are therefore an important addition to public sector's ways of knowledge creation and sensemaking.

Practical Implications

Enabling Systems Change

Developing meta-skills increases public sector leaders' capabilities in leading their own organizations in a positive way and working as a trusted part of egalitarian cross-sectoral networks. As a whole, developing meta-skills increases the resilience of the public administration and its capacity to act as a catalyst for future societal change. Meta-skills carry within themselves the notion of not trying to make either structures better or develop the individuals but rather to affect the systemic whole via multiple interactional paths. Meta-skills bring in a remarkable amount of Aristotelian virtue *phronesis* to public sector organizations and their ways of functioning. According to Darnell et al. (2019), there are two particularly important functions that *phronesis* performs for its possessor: first the ability to examine the situation from multiple viewpoints and pursue ethical deliberation toward finding the best possible way forward and, second, especially in dilemmatic situations, prioritizing solutions that integrate different components of the good life.

Meta-skills also derive from pragmatic philosophy the notion of seeing imagination, communication, and context as essential parts of decisionmaking and of putting thought into practice (Ansell and Geyer 2017). In these iterative processes, emotion is intertwined with cognition and forms an integral part of solution building and skills development (ibid. Ansell & Geyer). Perception, consciousness, and emotions are often forgotten, but are a strongly related part of organizational and systemic learning (Bateson 2016; Chiva and Habib 2015; Roeser and Pesch 2016). Developing meta-skills is also an ongoing and lifelong process running parallel with everyday life and work. Working in different organizations (i.e., top civil service rotation), spheres, and cultures nurtures the ability for meta-skills development by making tangible the systemic principle of the "fish being the last to notice the water." Governments that actively promote work rotation are better off in terms of developing leadership and civil servant skills related to understanding and using trans-contextual knowledge.

A Shift Toward Human-Centered Leadership and Systems Views of Change

The human-centered governance paradigm is gaining in importance (UK Policy Lab 2018; Bason 2017), and meta-skills enhance the qualities that are needed in dealing with multicontextual intertwined issues and reduce the tendency toward legalistic reductionism and managerial tunnel vision. Meta-skills also unpack the assumptions that lie behind traditional thinking of how change happens. Very often leadership and administrative actions reveal a belief in a causal logic of change based on commanding, using power positions, ordering, warning, restricting, threatening, or advising from an expert position. All of these are however generally ineffective ways of affecting human thinking and behavior in a sustainable and transformative way. They generate little or no change and promote external learning, negative emotions, and a loss of trust. Accelerating systems change and human-centered leadership mean looking at change as learning and co-creation.

The human-centered approach also challenges the customary ways of measuring and evaluating change by developing it in a more mission-driven and systems-based direction (Lähteenmäki-Smith and Virtanen 2020). Traditional research questions and approaches around result orientation and accountability echo dualistic thinking interested in whether a change has happened or not. This kind

of examination, however, leaves out the characteristics and nature of societal and human change. It relies on a managerial change view, where the change can be predicted, planned, and verified. There are strong tendencies toward a topdown view, strong belief in mechanistic and hierarchal manageability, and repeatability in the organizational world, and these reductionistic tendencies seem to be strengthened in the spheres of measuring and evaluation although they fit poorly with today's complex world (e.g., Lowe 2013).

Systemic change involving multiple parties means different learning for all the different groups and individuals, since they participate in the transition out of different contexts, backgrounds, roles, and strengths. In social change there is no "push button" that would start the desired progress everywhere and in any circumstances. Meanings are always co-created, and accelerating systemic change means taking a living systems approach, cultivating the dialogical conditions and nonlinear thinking, working with many aspects and different stakeholders simultaneously, and being interested in transformative change and openness for adaptation. It follows that looking at the effectiveness and outcomes of a developmental change of a system should be driven by the same assumptions (Virtanen and Tammeaid 2020). Using nonmeaningful measures in evaluation and performance assessment has also in itself had a discouraging effect on motivation and trust (Lowe and Wilson 2017).

It is important to evaluate transitions or systems change as dynamic learning processes where evaluation is an ongoing activity, guiding and redirecting the emerging change along the way. Enriching learning loops are a propellant of change and focusing on them enables transition. This is also an important step away from dualistic thinking and not taking into account that systemic interactions are reciprocal and nonlinear (Van Bavel et al. 2012) and affect the whole system both directly and indirectly. Systems thinking and systems change are hard for positivistic scientific thinking to internalize because of its adherence to the potential to define, describe, and master human self-organizing capabilities rather than appreciating and nourishing the human capacity to ride complexity and perpetually transform the patterns of system in a dynamic way. Echoes of this can be seen, for example, in the systems theory discussions raised by Burisch and Wohlgemuth (2016) and Cilliers (1998).

The discourse around the innovation capacity of organization has raised a distinction between incremental and disruptive change highlighting the importance of the latter. In a complex and ambiguous world, it is important to bear in mind that transitions with profound effects have a cross-sectoral effect and that the role of foresight, future thinking, and agile action is vital. From the perspective of systems change and meta-skills, there is though no conflict between incremental and disruptive change measures. Organizations and networks usually benefit from both. Creating and sustaining regular learning loops focusing on small changes, everyday innovations in working methods and learning cross-sectorally may not always produce disruptive innovations, but they do create and maintain the mindset of exploration and experimentation in the organization. They also lead to concrete small-scale changes which buttress the dynamic capabilities of the organization and can be crucial in archiving good results (Vermeer and Wenting 2018; Termeer and Dewulf 2018).

A further important addition in terms of positive psychology that the solutions-focused approach brings to accelerating systems change is its stress on positive deviations. Noticing strengths and positive development, modeling successes and expanding from them, and boosting positive feedback are all key competences for dynamic organizations and for successfully developing self-organizing human systems. Shifting the spotlight onto this positive core thus alters the prevailing view of change, and learning from being something hard, imposed, and external toward a natural way for a human being to be in the world and to be ready explores it. This is a difference that “makes a difference” in change making.

Reshaping Leadership Training for a Complex World

The scholarly discussion around the appropriate and necessary forms of leadership development in the public sector has in recent times focused on behaviorally distinguishing effective managers from ineffective managers and on establishing holistic competency models (e.g., Hamlin and Whitford 2020; Skorková 2016; Larat 2016). It is well known that there are a number of policy issues that can no longer be addressed alone either by sector or nation-state, thus heightening the need for new kinds of dynamic and transformative capabilities able both to adapt and shape the environment (e.g., Kattel and Mazzucato 2018; Teece 2018; Bourgon 2017; Burischa and Wohlgemuth 2016; Meredith et al. 2016; Mau 2015). These findings indicate that a combination of coaching, classroom training, feedback, and experimental learning seems to have the best impact on leader performance and organizational effectiveness (Seidle et al. 2016; Parry and Sinha 2007). Human-centered skills like empathy, ethics, participation, and design approaches are highlighted from the point of view of leadership interaction inside organizations and in achieving societal results (i.e., Quirk 2018; Van der Wal 2017; Bason 2017).

Delivering training that builds capabilities to enable action in a complex world calls for the giving up of the customary knowledge-gap approach from the trainer’s side and looking past the notion of teaching as knowledge transfer from one person to another. Seeing training as co-construction between the participants shifts attention from teaching to learning and creates a positive learning spiral that has ripple effects, also on leadership culture in a broad sense and for interaction in real-life settings (Virtanen and Tammeaid 2020). The development of meta-skills via training can best be described as emergent learning meaning personal and collective empowerment, leading to new insights and greater action competence (Freisleben 2020, also Darling et al. 2016). Using innovative and mixed methods and supporting both individual and joint agency, competence, and resources help to overcome various meaningful challenges. It also means going over to learning design based on socially constructed mutual learning and building on peoples’ experiences, ideas, intuition, and mutual sensemaking instead of relying on expert lectures to form the content. It is time to see that there is no science- or expertise-based solution to every problem and providing new knowledge by lecturing does not usually generate new kinds of actions.

Systems thinking has clearly been influenced by cognitive psychology which is portrayed as focusing on mental models needing change as a prerequisite for transformative change. That is one way to describe changes on the thinking and identity level. Enactivism and solutions-focused approaches remind us though that human learning and change are happening not only at the level of thinking

but also at the experimental level (McKergow 2021), something which delivers an important message in terms of learning, training, and teaching. Solutions-focused training design constantly seeks links between large-scale endeavors and everyday behavior. With this combination it is a way to operate on several learning layers simultaneously and initiate learning, reframing-focused thinking, and action. It strengthens individual and joint meta-skills by broadening horizons, fostering dialogue, and joint sensemaking as well as learning by doing and putting ideas into action in real settings. This kind of training makes use of the previous skills and capacities of the participants, enhancing both individual and joint goal setting and building enabling mindsets. It is only when different kinds of knowledge are combined with skills and experiences in a manner deviating from how it has been done before that new solutions arise.

Training, the bringing together of multicontextual groups, functions as an incubator of rearranging learning, discovering unpredicted new possibilities, and adapting learning and its outcomes to the individual needs of the participants derived from their personal backgrounds, situations, and aspirations (Jacobs 2017). A well designed multi-contextual learning is not only about putting the cognitive pieces together but also about rearranging present and previous learning in such a way that it leads to new understandings and to new ways to be and act in the world.

An important part of learning is activities that take the learners to real service touch points: develop capabilities to develop competences to simply observe without an immediate need to categorize, judge, or decide anything; and gather multi-angled information to ponder and after that practice the new skills. Leadership training supporting the development of meta-skills is also designed as a process allowing time, space, and continuity for immersion, growth, and bewilderment which is also an important part of transformative learning. A well-designed learning process is far from linear and always an entity impossible to reduce to its individual parts either working or evaluated on their own. In a long learning process, a keynote or an intriguing viewpoint can look and feel very different when first heard and after some months of thinking and processing. Often, some at first glance irritating features prove to be the most valuable ones in creating new kinds of thinking and action. Typically, a human being within a transformative change process is not really capable of evaluating their own learning in the middle of the process. When thinking expands to new levels however, the capability for assessment is increased (Virtanen and Tammeaid 2020).

Conclusions: Synthesis and Further Research Agenda

The topic of this entry – public leadership metaskills – is still a relative newcomer in both the academic and practice fields in respect of public leadership. Grounded in systems thinking and positive psychology, the solutions-focused approach, as well as distributed leadership theories, metacognition, meta-governance, and sensemaking, the meta-skills approach offers a fresh way to approach the ongoing challenges of public leadership.

Adopting a systems approach to change and the development of leadership meta-skills reduces the burden of leadership uniformity, i.e., finding one model, solution, or shared understanding of a situation. Instead, conceiving of society as

a system introduces the need to agree on future goals in a way that different parts of the public policy system better relate to each other. Understanding complexities is a prerequisite for public leaders to work toward societal goals which make sense from their position and viewpoints. Instead of trying to funnel down a shared opinion or definition, the meta-skills approach underlines the variety of human perception and context and harnesses these layers of action to benefit a wider process of transition. Developing metaskills contributes to the development of capabilities that can impact systems change by hosting, creating conditions, and interacting.

In order to increase the capacity of the decontextualized public administration to act in our complex world, three substantial shifts are required: from structure focus to human focus, from governance to collaboration (reaching out to new modes of meta-governance), and from knowledge transfer to co-creation. Developing meta-skills is a way for the public sector to learn new and fruitful ways to interact with the society and to transform its own ways of working. The problems and issues public leaders handle are often ambiguous, challenging, and evolving. This raises the questions of framing and interpretation which are decisive in addressing them. Moreover, from the point of view of nudging systemic and transformative change, meta-skills become central by enabling new ways of encountering, reframing, and understanding.

The emergence of meta-skills as academic and practical reasoning in the field of public leadership sets out a number of possibilities for future research. These for instance include a detailed empirical cultivation of the acquisition and deployment of meta-skills and coupling metaskills as a mechanism for contributing, attaining, and achieving performance goals set for public organizations and institutions. Moreover, an interesting aspect that relates to leadership meta-skills development here concerns the supply and demand of meta-skilling – how these meta-skills development aspects are anchored in the curriculums of public leadership training and how public leaders feel about the demand to focus on them. In the long run, additional analysis will also be required in terms of identifying the structural and organizational ingredients that trigger the emergence of meta-skills deployment and, on the other, how government and administrative structures evolve in relation to the adoption and development of meta-skills as a key element in public policy and public administration leadership practice. Finally, further exploration of the specific meta-skills relevant in a variety of diverse organizational contexts merits thorough theoretical, conceptual, and empirical research.

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5 Nurturing human-centredness through public leadership meta-skills

5.1 Increasing importance of meta-skills

Previous chapters have outlined the ongoing transformation of the working environment of public administrations and public organisations more generally as well as their response to these developments. Previous chapters have also looked at how the theoretical and practical understanding of public leadership has evolved. Consequently, public leadership and public sector institutions of the 2020s are working in a world where connections between actors and the dynamics of power matter more than ever and where holistic thinking works better than reductionism or linear reasoning. As such, a poor understanding of overarching societal phenomena can become both costly and cause a significant loss of well-being, fundamentally inhibiting the capability to tackle unexpected future developments.

Achieving a better level of social impact for public policy and public services in a complex world calls for a leadership approach that allows for and favours organisational adaptability. This does not necessarily apply only to public organisations but calls for the creation of the capacity for co-leadership and co-creation between public organisations in cross-cutting societal issues whilst also taking along other sectors of society, including private businesses and non-governmental organisations and citizens. The task is not however easily accomplished given that public organisations are often substance-bound and silo-based in terms of their division of labour, legal codes, regulations, and the traditionally conservative way in which they are usually applied. A new vocabulary and working practices are therefore required to elevate horizontal accountability and human centeredness as the core rationale of the public leadership.

Several important questions follow on from these observations. How are these new capabilities and attitudes built among civil service leaders and managers? And to what extent is this readiness already prevalent among top-level public service leaders? Although public servants and leaders tend to be well educated people, we cannot

assume that this kind of profound shift towards enabling and bridgebuilding for co-created change happens by itself and without consciously cultivating and appreciating the skills and structures accelerating the change.

Public organisations at different levels of governance around the globe are known to be cradles of the committee and bureaucratic culture. Deliberation is often institutionalised in public committees where civil servants, interest group representatives and experts participate. However, anyone with any experience of the way in which the public sector works in practice knows that far too often these committees and networks do not work as platforms of mutual learning or as the generators of new solutions to interagency issues (e.g., Krick & Holst, 2018; Feiock, 2013; Agranoff, 2006).

Committees often operate as negotiation platforms, safeguarding the organisational status quo, rather than exploring new insights for wicked problems in a spirit of creating new solutions (Annala et al., 2021). Committees are generally constituted by established parties or opinion groups, where the members are merely representatives of their background organisations rather than co-creators of common goals and solutions. The same spirit of ‘zero-sum game’ can be found in forums between different branches of government. So, collaborative leadership, joint learning and solution-building do not happen by themselves just because there is a broad range of representation around the table. To succeed in co-operating beyond the sectoral and substantial boundaries in tackling the complex societal phenomena in an impactful way, the development and adoption of leadership meta-skills are essential. Leadership meta-skills are needed to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration as an incubator of systems change. Adopting and developing meta-skills is also important from the human-centred point of view and in terms of increasing the public sector’s ability to generate services based on the actual needs of service users. In general, this requires using existing structures and resources in a new way and gathering different parties for co-creating non-compartmentalised services. This boundary-spanning and cross-cutting co-creation does not happen without deployment of the meta-skills that ease cross-contextual co-operation and renewal.

5.2 Origins and the evolution of leadership meta-skills

Meta-skills refer to generic and transferrable leadership competencies and skills which reveal themselves in the interactional choices of those who steer cooperation or participate in it (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). Meta-skills are present in both the skills and attitudes that guide interaction. Meta-skills enhance reciprocal and dynamic connections between actors. Leadership meta-skills are particularly important since leaders generally set the pace in terms of organisational procedures and culture. Leaders actively support and enable public organisations in their drive for transformation towards human-centeredness which itself nourishes public organisations to renew themselves. The capability to build and steer the fruitful cross-

sectoral co-creation of new solutions to cross-cutting societal issues, manifests itself in meta-skills in everyday working life.

Meta-skills are characterised as that level of leadership skills lying above the traditional way to approach the contents of leadership via strategic leadership, process management, planning procedures etc. Meta-skills draw attention to the fact that in addition to making choices on what is done, how that is done also makes a difference – both to the people involved and in terms of the societal results. Meta-skills refer to capabilities that are overarching and transferable from one operating environment (government silo) to another. As leadership skills they can be characterised as taking agency and responsibility in building future-driven reciprocal cooperation. Meta-skilfulness is required in undertaking systems change and enabling organisational or network learning and should therefore be in the interests of successful public sector leadership (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020 and 2021).

Until recently, leadership research has not paid much attention to meta-skills though leadership meta-skills do share similarities with theories of shared leadership (Bolden, 2011) which reminds us that leadership is a social process and with distributed leadership (Fitzgerald et al., 2013) which underlines the notion that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person or authority. The concept of metacognition (Metcalf & Shimamura, 1994) approaches leadership through collective consciousness and the personal or collective assumptions that guide our thinking. Meta-governance (Gjaltema et al., 2019) in its turn notes that, for enhanced accountability, transparency and the trustworthiness of governance there is a clear need for coordination and leading together across the sectors and different levels of governance (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2021). Van Wart's typology of public meta-skills approach (discussed in Chapter 3) resembles collaborative leadership, transformative leadership, self-organising, and networked leadership. The tradition of authentic leadership has also raised some of the same perspectives. Building upon van Wart, meta-skills thinking appears to have common features grounded in community change management and organisational learning (Van Wart, 2017, p. 177). These approaches are interested in how to enable organisations, practitioners and service users to work together in a more cooperative and trust-based manner.

Putting things together, then, the public leadership meta-skills approach rests upon four substantial roots: socio-constructive theories of knowledge creation and renewal, the co-creation view of systems change, the philosophy and practice of reframing taken from the Solution-Focused approach and the virtue ethics and strengths approach stemming from positive psychology.

The socio-constructive approach to organisational learning emphasises that knowledge creation is a holistic process where interaction, emotions, perceptions, bodily experiences and thinking merge. In this view, leadership always represents itself as relational between human-beings and the role of our assumptions is highlighted, since they largely create the world which we are able later to discover

(Cooperrider, 2017; Hersted & Gergen, 2013). Nonaka and Takeuchi have presented similar ideas in their SECI-process of organisational knowledge creation consisting of socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Konno highlight the importance of creating *ba*, a shared space and time conducive to the development of new understanding. Murtonen and Lehtinen for their part highlight the role of social support as the key mechanism of adult learning and development (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020).

The co-creation view of systems change emphasises the role of co-discovery and common learning journeys not only involving the service users but also other stakeholders (Akilesh, 2017; Ind & Coates, 2013) as well as the role of interactive leadership i.e., the “[...] *dynamic that produces adaptive outcomes in a social system*” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 306).

As an approach to change this highlights the reality that legitimacy is built socially and that many small streams flowing in the same direction make for powerful systems change (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). According to Papi-Thornton and Cubista (2019), inducing systemic change requires the development of self-awareness as well as social/emotional intelligence, empathy, and a desire to promote systems-level impacts, shifting the orientation from mainstream, short-term, individualistic success. It also benefits from working with diverse worldviews and committing to and prioritising the health and vitality of human systems, learning systems tools, frameworks and participatory methods and from focusing on applied practice rather than theoretical understanding alone. This could mean, for example, developing skills through field-based learning and flexibility to adapt to the emergent factors of ever-shifting systems instead of relying on long-term planning or forecasting. Within the field of policy design, this calls for relying on co-creation and experimental learning as policy design quality criteria (de Smedt & Borch, 2021). It is easy to agree with Ind and Coates (2013), who hold the view that co-creation practice about change brings together psychotherapy, management science, innovation and open innovation, design, intent, and emergence as well as creativity practice.

Solution-Focused philosophy and the practice of reframing lay the foundation for meta-skills in several ways. It draws attention to the potential of human interaction to create a desired future and to utilise the skills often associated with one area of life in other situations (Kim Berg & Szabó, 2005). The roots of the Solution-Focused approach in human psychology highlight the importance of dispelling limiting beliefs of what is possible, obligatory, or true in any given situation. The same applies to common and shared beliefs, convictions, and opinions. This kind of reframing can happen via fruitful interaction and the Solution-Focused manner of doing it by simultaneously strengthening interactional relationships and building trust is a key factor in co-creating change and promoting holistic thinking rather than reductionism and linear reasoning.

The Solution-Focused approach differs from many other approaches to change making by taking a future-driven (i.e., teleological) stand instead of a causal one, trusting in emergence rather than pre-planning and utilising variety instead of looking for rigorous consensus (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). All of these are key features in the promotion of change, making human-centred rather than decision-maker-centred choices. Solution-Focused practice offers various ways to combine individual, organisational and societal aspirations (e.g., Dierolf 2014; Tammeaid 2020). In the context of systems change, the Solutions-Focused approach understands that a sustainable change cannot be forced or ordered and that we cannot change other people either. What we can do is promote high quality interaction and change the circumstances towards a more favourable direction such that they become a space of mutual learning and purposeful cooperation (McKergow, 2021; Bateson, 2015).

An essential part of the change making power of meta-skills stems from virtue ethics, something which positive psychology has in recent decades introduced in a new form that can be easily utilised in organisations and leadership. Positive psychology looks at human activity through the medium of strengths and hidden strengths to be developed. In this view, good and wise deeds result from judgment that takes both emotions and factual reasoning into account. Nor is thought alone enough to be a virtue but turning good intentions into activities generates good results. From a meta-skills viewpoint, leadership is manifested more in deeds than as personal qualities.

This element introduces a new feature to the long tradition of leadership theories by challenging the search for a person with a certain type of leadership qualities, instead focusing on what leaders do and what kinds of interactions they provoke in their surroundings. People's diversity is genuinely a useful reality both in the Solution-Focused and positive psychology views. This implies that different individuals can succeed in a leadership role. Leadership meta-skills argue that the desire to create fruitful interactions between various people and groupings, to explore things from different perspectives and to build solutions that open new thinking and new ways of acting are essential.

In Chapter 2 we discussed morality and the human ability to carry out both good and bad deeds. Both positive psychology and the Solution-Focused approach make the deliberate choice to build circumstances where peoples' best qualities come to the forefront. "*The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook,*" says American psychologist William James (James, 1890, p. 865) in his famous quote. Not everything deserves to be covered, looked at, or explored when we involve ourselves in the task of systems change making. Focusing on virtues and good deeds primarily feeds better impulses to the connections between actors and the dynamics of power. The deliberate choice of building trust makes for a more resilient society and better accountability. There is a distinctive relationship between ethics and societal resilience (Varona, 2021) and at this point also lies the catalytic power of leadership meta-skills.

According to Dutton et al. (2010), a more virtuous work-related identity can alter individuals' preferences in terms of building connections to others and facilitating the cultivation of social resources. This represents an important move to increase trust and appreciation. Echoing Dutton et al. (2020), the focus on building virtuous qualities also strengthens social resources on the evaluative, developmental, and structural levels by generating increased understanding of others – including outgroups – encouraging the formation of new relationships, disclosing more information, discovering shared perspectives and acting in a more authentic manner. Moreover, as Fredrickson (2013) has shown in her seminal research of positive emotions, such emotions strengthen actors' mental, physical, and social resources. Flexibility in operational terms increases and the opportunities to learn and create something new, even in challenging and fragmented situations, improves. Highlighting strengths, signs of progress and positive deviations reinforces the inherent ability of human communities to work together to address the issues ahead and create something new. Shifting the spotlight to strengths and opportunities breaks the traditional setup where change is seen as a difficult, often externally generated, compulsion to change.

Developing meta-skills offers a promising opportunity for governments and public organisations more generally to improve their policy design by moving away from seeking a prescribed procedure, a lean consensus, or a predictable single future toward the possibility of multiple transition pathways. It also provides a platform for developing an enabling and human-centred leadership style both inside public organisations and in relation to other organisations and society. Contextual integrative thinking and joining resources for human-centred change are necessary for government to meet the challenges of 2020s. Highlighting the importance of meta-skilling makes explicit the notion that success in systems change does not occur in a vacuum. Meta-skills and the interactional design they bring to public sector leadership are essential for successful change making.

5.3 Public leadership meta-skills typology

Meta-skills manifest themselves in relation to the environments in which people use them. Instead of producing attribute lists of general meta-skills, the more appropriate approach is to focus on which meta-skills in different operating environments promote cross-contextual interaction and renewal. Based on earlier research related to leadership meta-skills (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020 and 2021), this sub-chapter discusses six public leadership meta-skills – their contents, meaning and value while also testing them empirically.

The idea of public leadership meta-skills was born and developed during six long-term “Renewing Public Sector - Enabling Leadership” leadership training courses operated by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra and conducted in Finland for 140 senior government officials during the period 2017-18. The focus here was to strengthen enabling and cross-sectoral leadership among top civil service leaders (Permanent State Secretaries, Under Secretaries of

State, Director Generals, and other senior-level members of ministry staff) supporting leadership capabilities to take an active role in the transformations needed within the context of government work in the 2020s. When designing the courses, it was important to identify the primary characteristics and transformational challenges of public administration in the 2020s as well as the leadership competencies required for successful governance. During the six separate leadership courses (each consisting of around 22-25 participants) leadership meta-skills emerged as a useful conceptual tool with which to capture cross-governmental cooperation and human-centred leadership. The public leadership philosophy and practice embedded in the leadership training curricula as well as the leadership training methodology is more thoroughly described in Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020). Based on the long-term leadership courses that incubated the idea of public leadership meta-skills, six leadership meta-skills were subsequently identified. They are, learning to learn, the systems approach, dialogical positioning, harnessing thinking skills, reaching out to practice and upholding an enabling mindset (see Fig. 2).

According to the tacit knowledge provided by the training courses as well as decades of experience as a leader, civil servant, coach, and consultant within the government working environment, these six meta-skills build capacity to facilitate good trans-contextual interaction and promote integrative change and renewal which are a pre-requisite for tackling a variety of cross-cutting societal issues regardless of public sector branch. Additionally, these identified meta-skills enable public sector renewal and a broadening of the scope of government interventions and policy implementation while lacking them can easily undercut any existing aspirations for renewal.

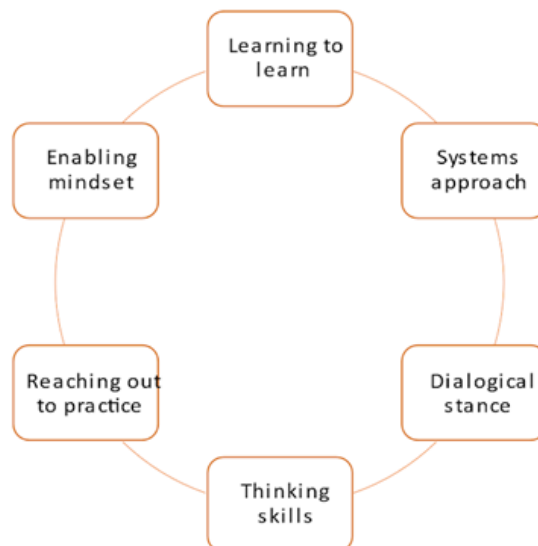


Figure 5.1. Public leadership meta-skills

Learning to learn encompasses public leaders' engagement and interaction with the changing world. It also conveys the idea of a learning attitude that relates both to everyday tasks and comprehensive policy implementation processes. Leadership is a process of constant learning as well as of showing an example and fostering learning in others. An important component of learning to learn is the ability to view one's own activities as part of a larger context and finding new and constructive ways to be and act as part of the emerging entity. Kallio (2020) points out that development in adulthood can include both progress and regression and that these processes often take place retrospectively. Furthermore, basic cognitive mechanisms, motivational factors, concepts, beliefs of learning, teaching and the nature of knowledge affect development and learning abilities during adulthood. The role of collaborative knowledge building in learning processes as well as the metacognitive understanding of one's own learning, motivation and beliefs supporting the learning process, are all integral parts of learning to learn (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020).

The systems approach brings together public leaders and public organisations in a web of interaction with various other societal actors. Achieving change constitutes a process and requires new kinds of joint sensemaking, interaction, and feedback loops. In the systems approach, the illusion of controlling human systems – and public organisations – to carry out tasks much as a piece of machinery does with expected performance outcomes is replaced by an extensive understanding that every part of a system affects and operates as part of the whole. Actions made as part of the system can be enabling or opportunity-reducing. Instead of describing and mapping the properties of the system, it is more important to see each other as part of the system and ask what we want to create together. This meta-skill is based on the same argument than this whole book: public sector, society, and leadership can best be understood and improved by looking at how the different parts interact with each other and how they are integrated. Systems thinking is not a uniform field of study and in the context of meta-skills systems thinking refers first and foremost to the dynamics of open systems and people acting in networks of responsive feedback structures (Stacey, 2010). This insight lays the groundwork for our exploration of societal phenomena from a multidisciplinary and multi-player point of view (Stähle et al., 2020).

The dialogical stance incorporates reciprocal human-to-human relationship with all people despite status or role, but also as a practical skill to build dialogical interaction. Good leadership is not apart from, or above, the organisation but fulfils its overarching role in relationships. Dialogue as an actionable skill conveys the idea of building adaptive spaces for comprehensive and enlarged understanding and cognition of different experiences and contexts to arise. Facilitating joint sensemaking and bridge-building improves the conditions for change. The dialogical stance describes the change of leadership from an authoritarian and status-based culture to a more informal human-to-human relationship approach despite the different

roles people continue to inhabit in an organisation or around a common task. This same shift has been the primary focus of the Human Relations movement on leadership outlined in Chapter 2 above. Furthermore, the thorough and favourable impact of the dialogical stance in communication between human beings has been described in detail, for example, in Buber's (1937) classic distinction between the I-Thou relationship and the I-It relationship and in Isaacs' (2007) seminal work about dialogue and the art of thinking together.

Thinking skills refer to the ability to detach oneself from familiar thought patterns and consider things from diverse, new, and even surprising perspectives. Harnessing thinking skills increases the ability to critically examine one's own as well as other generally shared beliefs and established ways of perception and building solutions. To identify what is essential and meaningful in different circumstances helps us to make choices in real situations. This however requires mental flexibility in its broadest sense, i.e., perception, knowledge-building, creativity, and positive emotions. Geoffrey Vickers has described the human mind as an act of artistry, where intuition and rationality are always involved. Steve de Shazer, the central figure in the development of the Solution-Focused approach, refers to Vickers' definition noting that the "[...] human mind has available to it at least two different modes of knowing and it uses both in appropriate and inappropriate combinations in its endless efforts to understand" (de Shazer 2016, p. 55).

Kallio (2020) points out that that attaining the ability to engage in contextual integrative thinking is the target of cognitive development and learning in adulthood. It requires an understanding of the multiplicity and plurality of viewpoints, opinions, explanations and domains and acts as a prerequisite for the making of wise decisions and conclusions. An important Solution-Focused adjunct to thinking skills is the development of an ability also to choose a "not-knowing-position" or "beginners mind" even in a familiar situation and by that means, to generate new understanding or to lead thinking back to the fundamentals (Malinen, 2004).

Reaching out to practice makes explicit attempts to find new ways of working quickly, open-mindedly, constantly learning and thereby shaping the future through active involvement. Consequently, it brings with it the idea of acting as a partner in networks and ecosystems, building partnerships and providing good conditions for the implementation of decisions. Too often there is a gap between strategic decision-making and the operational level activity in public organisations. This gap needs to be overcome and one possible way to accomplish this is to adopt the novel and collaborative ways of the human-centred approach – to place yourself in a dialogue with staff and service users. Reaching out to practice brings about experiential learning which is also an effective means of change in public organisations. Conditions, connections, and directions can also be changed by simply changing the tone and space for interaction and in that way, creating new kinds of dynamics (Bateson, 2015, Stacey, 2010). It is a surprisingly counterintuitive way of inducing change due

to beliefs like ‘the plan has to come before action’, ‘theory is more valuable practice’ and ‘learning is a cognitive process (only)’. Both the long tradition of experiential learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975) as well as the enactive approach to learning portrayed in the Solution-Focused approach remind us that interacting with the world is an embodied and holistic endeavour enabling change (McKergow, 2021). Within the field of leadership, the recent development of social learning labs has reinforced this view of putting things into practice. Wenger-Trayners (2021) describes “*systems convening*” as a crucial form of leadership in the 21st century, making explicit the idea of leadership as convening, involving narrative work, legitimacy work, boundary stretching, identity work supporting personal transformation, agency and power works as well as articulating value. Indeed, the Design Council in the UK has recently revised its systems design framework by adding the supporting role of leadership to established design processes like the double diamond. They also highlight the skills and abilities of narration and connection in their model (Drew, 2021)

The enabling mindset is the breeding ground for seeing, taking, and pinpointing new opportunities, creating new ways of working and interaction and, even more importantly, appreciating the natural transformative capacity that human beings and communities possess. Change begins with the assumptions people bring with them. Paying attention to opportunities even in a gloomy situation, as well as to the strengths and capabilities of the people involved, increases the functionality and developmental capacity in any change. The enabling mindset creates space for success and for proceeding towards the common goal in various ways instead of striving for one uniform solution or deciding on behalf of others. As a leadership stance it means making room for others to flourish. The enabling mindset forms the core of Solution-Focused thinking. Gearing the mindset towards possibilities and enabling rather than problems and constraints is fundamental in breaking from mechanistic and narrow reason-effect thinking approaches (Grant et al., 2012). It opens the gates to everyday creativity and the nonlinear space of opportunity. In order not to end up just fixing the failures in respect of current ‘solutions,’ we must look to what we want to create in terms of the direction of the mission, the purpose of our actions and the desired future, rather than simply looking at the problems. When approaching issues with an enabling mindset, there are usually more resources than expected, less hindrances than expected and more room for actions (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). Moreover, as Vickers notes, the importance of values through which we see the others is clear (see Williams, 2005; Ison, 2005): our humanity hinges on our capacity to respond and to do so aptly, by creating appreciative systems for human society. In the context of public policy issues, the enabling mindset can be recognised by changing problem-focused definitions (describing poor development and its serious ramifications) into workable future targets (what we want to see happening and what the enablers of that development) are, while, at the same time, changing our passive view of the world into one of active action. It is important then not just to look at public policies as ways to repair a problem but rather as ways to co-create new and relevant solutions.

The aforementioned meta-skills were subjected to empirical testing in 2021 when 22 high-ranking Finnish civil servants were interviewed (see, Exhibit 2).

EXHIBIT 2. *Empirical research about public leadership meta-skills in Finland.*

To understand how public leadership meta-skills fit into the ways in which public sector leaders themselves make sense of their work, role and every-day endeavours, a series of interviews were conducted in Spring 2021. We interviewed 22 high ranking civil service leaders working in the central government in Finland.

All of the interviewees had held civil service careers spanning several decades, mainly in leadership positions and all had held positions in different branches of government. At the time of the interviews – Winter 2020 and Spring 2021 – they all had ministerial leadership positions or were leading central government agencies. 12 of the interviewees were men, 10 women. Seven of them were, or had during their recent career, held the position of Secretary-of-State or Under-Secretary-of-State. In general, most of the interviewees were Director Generals representing all 12 government ministries⁹ of Finland. Three interviewees were Director generals of central government agencies, and one represented another central government institution. To contextualise the Finnish case, we should note that, on the one hand, the Finnish Government refers to the body which convenes for the general governing of the country, consisting of the Prime Minister and other ministers, while on the other, it is also the decision-making body for governmental and administrative matters consisting of the Government plenary session and twelve ministries. For Finland it is typical to have a multi-party government for a maximum of four years at a time. Each ministry is responsible for the preparation of matters within its mandate and for the proper functioning of administration. They also guide the performance of around 40 specialised government agencies. Altogether, the Finnish central government has around 74 000 employees, of whom roughly 6000 work in the twelve ministries. The number of top civil service leaders is around 150-160 in total.

Public administration leadership culture and public administration structures in Finland have traditionally been based on Neo-Weberian State-type arrangements in which authority is exercised through a disciplined hierarchy of impartial officials although traces of New Public Management with an emphasis on market-type mechanisms, performance targets, outsourcing and New Public Governance with an emphasis on the government's ability and willingness to work and govern across agencies are also visible in the Finnish Governmental tradition. From the perspective of public sector leadership development, the Finnish model can be labelled as a

⁹ Prime minister's office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Environment.

combination of egalitarian management model and an elitist one. Over the years, Finland has been among the ‘best in class’ in terms of the other Nordic countries in the OECD and EU comparisons in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration and its functions (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020).

5.4 Public leaders’ narratives about leadership meta-skills

5.4.1 Research logic

The semi-structured theme interviews of top civil service leaders were conducted as virtual, recorded interviews lasting from 45 to 60 minutes between December 2020 and June 2021. The interviews were a phenomenological and hermeneutical effort to understand public sector leadership and the enablers of success in public sector functions as well as an attempt to bring some new understanding to the multidisciplinary nature of public sector leadership. The main aim of the interviews was to put to the test the hypothetic concept of public sector leadership meta-skills as exercised by highly experienced public sector leaders who, due to the nature of their work duties, have a good vantage point across the whole gamut of the government’s functions. Thematic clustering of the material gathered from the informants led to a content analysis (Puusa, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006) bringing up first how the informants interpret the concept and practice of public sector leadership meta-skills (Pessoa et al., 2019) and secondly the resemblances and regularities in the whole sample of interviews of these experienced Finnish public sector leaders.

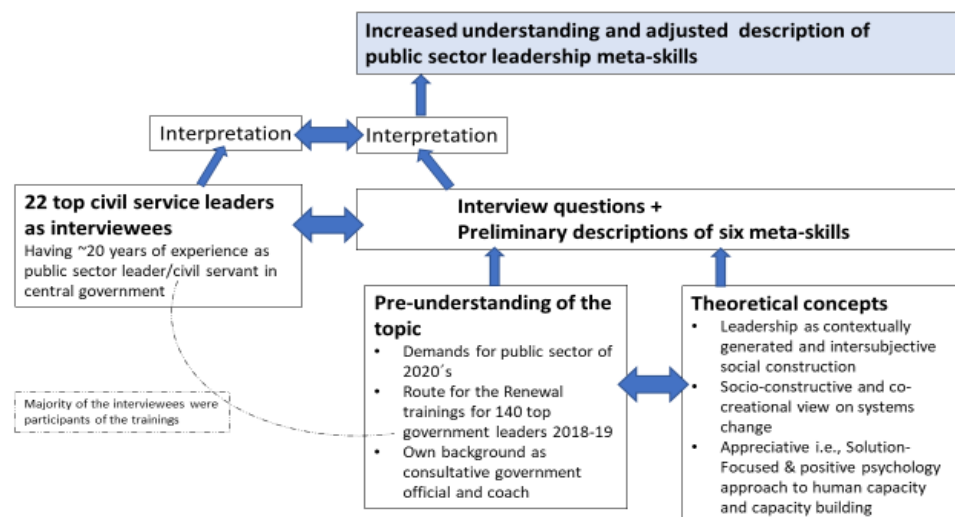


Figure 5.2. Empirical research logic.

A standard interview structure was sent to every interviewee beforehand to enable them to familiarise themselves with the theme in advance. The interview structure included a general definition of meta-skills, a hypothetical assumption of the impact of meta-skills in public leadership, i.e., improving the capacity for renewal of the public sector and broadening the scope of policy choices, descriptions of the six meta-skills assumed important based on our pre-understanding of the issue, and the following questions:

- 1. What do you think of these six meta-skills? How important do they seem to you in your own work? Does possessing them help or does lacking them complicate your work?*
- 2. How do these meta-skills apply to you as a leader: How and where have they developed, or have you consciously developed them?*
- 3. Do you consider it important that these meta-skills be developed more widely across government / public administration? If so, by what kind measures?*
- 4. What else do you wish to say?*

The interviews were conducted on a confidentiality basis to support the authenticity of the material. The confidentiality issue was important given the high rank of the interviewees and the obvious fact that a limited number of people hold such high-ranking positions within the Finnish government structure thus making it rather easy to identify the people concerned potentially impacting their proclivity to speak freely etc. To undertake a thematic clustering of the interview material, all the interviews were transcribed. The material gathered was used to identify answers to the questions of whether these experienced public sector leaders find the concept of meta-skills relevant and understandable, how they react to the list of six meta-skills, would they group, define or verbalise them in another way or do they see some meta-skills as being more relevant to them than others, how do they see the relationships between different meta-skills, what kinds of definitions and/or examples do they associate with each of the six meta-skills, what has the use of (assuming they were identified) these meta-skills brought to their everyday leadership and central government work, can, in their experience, meta-skills help the public sector to undergo renewal and broaden of scope of policy choices, how do they see the development of meta-skills in their own career and how do they rate the level of the six meta-skills in the public sector in general, do they consider developing meta-skills to be important in public administration and if so, through what kinds of measures and finally, what else do they want to say about the issue?

The interviews were conducted during a particularly difficult period given the ongoing global Covid-19 crisis and an extensive period of remote work in government functions. These special circumstances were however reflected in the interviews to only a small extent since the interviewees were all long-term civil service leaders with experience from different government/cabinet periods. Moreover, the shift to remote work had, due to the country's state of technical

readiness, been relatively smooth compared to that of many other countries. The interviews coincided with the mid-term period of the cabinet's existence which enabled the task of gathering the latest insights of the government level leadership quite fruitful.

5.4.2 The value of putting emphasis on leadership meta-skills

The first surprise emerging from the interviews was how unanimously the interviewed leaders agreed with the idea of the existence and importance of leadership meta-skills. Some of the interviewees critically questioned whether all six meta-skills were on the same level or whether some are more personal or are even meta-skills of meta-meta-skills? Others noted that these are not the definitions they themselves would have given, but despite that these six meta-skills did make sense to them. A solid majority of the interviewees agreed with the idea and list of six public leadership meta-skills and several described them as reflecting extremely well the important features of successful public sector leadership.

Some interviewees echoed traces of personality and feature theories behind their perception on leadership, but most detected by themselves that leadership meta-skills refer to dynamic and processual leadership capabilities that appear in interaction. All the interviewees agreed that unlike in most private sector companies, public sector leadership is about succeeding together over organisational and institutional fences. There was a unanimous understanding of the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation over organisational and thematic borders both to make better use of the capacity of the civil service *cadre* and to achieve policy formations and decisions more in line with citizen and societal needs. Dialogical stance was the most familiar of the six meta-skills to these Finnish leaders. It was understood merely as conducting discussions with different stakeholders. Dialogue in a deeper sense – as deep listening and co-creation – appeared less in the interviewees answers but was however recognised by a few of them. *“This is something machines can’t do and will therefore be the most essential leadership skill in the future”*, noted a Director General with around 40 years of experience in both ministerial and government agency leadership. *“Leadership that is not based on dialogue is just a hippo – highly paid people’s opinion”*, continued a Secretary of State with a working-life-spanning ministerial leadership career.

The importance of learning to learn both in leadership positions and in public sector organisations more generally was also widely recognised by the interviewees as was the role of the leader to show the way forward in terms of that development. A Secretary of State put the importance of the learning attitude in a nutshell by saying that

“...without learning to learn not a single organisation can respond to the issues it should be dealing with. It is hard to see how an organisation not constantly learning could be more than mediocre. Leaders’ meta-skills are at the same time meta-skills of the whole

organisation. We should put much more weight on them in selection.”

An enabling mindset was the most difficult meta-skill to grasp for the interviewees. Deep understanding of this meta-skill was portrayed in the answers of those few who had received formal training in terms of coaching or Solution-Focused practice. Some leaders however portrayed an intuitive understanding of the enabling stance. Most associated the enabling mindset with strengths-based leadership that had been part of the “Renewing Public Sector - Enabling Leadership” training programmes and told us that the paradigm shift to spotting and using strengths had permanently changed their approach to leadership. The enabling mindset notion had also brought with it remarkable effects in organisational culture, as described by a Director General with ministerial affiliation and around 15 years of experience from both government agency and ministerial organisations:

“The internal culture of our ministry starts with people’s strengths. And they are recognised and encouraged. This is reflected in work motivation, flexibility and group dynamics. Colleagues appreciate other people’s strengths and build on them. It is impactful and we have it as a culture. We do not talk much about it, but it is part of our organisation. It enables us to create new things and frees up action. Work engagement and energy comes from it. Sometimes there are huge and sometimes smaller issues to deal with, but ownership is created for both. It also comes up in networks, at the national level or in networks of like-minded countries”.

Some of the interviewees had undertaken profound changes in their organisations based on the idea of enabling. For example, the change of the former internal administrative services to enabling services. Thinking skills was the meta-skill that divided the interviewees most. It was either named “*the best*”, “*the most important*” or the most unfamiliar of all meta-skills.

“Without intellectual curiosity nothing is achieved except leading the old in an outdated way”,

summarised one Secretary of State with over 30 years of leadership experience from several government branches. An Under-Secretary of State with over 30 years of leadership experience from different government branches emphasised that the

“Societal relevance of organisations that can’t think and co-create together disappears”.

Reaching out to practice provoked a somewhat more scattered response, although all the interviewees recognised the problem between strategy and practice and the difficulty of maintaining a dynamic relationship between them. One Director-General with ministerial affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience described the process of reaching out to practice in the following way:

“Public administration leaders need to make at least three levels of reflection on how to put a policy into practice and how to communicate it. First is the political framework, the opportunities, the constraints, the institutions, how to get it accepted there. For many things there is also some kind of procedure in legislation, but when we talk about an experiment or any other new model of policymaking or cooperation, we must think how to adapt it to that political reality. And secondly, you must think about how it will be understood in there in your own civil servant silo and thirdly how it will be co-created with other branches of government and society. All these pieces should still fit together so that they do not lead in different directions. This all comes back to systems thinking and to the fact that, if you don’t get politicians to see or believe or take an interest to it, it just doesn’t happen. But this is how ecosystems are built”.

A Secretary of State with over 30 years of leadership experience from several government branches reminded us of the long timespan of change making:

“Many are looking for profound and visible changes without understanding that a sustainable change is achieved by small steps and in a systemic manner. Structural changes can of course be implemented overnight, but the behavioural change of actors which in private companies take months, takes years in the public sector. And then cultural change that is said to take 3-5 years, even 7, in the private sector, takes much more time again in the public sector. You must understand that if you make a structural change in order to be quick, it leads to conscious efforts of leading the behavioural change for months and the cultural change for the coming years. And you must be constant in doing it, otherwise the organisation pulls back into the old ways”.

The Table 5.1 at the end of this chapter summarises how the interviewees saw the various enablers and hindrances in respect of nurturing and developing meta-skills in government leadership and what kinds of amendments they made to the model. One of the motivations for carrying out the interviews was to find out how much public sector leaders use meta-skills and in what kinds of circumstances. According to the interviews conducted, almost all interviewed leaders used meta-skills both in internal leadership (own organisation) and in leading their government branches (performance management of governance sectors) as well as in cross-sectoral cooperation between public sector branches, other sectors, and society more generally. Only three of the 22 interviewees made use of meta-skills mainly internally and within their own branch of government while one interviewee was only using meta-skills internally. Broad use of leadership meta-skills is portrayed in taking a role as an enabling

co-ordinator or initiator and the one who actively brings different stakeholders together. Good experiences of broad cross-sectoral policy preparation had been gathered for example in preparing nation-wide strategies for digitalisation, comprehensive security, health security and informal ecosystem forums and municipal dialogues.

The motivations behind restricting the use of meta-skills to one's own department or organisation were expressed in terms of perceptual experiences of discouragement within the organisation to cross-sectoral working, looking at official duties from a broader perspective and investing time and effort into renewing the organisation's ways of working. Those who reported strong notions of this kind in terms of a discouraging organisational culture had, interestingly, developed different responses to it. One reported simply accepting the situation and silently envying colleagues working for other government organisations where the socio-cultural possibilities for systems thinking and action were better. Another had adopted a strategy of outspokenness, publicly raising questioning of the choices made and other possibilities available despite lame response from the surrounding organisation. The third's strategy had been to actively seek inspiration and support from peers from other organisations to "get themselves going" and change the culture of their own organisation, too. All three raised the importance of joint structures such as training, co-creation labs and the increased use of cross-sectoral policy planning to encourage all government organisations to adopt ways of working that better respond to the needs of the 2020s and 2030s.

Considering the hierarchical composition of government organisations, it was no surprise that the interviewees that held positions at the Secretary of State or Under-Secretary of State levels had the best opportunities to set the pace for the renewal of working methods and open-minded organisational culture even though they also facing most pressure from the political leadership.

It is also noteworthy that citizen or service users were not really mentioned during the interviews focusing on leadership meta-skills with top-level civil servant leaders whose role is to concentrate on strategic policy issues at the state level, i.e., quite far from the experiential world of a single citizen or public service user. Clearly, in terms of timespan, policy planning reaches out far into the future from the perspective of immediate government service experiences. Nevertheless, all public policies have a direct effect on individual citizens and different groups in society as well as on the operating conditions of private companies. As such, it is crucial to keep the ordinary citizen, the multiplicity of life situations and the various players in mind when sketching policy guidelines and contents. Harnessing meta-skills serves as a vehicle to place oneself in someone else's position while keeping at least an imaginary citizen and a variety of viewpoints in mind while engaging in the ongoing task of strategic policy work. In addition, it is also important to poke holes in decision-makers bubbles by consciously arranging occasional opportunities for direct dialogue with other sectors of society, the citizen and possible service users. Direct encountering at its best widens all the

participants' views of the world and of its possible futures, as well as illuminating the actual issues others have to deal with. This kind of cross-border encounter rarely succeeds without good meta-skills. Since 'citizens' or 'service users' are generally unwieldy and often amorphous groups to approach from the policy planning side, the best examples provided by the interviewees talked about the thorough segmentation of affected parties in relation to the policy issues at hand and of keeping regular contact with actors in both the third and private sectors within the respective policy fields.

5.4.3 Bureaucratic culture and rigid organisational structures

This sample of top-level civil servant interviews suggested that the leadership conditions restricting even the top leader's opportunities for human-centred leadership and elevating horizontal accountability reside, on the one hand, in statutory blindness residing in public sector organisational cultures and on the other in the tense relationship between the political level and civil service leaders. Dealing successfully with both pressures seems to be the key to public sector leadership's ability to generate renewal and broaden the scope of human-centred policy choices.

The interviewees talked about many incidents where boundary stretching and finding a way through to the established interpretations of the legal framework had looked like an impossible journey, but persistence in asking for the backgrounds to legal conclusions had paid off. Experienced leaders ensured that future-oriented far-sightedness is required in order to engage in constructive questioning of the prevailing legalism across the sector and in holding the societal target in mind at the crossroads of decision-making. It is important to note here that asking for example two regional authorities to pool their expertise in order to work together in a complex permit granting process (outside their usual functional area) does not require breaking laws, but merely understanding that the functions of an authority are meant to ease, not inhibit, the functioning of society. Far too often, the authorities are beholden to their own administrative strictures or to/for other authorities and the main target of the work imperceptibly shifts, for example, to avoiding complaints from the administrative court rather than fulfilling a constructive role in society. Moreover, the most enlightened representatives of the courts now note that the role of the civil servant has changed. A good civil servant and civil service leader is proactive, flexible and takes the initiative within the framework of current laws and regulations.

According to the interviews this shift is ongoing but needs upholding and consistency of application across public sector organisations. Some interviewees noted that proceeding with opportunities for purpose-oriented work within the public sector is crucial for the public sector's ability to attract skilful leaders and a skilled workforce. There was also a common notion that the legalistic framework surrounding public sector organisations is sometimes used as an excuse for not acting or to justify short-term political wins or other benefits. When describing the relationship between political

level and civil service leadership which in practice co-lead central government ministries, the findings of the interviewees were divided into two minor narratives and one dominant one. The first minor narrative highlighted the civil service leaders' role in serving the changing political leadership to the best of its abilities. That was reflected, for example, in statements like the following by an interviewed Director General with ministerial affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience

"[...] sometimes our role is to help the minister to make really stupid decisions – in cases where they insist".

In contrast, the second minor narrative highlighted the balancing role played by civil servants. Historically, before Finland gained its independence, the civil servant's opportunity to prolong decisions and hinder processes served the country well while it has also been observed that there may be need for them to play this role again were authoritarian and populist political tendencies to gain a foothold on the political scene. The dominant narrative, however, settled on a point somewhere in between these views. All interviewees nevertheless agreed that relationships with the political level are often tense and confusing.

In principle, the two-pronged leadership of the government is an asset. It unites the long experience and means of societal change-making of the civil servants with the political goals of the electorate chosen in the normal democratic manner. For this combination to be successful, 'appreciation of the other' is required from both sides. Problems habitually emerge around the lack of recognition of the importance of this leadership alliance and the concomitant lack of appreciation and dialogue this carries. Public policy planning and implementation need careful elaboration and where preparations are made only in political or in civil services siloes this often results in problems and misunderstandings. Haste, a lack of dialogue, proceeding only on an ideological bases without a reality check and pre-set tight commitments were widely identified as characteristic of many of the present-day policy processes initiated by political leaders. On the other hand, the interviewees admitted that the ability to provide opportunities to open up alternative ways forward had not always been characteristic of the civil service side either.

Dysfunctional relationships between political and civil service leaders are also reflected in the uneven organisational cultures of the various ministries. According to the interviewees, some of ministries are very reluctant to draw up even long-term strategic guidelines without political involvement. Since political power is often more interested in short (cabinet time) than long-term objectives while most of the issues ministries take care of never appear on political agendas, some ministries can be said to function as partly directionless in terms of their long view. The decision-making opportunity in different issues is distributed to single civil servants often lacking a view and/or experience of anything other than a narrow, specialised field. That severely undermines opportunities for human-centred and holistic policy and decision-making and the ability to address societal issues in

general. In other ministries, the preparation of public policies and policy implementation are however led more in the spirit of consciously involving all the relevant stakeholders in cooperation. The interviewees highlighted here the relevance and impact-driven approach to forming meaningful preparatory processes, instead of narrow expert thinking and/or representative committees easily freezing thinking and action with a vested interest to preserve the status quo.

The relationship between political and civil service leadership is a characteristic feature of government ministries, but traditionally much less so of government agencies. Instead, in recent decades the role of government agencies in Finland has been to act as independent authorities providing expert knowledge within specialised fields while serving people and businesses in licencing, registration, or approval matters. The interviews show however that there have been attempts to impose a more politicised approach to those matters dealt with by government agencies thus 'nudging' decision-making in a more politicised direction. The coming years will show whether these developments were intensified because of the unusual circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, because of tendencies within certain political parties or whether this simply reflects a more general trend in terms of a politicising culture.

5.4.4 Jumping over restrictive organisational 'hurdles'

Maintaining a focus on 'the big picture' was mentioned by the interviewees as the primary success strategy in terms of serving society and societal development from a human-centred perspective. It is however important to note that 'the big picture' is not something a successful leader only internalises but rather they communicate it regularly within their own organisation and with outsiders and are eager to discuss it in a dialogical manner with various people. These every-day leadership actions both increase the quality of leadership and decision making and serve also as fertile ground for cultural change in terms of pondering issues, decisions, and guidelines from multiple perspectives. One part of this 'big picture' is a leader's ability to swap 'hats' between the strategic and operational levels. Losing sight of the operational reality easily leads to decisions stemming from different realities from those who are affected most by the decisions or those in roles who must implement them. According to the interviewees, it takes a conscious effort to maintain this link to the operational side of things, but it always pays to do so, since without an appreciation of the reality 'on the ground' dialogue easily dies. Four of the interviewees pointed out that the big picture should also include, far more so than it currently does, an appreciation of the international and global scenery. According to their findings both internal and cross-sectoral discussions and situational pictures tend to focus on domestic affairs, often forgetting the broader international circumstances affecting Finland as with any other country.

Another emergent success factor mentioned by several interviewees was the need to better understand the role of civil society. Civil society refers both to the organised third sector and to self-

organising free citizen activism utilising the Internet, social media and information openness, primarily seeking concrete collaboration for self-directed immediate goals (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2018). Working together with civil society creates a new kind of challenge and opportunity for the government. For public sector leadership it means increased openness and elevated readiness to open the background to decision making. Although it is hard, at the ministerial level, to regularly hold discussions directly with the citizenry, maintaining an enabling mindset in terms of their indirect interventions with the citizenry is an important part of succeeding in these challenging tasks. This can mean, for example, encouraging test beds, sandboxes, and voluntary codes, i.e., self-regulation, without legislation, allowing for greater flexibility in different geographical areas and, in general, establishing legitimacy for the creation of more human-centred services while harnessing the political will for change. At the city and/or municipal level, the opportunities to create space for local bottom-up initiatives and decision-making may be even wider.

A third success factor broadly emerging from the interviews was the importance of forging a good working relationship with the mainstream and social media. To keep the big picture in focus while supporting transparency, any public sector leader in the 2020s has to be active, or at least reachable, by media and in general also on social media. Those interviewees with long experience in government leadership positions however had serious doubts about whether it was possible to uphold fruitful relationships with either. Both media spheres have gradually begun to resemble each other and are increasingly stamped by hyperbole and polarisation. On occasion this leads to the demonising of individuals and organised campaigns of attack stemming from various motivations, from personal and political motives to intentional attempts to cause instability in society. So, one of the success factors in terms of human-centred leadership is – counterintuitively – keeping media and social media in particular in their place and not letting them distort the views and trust of the citizenry, or society more generally. In critical situations leaders should then ask for professional help with communications.

Since the Solution-Focused approach provides an important cornerstone for the concept of leadership meta-skills it was interesting to track Solution-Focused signs of thinking and behaviour in the descriptions the interviewees provided of their every-day work as public sector leaders. A remarkable finding here was that more than half of the interviewees featured Solution-Focused thinking and behaviour in their answers, although only 1-2 have received any formal training in the Solution-Focus approach. This finding implies that decades of experience in demanding leadership positions in public sector working environments, characterised by multi-stakeholder involvement, gradually guides successful leadership practice towards Solution-Focused thinking and behaviour. ‘Solution-Focused’ is a wording sometimes appearing in the vocabulary of Finnish central government. It is often however used erroneously to mean equal to provide a ready-made solution to someone else’s (i.e., externalised) problem. The interviewees did not necessarily use the word but rather,

expressed descriptions of Solution-Focused co-created solution formation, in their daily work as public sector organisation leaders. In so doing, they demonstrated the power one leader can have in stretching the boundaries of tradition and in finding new ways forward. In complex situations any leader can assume that agency and use it to tackle the co-creation challenge with the resources they have and with the meta-skills they already possess.

As a general observation, the interviews conducted reinforced the notion that the six meta-skills examined form a whole where one meta-skill is difficult to detach or elevate above the others. It is, for example, essential that policy implementation is practiced in such a way that the interaction between strategic decision-making and operational activities remains open and two-way, i.e., dialogical and that the promotion of learning and thinking skills in the day-to-day running of an organisation takes place in an enabling rather than in criticising or discouraging spirit. Faithfully to their Solutions-Focused roots, the six meta-skills discussed in this chapter help build the human-centred change that activates both the known and previously unrevealed knowledge and capabilities already residing in people, builds rapport and motivation in relation to the target before bringing in research or other external knowledge or boundary conditions created by legislation, including financial resources or anything else. In so doing, it facilitates the human capacity and collective intention vital for the making of good decisions (Searle, 2010). The six meta-skills together create a platform to transform the hard codes of organisational culture and ways of working, i.e., social norms, budgeting, type and extent of the data and information used in sense-making and decision-making. Meta-skills shift the focus of the common tasks to the future and what is wanted instead of focusing on how have things have been done thus far. Legitimacy is built socially, and change happens by changing the interaction process. Practising meta-skills then helps public sector leaders to ask better questions.

5.4.5 Opportunities for public management development?

The up-to-date empirical research on the role of meta-skills in the work of Finnish high-ranking public-sector leaders presented in the previous sub-chapter provides a promising result in terms of the importance of possessing and harnessing meta-skills in public sector leadership to achieve more holistic and human-centred governance.

The interviews conducted gave a government-wide picture of meta-skills as part of the self-understanding and agency of those civil service leaders responsible for the betterment of society at the ministerial and partly also other central government level. More empirical research is, however, needed to grasp the role of meta-skills in the leadership of other public sector spheres i.e., other kinds of leadership positions and within central government and the public-sector more generally, especially at the regional and municipal administration levels. Staff and citizen views of the meta-skilfulness of the leadership would also be interesting to gauge more fully. The extension of the interview pool to include the administrations of other countries would provide the necessary clarification in terms of our

understanding of the role of leadership meta-skills in other societies and cultures.

One finding that does however require further research according to the Finnish answers is the question of whether the government ministries, which together form the government in an administrative sense, can be successfully understood within a conceptual framework and with the theoretical tools of organisational research. The interviewees confirmed the perception that despite their similar status and role in government composition the ministries that form the central government of Finland are a collection of very different organisations with utterly different organisational cultures and ways of working. There are remarkable differences between the ministries in terms of their organisational and operational cultures, as well as in their ways of working with politicians, administration, citizen, and their own field of substance. The construction of the government's central bodies differs to some extent from country to country – even when considering only those countries ruled in a democratic manner – as noted in Chapter 2. The Government of Finland represents a government body consisting of independent ministries. So, despite being a decision-making entity and despite knowing how important cross-sectoral governance is, can the government in the broad sense be called an organisation and does it function as such?

Looking at the most recent organisational scholarly research, the government entity comprising of ministries taking care of their sectoral fields and government central agencies working within those fields, could be defined as a “nine-headed” *hybrid organisation* as in the ancient legend of the Hydra (Johansson & Vakkuri, 2017). It could also be termed a *bi-modal organisation* which successfully balances a certain amount of organisation with short-term actions of *autopoiesis* and fluid social networks (Smith & Aharicz, 2013). It is also possible to look at it as ubiquitous in contemporary governance arrangements provoking Institutional Collective Action dilemmas crossing jurisdictions and institutional contexts (Feiock, 2013).

One possibility is to call it a *nested organisation* reminding us of a Russian doll (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2017). From the systems change perspective, Colding and Barthel (2019) bring up the importance of looking at the actual practices to achieve good results in a nested organisation and understanding the critical link between complex and dynamic ecosystems, adaptive management practices and institutions. The concept of dynamic fractal organisations also provides one possible way to look at the government entity. But taking the ability to integrate and synthesise tacit and explicit knowledge and create *phronesis* along the way as the signifiers of a fractal organisation (Nonaka et al., 2014), it would be an exaggeration to say that governments are fractal organisations. From the point of view of human-centred leadership that would however make for a lucrative goal. When the need for horizontal accountability and better capacities to look at policy issues from the perspective of the citizen or end user are widely recognised – as is the case in Finland – there have been some attempts in recent years to create co-ordinating horizontal

structures between ministries. Most of the interviewees however acknowledged that this process of harmonisation has begun at the wrong end, i.e., through attempts to unify procedures in financial, personnel and technical matters. Choosing that route has created increased frustration when the actual shortcoming is in the fuzzy and uncoordinated leadership model with unclear relationships between political level and civil service leaders and low incentives for cross-sectoral cooperation. In multi-party government, the political leaders tend to experience low incentives for cooperation since there is a tendency for ministers to rival each other in terms of political visibility or quick social-media wins in matters that would demand the coordinated cooperation of several ministries to find new solutions to complex problems. In some cases, the difficulties relating to horizontal accountability can be exacerbated by civil service leader's ingrained sectoral views, so human-centred horizontal policy making does not happen without investing in the new mindset recognising the need for co-creation both within the political and civil service leaderships. Succeeding in precipitating a paradigm shift from the traditional subdivided ways of thinking and functioning towards human-centredness is not a technical endeavour but something that needs leadership.

An interesting question emerges here in relation to how much the need to renew the administration and public leadership appears on political agendas, although government ministers are, in principle, also leading the ministries as organisations during their periods in cabinet. In practice, Secretaries of State usually fulfil that role, while the development of administration and governance practices seldom finds its way onto the party-political agenda. This seems to be one reason for the persistence of the status quo in terms of the way in which the government administration is organised. Interviewees from a few ministries report on several remarkable developments, including the restructuring of ways of working and investing in leadership development after acquiring ministerial permission to elevate those issues onto the work agenda.

In summary, there is a clear need for the civil service and political leaderships to keep each other in a close embrace. This generates better quality administration and policy preparation for the political leaders and enables civil service leaders to lead their organisations and networks to be more in line with the demands of the 2020s. Extended efforts to promote good quality dialogue and mutual appreciation in the spirit of co-creation are however required to succeed in this goal.

5.5. Support structures for cross-sectoral leadership

Achieving better public policy outcomes and producing better services in a complex world is not an easy task to fulfil. As discussed above, it is not only the societies that are complex, but also the governments, while their resilience emerges from the interaction between actors (Ungar, 2021). This interaction cannot be planned, but it can be exercised and cultivated (Lowe & Plimmer, 2019; Nederhand, 2019; Stacey, 2010).

Leadership is about purposeful action and making room for the personal and organisational renewal.

According to the interviews, interaction between the different parts of the system has increased and it is not generally understood that working in silos does not lead to a result where the different parties are satisfied. Judging from this, we can take it that governance is moving in a positive direction and that understanding of the 'big picture' has significantly increased. Using the classification of Searle (Searle, 2010; see also Chapter 2) we can say that there is a wide *collective recognition* of the need to work together towards common goals. The Finnish civil services leaders interviewed here highlighted various examples where they have been engaged in patching the dysfunctionalities of siloed and formal procedures by initiating new kinds of discussion forums, preliminary preparation and ecosystem building across the boundaries between government and other sectors of society.

For this development to be strengthened, public leaders need at least two things: encouragement, incentives and supporting structures for cross-sectoral co-operation and the evolution of meta-skills to ensure that the inevitably colliding viewpoints and complex decisions are made in circumstances that enable fruitful interaction and increase the opportunities to find new solutions.

Asking for the creation of structures to support the cross-sectoral work promoting human-centredness is not an easy task within the public sector where good intentions can be derailed through over-regulation or imposition. A situation where either the administrative structure or legislation does not encourage cross-sectoral policy preparation is therefore now unviable. According to the interviews, coordinated and co-created policy-formation in Finnish central government has occasionally been better during some governmental periods due to the existence of particularly skilful Secretaries of State at the Prime Minister's office interested in promoting solutions supporting co-leadership. The government capacity for leadership and co-ordination should not, though, rely on the skills, capabilities, and interests of one person. Political positions do not necessarily attract people with leadership and working life experience. According to the interviewees, strengthening the dialogue and real co-ordination first on the highest strategic level between the ministries with the lead of Prime minister's office, would be an important step to further support this process. Also highlighting the principle of broad-based policy preparation and favouring it in practice (not only on paper) would give the required signal for cultural change.

Without any supporting structures it happens easily that the so-called secondary gains (Egmond, 2003) run over understanding and intentions to use the possibility one has for changing the traditional script and choosing a more novel way of action. Secondary gains here refer to psychological phenomena in terms of pondering the pros and cons of different means of action and not making decisions with the end user in mind but deciding in favour of traditional part-optimising ways of working because it is easier, more familiar, less

time-consuming, and socially simpler, thus delivering short-term gains to the decision-maker. Hämäläinen et al. refer to the same kinds of challenges in their work on systems intelligence (Hämäläinen et al, 2014).

From the viewpoint of sociocultural learning, the least effective way of inducing change is demanding or ordering somebody to do something. Setting new sociocultural norms by means of inclusive, engaging working methods which allow for variety and adaption and trusting people's abilities are far more effective in changing working practices (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020).

The work of central government is far from characteristics of uniform or production type of work (Johansson & Vakkuri, 2020). Rather, governance is more like craft work which takes place in often quite discrete environments built around various complicated and complex societal issues. As such, it is hard to govern by means of strictly uniform structures. This observation was again confirmed by the interviewees. Investing in leadership meta-skills provides a platform for the promotion of cross-sectoral human-centred leadership within government bodies. It is an investment in shifting the policy planning of complex and intertwined issues from a top-down and performance-based focus to a co-creation and context based one.

Leadership meta-skills are human support structures in taking organisations and networks into dynamic new spaces, upholding pockets of creativity and renewal, often are called *adaptive spaces* (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) or *ba*, where context-based mutual learning happens (Nonaka et al, 2016). The quality of human action is decisive in people's willingness to engage in communities and their willingness to provide their best knowledge and abilities for common use – also in challenging situations of boundary crossing – both in terms of government work and in any other professional surroundings (Törmänen et al., 2021; Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020; Scalzo & Fariñas, 2019). This type of co-creation increases opportunities to achieve *phronesis*, the classical Aristotelian notion of mature knowledge creation and decision-making stemming from the aspiration to make human life better (Tynjälä, 2020; Kristjansson et al. ,2021). In terms of cross-sectoral leadership all agents compose together the circumstances for what is possible and what is not for each other. Therefore, it is important that meta-skills are promoted widely among leadership groups.

5.6 Synthesis – public leadership meta-skills provide a passage to navigate complex leadership contexts

Leadership meta-skills are sensemaking and bridgebuilding tools that seek common ground despite the existence of different perspectives. They widen the opportunities for different viewpoints to be understood on a deeper level, promote positive dialogue widening flexible mindsets, breaking down biased attitudes and the space between polarities. Meta-skilled bridgebuilding requires abandoning a monopoly of truth and taking the initiative with an outlook that some

researchers refer to as ‘intellectual humility’, i.e., understanding that one’s own beliefs might be wrong or only partially true (e.g., Leary et al., 2017). Meta-skilled bridgebuilding is far from grandiose in terms of leadership moves, but merely reflects the idea that it is the small details of communication that make the difference and turn the task into a common endeavour.

The meta-skills presented, discussed, and empirically analysed in this chapter contribute to the emergence of a future-oriented, dynamic, and opportunity-taking organisational and leadership culture. Achieving real-life change is a challenge for most leaders, whether they are piloting organisational renewal, implementing public policy, or tackling any other major challenge. In all cases, co-creation, harnessing the potential of the different parts of the system towards a common goal smooths the way. It is not created by seeking uniformity but by creating the conditions for success for different people and different stakeholders.

It is important to note that human-centeredness involves both internal and external leadership, the first focusing on fostering and nurturing a human-centred leadership style within one’s own organisation as well as the network of organisations forming the public sector while the second leads human-centred public policy work involving the end-user and citizen perspective. Both leadership tasks are hard to succeed in without good meta-skills promoting productive co-creation in the twists and turns of our complex world.

The empirical case from Finland presented in this chapter sheds light on how experienced senior public sector leaders themselves interpret these meta-skills, how they define the importance of meta-skills in building human-centred, strengths-based and flourishing organisations, constituting joint sensemaking and collaboration cutting across organisational boundaries and compartmentalised sectors within the public administration. The support structures for and hinderances to the harnessing of meta-skills were also addressed in the context of cross-sectoral public organising and leadership.

The process of working together with many stakeholders and different people cannot be planned, but leadership meta-skills help to guide progress agilely in the midst of action. This way of managing renders organisations and networks much more resilient during both sudden and predictable changes in their operating environments. It places everyone in the role of a responsible actor in relation to future goal attainment.

After getting acquainted with case studies on public service co-creation, it is easy to become lulled into the belief that co-creation is easy and happens on its own, when the right mix of stakeholders put in a room together and provided with marker pens and a flipchart. Bridgebuilding does not however come without skills, nor without risk, the possibility for disappointment or, ultimately, of failure. The prospect of success is increased by developing both leadership meta-skills and practical coaching, co-creation, and facilitation skills. More important than methods, however, is the mindset displayed in the context of leadership meta-skills which consists of an appreciative

perception on human capabilities and mutual trust-building. As described above, meta-skilfulness does not guarantee success in all situations, but it does gather the available resources to use and increase the likelihood of success. Succeeding with the promotion of co-creation also involves an understanding that change is always a process, not a one-time event. Harnessing leadership meta-skills builds success in fulfilling the ultimate task of the public sector: making life better. What the concept of meta-skills brings to leadership development will be discussed below, in chapter 7 (Reforming public leadership through learning).

Table 5.1. Public leadership meta-skills definitions by the Finnish top civil service leaders.

Enablers for nurturing and developing in government leadership	Hindrances for nurturing and developing in government leadership	Ideas and amendments
1. Learning to learn		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in different organizations (organized and unorganized rotation) • Out of the box -experiences, using all events at work as possibilities for learning • Positive curiosity and deep listening • Recruiting development potential to organizations, not experts of narrow fields • General interest in social issues nationally and globally (and not only the own field) • Involving oneself in international co-operation • Understanding that wisdom does not reside in own head, own office or in the board • Interest in people and human behaviour • Arranging and guarding possibilities to concentrate and go deeper in issues • Bringing the learning component to all processes • Peer-support and learning from others (training and informal) • Own ability to deepen into new issue quickly • Ability to scrutinize own emotions and perceptions • Courage to break the social pattern of hurry • Lifting up what we have learned already, where proceeded • Creating connections and networks for mutual learning also with institutions outside the own field 	<p>Time, place, and energy for learning in pressured work</p> <p>Lack of understanding of the importance of learning</p> <p>Trainings organized in classroom based and teacher-focused manner</p> <p>Attitudes and discouragement by colleagues and employees, who have not renewed their competences for years</p> <p>Rigid structures and hierarchy of the government bodies restricting learning and thinking</p> <p>Ossified perceptions of human development possibilities</p>	<p>Highlighting the importance of learning as every civil servant's duty</p> <p>Arranging brown bag lunches around different issues</p> <p>Using collaborative ICT-platforms for processing information together</p> <p>Regular "lessons learned" moments in the working community</p> <p>Providing possibilities to expand to previously unknown field for the personnel</p>
2. Systems approach		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing oneself and the actions of the own organization as part of the bigger scenery, taking helicopter perspective 	<p>Rigid and subdivided administrative structures</p> <p>Fragmented structure of the central government, lack of</p>	<p>Systems understanding is most powerfully learned through experience, harder</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements of the demanding policy formation work with strong contextual elements and many stakeholders • Good experiences of broad-based policy preparation • Increased understanding of phenomena-based approach within government • Defining “leadership of the whole” as the primary duty of all director generals • Understanding that citizen’s needs develop in continuation of time and personal lives, not working only here and now, but towards the future • Not “performing expertise” but helping the government to achieve its societal goals • Understanding that everything new is born on interfaces between different fields • Examples of strong interdependencies (good and bad) • Understanding that horizontal impacts are as important as vertical. • Developing organizational ability for agile and flexible way of working proactively • Acting as the initiator in bringing different stakeholders together • Opening channels of communication and discussion with the civil society and the private sector • Understanding that the essence of leadership is not portrayed in management systems and calculations, but in attuning t to developments in the world • Interdisciplinarity, also within the academic world • Investing time and energy in visioning and foresight • Turning attention to how I can personally increase trust, openness, and appreciation to different viewpoints • Investing in opening the reasons behind decisions, also in issues that are approached more emotionally than with factual reasoning in the society 	<p>joint goal setting and ability to form long-term joint goals</p> <p>The multiple functions of the public sector (from legislative to marked-based service providing)</p> <p>Academic fields and education keeping up siloed thinking and knowledge development</p> <p>Fear of making mistakes</p> <p>Tradition on performance-based management and trust in waterfall model of implementation</p> <p>Organizational defences based on emotional grounds</p> <p>Lack of genuine co-operative mindset between different government organizations</p> <p>Lack of supporting structures and incentives</p> <p>Tradition of narrowing leadership down to management processes</p> <p>Raising leadership and decision-making above the organization or the society</p> <p>Exaggerated administrative burden (for example documentation requirements) directing the leadership time and effort to irrelevant details</p> <p>Increased politization of decision-making</p>	<p>to learn as a theoretical concept</p>
<p>3. Dialogical stance</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience to listen and desire to understand • Discussing from the same level with everybody and meeting different opinions in a positive way • Going through the troubles to archive dialogue with those who do not think alike • Giving space to others and not presenting own ideas first • Informal culture of the Finnish administration • Long tradition of involving NGOs and companies in strategy tables • Investing time in answering letters from public 	<p>The non-dialogical government organizational culture only 20 years away</p> <p>Traditions and expectations of hierarchical all-knowing management</p> <p>Tradition of impropriety to discuss matters of another unit/ministry/organization</p> <p>Lack of actual skills, although understanding of the importance of dialogue is there</p>	<p>Making use of possibilities for coaching, development and feedback in getter better in involving personnel and other people</p> <p>Using digital platforms for having dialogue with remote units, stakeholders, and the civil society</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing appreciative leadership style • Showing own example is dialogical leadership and in breaking expectations of omniscient boss • Highlighting that all employees in different responsibilities have an important role in common success • Understanding that the dialogical way may seem slower, but it is quicker in the end due to better commitment, taking time for it • Making sure that all participate and take word in meetings • Investing in creating common target despite differences • Highlighting the importance of thorough discussion, not rushing to conclusions • Understanding that there no “pure knowledge” anywhere, also experts opinions differ according to (and within) the field. Dialogue is a prerequisite for knowledge creation and decision-making • Giving a model of deep listening in meetings and negotiations • Developing own skills to create <i>ba</i>-spaces • Learning to ask better questions and in a way that provokes curiosity and creativity • Learning conflict resolution skills • Being explicit in own behaviour so that other people feel that they can without fear express what they think • Understanding that listening and appreciating does not mean agreeing in someone’s opinions or interpretations 	<p>Old school leaders who take badly opinions differing from their own</p> <p>Misunderstanding that a decision-making process cannot be dialogical</p> <p>Populism and lack of dialogical tradition in the organizational intranet, media, social media, and politics</p> <p>Lots of development room to get rid of the deceptive illusion of efficiency of virtual meetings and make virtual meetings more dialogical</p>	<p>Learning coaching leadership style</p> <p>Learning from the discussive and appreciative culture of the international organizations</p> <p>Restoring the possibilities to dialogue after the period of virtual work during Covid-19 pandemic</p>
<p>4. Thinking-skills</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that there are several relevant angles of entry for any issue • Constructive questioning of the underlying assumptions in meetings etc. • Establishing a future exploring team in the organization • Harnessing foresight and future modelling • Using participative and multifaceted working methods in regular meetings • Using role-plays and gamification in getting new perspectives in committees • Organizing workshops alongside and as part of meeting-driven policy preparation processes • Banning mobile phones and laptops in some meetings and concentrating in interaction and co-thinking • Using opportunities to get involved in policy preparation processes outside a familiar field • Harnessing own ability of being fully present in various situations and connecting to different realities 	<p>Plethora of issues that should be thought thoroughly and time pressure is a problematic combination.</p> <p>Increasingly shortening time spans of policy preparation</p> <p>Political pressure and efforts to fit huge transformative challenges to one cabinet period</p> <p>Plethora of information and too little synthesised information using multiple type of knowledge</p> <p>Days consisting of “tunnels” of short meetings</p> <p>A cultural belief that advanced preparation of stances and statements is a good thing</p>	<p>Too much of leadership time is spent on routine duties of reading statements, signing papers etc. Substantial amount of that work should be replaced by using algorithms, which are better suited for that duty.</p> <p>Gathering newcomers’ bright ideas for challenging the present way of working</p> <p>Deteriorating thinking skills is a sign of decline of the level of civilization</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing time to think also for the others • Recognizing own biases, perceptions and basic assumption and being ready to treat them critically • Understanding that archiving wisdom is a process • Highlighting that a good decision is not a partial result achieved via rational reasoning, but something that connects to the context and entirety in a purposeful way • Bearing the silence after an unexpected thought and seeing the change in what is possible and what is not as a process • Bringing in mind that we all live in our own bubbles • Being able to change own mind and re-think bad decisions, thanking people for bringing in good new arguments • Purposeful recruiting of people with different backgrounds, different strengths, and different generations • Making board meetings a forum of dialogue • Forming outside reference groups of people with various backgrounds to challenge the own thinking and organization • Understanding that focusing only on the issues of the own sector is not enough 	<p>No actual tradition of joint critical review of common established beliefs</p> <p>Government silos have been free to cement their own beliefs for a long time, that affects also leadership thinking and preparedness</p> <p>Timidity to have real discussion, fear of someone feeling offended by open discussion</p> <p>Turning a blind eye to hard unsolved matters and hoping that somebody else takes the agency</p>	
<p>5. Reaching out to practice</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that it is impossible to lead from strategic ivory tower • Showing the big picture, future vision and strategic goals and making room for employees/people to find different ways to reach them • Be very clear if the aim is just to make a decision or also to implement it -unfortunately also decisions without any intentions to execution are made in the public sector • Creating different possible ways of implementation and engage people in the process • Spreading the ownership of the issue/project broad enough; asking “what this has to include to make it acceptable?” • Constant sorting out what is essential to get entangled in oneself and what is not • Standing behind the chosen path and ensuring conditions for the implementation • Assuring political and stakeholder support to the issue • Understanding what the every-day challenges in the field are • Taking along the operational side already in preparatory phase • Understanding that in citizen interface other priorities are important than on strategic level 	<p>Thinking that decisions implement themselves and leading strategy execution is not necessary (or part of own job description)</p> <p>Taking means for archiving something as a starting point instead the target</p> <p>Fragmentation and polarization of the political climate</p> <p>Shifting the responsibility to others/other organizations</p> <p>Producing list of things that can't be done or are not allowed to be done (due to a legislative frame)</p> <p>Concentrate in systematic visioning and alienating from everyday life</p> <p>Establishing executive boards without operative responsibilities</p> <p>Producing long, specific documentation without understanding the context of the implementation or the end user's perspective</p>	<p>In open systems even small flaws in putting things into practise, can cause huge problems compared to closed systems. In crises the ability to put things into practice in the society is the crucial ability</p> <p>Sharpening tools of project management in public sector</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembering that planning can be done, but you have to be ready to change the plans according to the context • The change process has to “breathe” throughout the way. It involves interjections, interim decisions, redirecting the process and encouragement. This is called stewardship, i.e. leadership • Giving up dreams of perfect solutions and settling with good enough • Peeping to both strategic and operation side, but to remember to come out of both regularly • Good understanding of internal and external networks as a tool of implementation and knowledge resource along the way • Understanding that structural changes are quick to implement, but behavioural and cultural changes require years and constant upholding of the chosen direction • Understanding the choosing the means and ways of implementation are a strong message of the actual objectives and form organizational culture • Remembering that people act rationally from their own point of view • having ability to summarize the essential for the end-user perspective 	<p>Micromanaging</p>	
6. Enabling mindset		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building faith in future and signalling hope even I hard situations • Keeping the ultimate target, better life for citizen, in mind • Shifting the focus from control, order, and prohibition to creating circumstances for people to make their own choices • Keeping in the mind the sense of proportion • Not telling that something is not possible, but thinking together what can be done in certain boundaries • Not over-regulating the future based on present moment prejudices, instead making sure that the public sector enables the development of new technology etc. • Accepting that all the decisions and solutions are not meant to be permanent, sometimes a good enough solution for a few years is the best choice • Bottom-up processes instead of top-down • Enabling civil servants to work for the entity instead a narrow field • Involving people based in interest in issue instead of representation 	<p>Formal leadership and development agreements that do not lead to any actions</p> <p>Tightly regulated HR-limits of the public sector sometimes prohibiting sensible shifts of job description</p>	<p>Remembering that nobody is perfect, even the leader: Important to add self-compassion and mercy to the list of meta-skills</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not trying to be expert of every field oneself, but using the expertise and talent all around • Encouraging for crafting the ways of working so far they lead to agreed results • Understanding that other people do the actual work, not the leader • Seeing and appreciating different strengths in people, not uniformity • Understanding the leadership as a role making it possible to others to flourish and shine • Focusing on people's strengths and building on them, also in performance and development discussions • Starting potential and talent programs • Helping people to reach their potential and using their agency in a constructive way • Positive perception on human being • Seeing the nature of people and organizations as becoming (instead of being) • Focusing on developing ways of working and doing things a bit better. Renewing mindsets rather than computer systems • Learning to ask what is well, what is working and how do we find paths forward. 		
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7. Reforming public leadership through learning

7.1. Updating the assumptions around teaching and learning

7.1.1 The potential benefits of traditional classroom learning are questionable

This book has concentrated on the challenges of human-centeredness that throw a shadow over the conventional rationale of public sector functions and leadership. An ever-diminishing portion of public sector leadership is now conducted in the 'known-world' with settled case-practices and clear goals while the capability to act in a wise way under conditions of uncertainty is continually increasing. The ability to learn and renew both personal and common ways of working thus come to the fore when attempting to reform the public sector to meet the challenges of this increasingly intertwined world.

In these circumstances, a good civil servant and/or civil service leader is proactive, flexible and takes future-oriented initiatives within the framework of laws and regulations, recalling the notion that resilience and new solutions emerge from the interaction between actors (Ungar, 2021, Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020, p. 101). The possible range of relevant actors here extends from different branches of government to other sectors and the end users of public sector decisions and services. Instead of forming 'best solutions' strategic leadership involves openness to complexity, variety and adaptation according to the complexity of the environment (Gershenson, 2014) and context-bound negotiations of local and situational meaning (Hersted & Gergen, 2013, Rosso et al., 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 5, leadership meta-skills, such as the dynamic and processual leadership capabilities that appear in interaction, provide an important opportunity to meet all these challenges head on. But what kind of learning and development in general is required to enhance public sector capabilities for renewal and increased meta-skilfulness in its actions? When looking at the training and development of public sector leaders in office, at least two spheres are important to consider here: What level of capacity do schools and institutes of Public Administration and other organisations that train civil service leaders and public sector organisations must meet current leadership training challenges? How do public sector organisations themselves provide space, structure, and opportunity for practicing

integrative leadership and learning? How does training, learning and development change when the challenge of the cross-sectoral systems approach and human-centeredness is taken seriously? These are the issues that will be discussed in this chapter.

7.1.2 Learning as a catalyst

Schools and institutes of Public Administration constitute the global backbone of civil servant's leadership training and development. In organisational terms, public leadership training institutions are often closely affiliated to the government. The amount and level of formality of their comprehensive and integrated training strategies differs from country to country but in various ways these institutions seek to serve the changing landscape of public administration in their respective countries (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; de Hollanda et al., 2019; OECD, 2017). The important question here is, however, whether these institutions end up acting more as the guardians of established governmental procedures than equipping participants their training programmes with the tools to face the complex and wicked issues they are increasingly likely to face in their day-to-day work. Have they taking as their lodestar the desire to develop leaders whose central ability is to take their organisations and networks into the new, multi-angled, adaptive space? Is supporting human-centred renewal and the idea of developing leadership meta-skills central in their work?

It seems that while such schools and institutes of Public Administration in different parts of the world have broadened their teaching methods to encompass team-based activities, their general approach suggests a continuing preference for one-way classroom training (de Hollanda et al., 2019; OECD, 2017). Encouraging learning and skills development is already widely noted to be a strategic choice for governments and some countries (for example the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, the Netherlands, and Estonia) have renewed their thinking of civil service skills further in the direction of capability building (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; de Hollanda et al., 2019; OECD, 2017). Indeed, the OECD has already highlighted the need to further the develop the innovative capacities of these institutions (OECD, 2017). These trends can however be interpreted as the seeds of a meta-skills approach. Meta-skills as such, do not appear in any of these surveys which is understandable since we are talking about a novel way of understanding and developing public sector leadership.

Placing the human-centred leadership approach and meta-skilling at the foundation of public leadership development extends the demand to re-examine the assumptions of a public leader as an effective change-maker and the pedagogical assumptions of the trainer supporting leadership development. In their synthesising article about adult learners Murtonen and Lehtinen (2020, p. 108) highlight how conceptions of oneself, learning, knowledge, the subject of learning and teaching all affect teaching and learning processes. As discussed previously, in chapter 5, instilling the ability to contextualise integrative thinking is central in both adulthood and professional learning (Kallio, 2020b). Adopting conceptions and beliefs fostering and impeding integrative learning ability is then key to impactful learning, accelerating growth and change.

This shift in perspective applies to beliefs concerning one's own learning skill and self-efficacy, detaching learning from certain places or times, seeing

learning as an active state instead of merely the intake of knowledge, abandoning black-and white conceptions of knowledge, valuing the multiplicity of types of knowledge and seeing knowledge formation as a process, as well as recognising the role of beliefs and the personal relevance of the subject of the learning and considering the role of teaching as supporting learning and understanding instead of simply delivering facts (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020). All of these ‘shifts’ benefit from the creation of collaborative learning environments providing an important social support for learning.

Making and enabling these kinds of learning environments and learning processes is work of great importance and the primary task of trainers and training institutions. When the validity of information does not only stem from seeking to uncover ‘facts’, but also from the interrelationships that form the phenomenon and, furthermore, from our assumptions that largely create the world, we are able to discover (Cooperrider, 2017), whether it is important to ask whether the pedagogical assumptions of the trainers of public sector leaders follow this same approach. Do they support the formation of new knowledge and understanding as a social, culturally changing and time- and place-bound development process (Stähle et al., 2020, Gergen, 2015; Stacey, 2010, p. 118-138; Sparrer, 2007, p. 1-6)? Instead of providing programmes with experts lecturing about different issues in a loosely related manner, the key to providing relevant educational services is the skilful design of collaborative, relational and enabling learning processes. This also involves working on both joint and individual learning targets and building a firm connection between theory and practice (Järvelä et al, 2010). Here the capabilities to facilitate experiential learning and intertwined individual and collaborative reflection come to fore, as does conducting integrative development processes starting not from knowledge but rather from engaging in an activity, then reflecting on and conceptualising the experience and followed up by trying out and testing new skills and abilities (Maurer-Hankovszky & Szabó, 2002; Kolb, 1984).

The traditional view of leadership training as it relates to public leadership still rests upon a structural or position-based view of power. Broadening out from that view is however crucial here as all forms of control are, ultimately, multi-directional. That also renders leadership a dynamic and relational phenomenon by nature. In human systems, echoing Bateson (1972), events proceed as circular chains of interaction and the realities are shared, maintained, and transformed through nonlinear, iterative interaction and dialogue (Gergen, 2015; Stähle et al., 2020, p. 191; Goddard, 2013; Wals & Schwarzin, 2012; Stacey, 2010, p. 132-133; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005, p. 538). Using learning as a catalyst of change does not only involve adding coaching, co-creation, and facilitation skills to training programmes, but also awareness of the implications of the systems approach to training and learning as well as those thinking patterns in our minds that guide knowledge-creation, learning, training and renewal.

7.1.3 Dialogical and collaborative learning as change making

The link between societal change making, i.e., the *raison d'être* of the public sector, and the capabilities of the civil service *cadre* to meet this task in a manner compatible with current and future prosperity is, on one hand, self-evident, yet on other sometimes difficult to grasp. The challenge combines

the large-scale mission and impact-oriented horizon with mundane everyday actions. Effective learning and change making addresses both spheres simultaneously in an emergent manner (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 125-126; Toom & Husu, 2020, p. 147; Darling et al., 2016; Calleja, 2014, p. 117-119).

As with many other spheres of life, teaching and learning can be approached in very different ways. One recognisable approach is technical orientation (Nivala & Rynnänen, 2019), also referred to as the adaptive (Erikson, 2014) or 'monological' approach (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Typically, this orientation is based on underlying, sometimes implicit, assumptions about an existing good or desirable direction distributed to others. In the public sector context, it seeks to train participants to fulfil predefined tasks and roles in a regulated way (Presseau et al., 2019, Kriznik et al., 2019). As a training approach, it is primarily directed at knowledge acquisition by individual learners and to adapting individual variety to a pre-set model or ideal. Characteristic of this is also the so-called 'up-down approach' and the bypassing of the contextuality and ambiguity of the surrounding realities. As an approach to training design, it quickly becomes apparent in seeking to plan and run programmes widely and in a standardised form. The dominant empirical-analytical trend across the scientific community has fortified this approach to learning and training and facilitated an educational planning culture seeking linear measurement and interventions suitable for multiplication (Presseau et al., 2019; Raelin, 2012, Johnson, 2008).

Recognition of what constitutes 'good' public leadership has fluctuated over time, as noted above in sub-chapter 3.4, but much of this debate has been personalised to focus on the characteristics of an individual (Wilson, 2013). This technically oriented approach is present in many historical definitions of what it is to be 'a good civil servant' focusing on honesty, irreproachableness and probity. This Weberian approach, focusing on the personal qualities of individuals, remains a core element of the 'civil service ethos' in many countries (Dwivedi, 2007). Current challenges including an increasingly diversified and multidisciplinary public sector however require collaborative skills to a much greater extent than ever before. Being a talented individual of good repute can be understood at most as the starting point for public sector leadership capabilities and learning objectives in a complex world. Public sector leadership is about succeeding together over organisational and institutional fences. Puonti (2004) has described this challenge of learning to work together in a cross-sectoral manner a shift from the (traditional) sequential collaboration of authorities to their parallel collaboration.

A dialogical orientation to training and learning seeks to build joint learning networks which are powerful in triggering learning in adulthood contexts (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020; Wals & Scwatzin; 2012, Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Dialogic and collaborative training design highlights horizontal relationships between learners and between leaders and teachers. It relies on hermeneutics and emphasises the dynamic relationship between theory and practice and the central role of human growth, local adaptations and agency. Seeking common purpose, meaningfulness, and betterment in terms of quality of life are characteristic of the dialogical approach to training (Berg & Carlsen, 2016; Raelin, 2012, Mezirow, 2000). *This dialogically oriented approach* to the civil service is likely to generate training that

genuinely meets the developing needs of the participants and helps to address the issues they face at work. It does not only address individual needs but rather creates a human-centred culture within the public sector and in the tackling of common challenges. As a pedagogical approach, it generates transformative learning environments where it is possible to discover new perspectives on life and action in the social dimension by looking at dilemmas as shared and negotiable experiences and finding ways to function from this new perspective (Stähle et al., 2020, p. 192; Calleja, 2014; Mezirow, 2000). One weak point of the dialogical approach, however, concerns shifting from dialogue to practice. Dialogue brings up myriads of individual perspectives and does not seek conclusions (Isaacs, 1999 and 2007). After careful listening and gaining an understanding of the issue at hand, a civil service leader usually must proceed from speech to strategic action (see also Gran & O'Connor, 2018).

Critical-emancipatory approaches to teaching and learning, like social-pedagogy, fit well with the idea of the collective societal purpose of the public sector. The approach highlights the opportunities for civil service leaders to take the initiative in terms of promoting better welfare and progressive societal change. It supports self-reflection, the relinquishing of restrictive beliefs and the creation of new opportunities for new kinds of participation and agency. The dark side of the emancipatory approach is the possibility that it is applied in a strongly political or ideological manner, which goes against the character of civil service. Where the emancipatory approach is associated with any type of identity politics, the approach faces the same pitfalls, in terms of bypassing complexity, as the technical approach outlined previously.

Raelin defines the *action-oriented approach* to training and learning as post-bureaucratic, deliberative, and as taking an alternative role by empowering others (Raelin, 2012). It is characterised by actively facilitating emancipatory dialogue thus increasing understanding, enhancing collective wisdom, creativity and dignity in a manner respecting both individuality and the collective. This type of collaborative and the dialogical approach is intended to facilitate new kinds of exploration, decision making and the taking of collaborative action (Raelin, 2012). Paavola and Hakkarainen call for a *“trialogical”* approach here, i.e., learning as a process of knowledge creation which concentrates on mediated processes where common objects of activity are developed collaboratively (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020, p. 111-113; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) refer to the same kind of dynamics in their view on organisational knowledge-creation. As an approach it nurtures dynamic intersubjectivity that creates room for polyphonic future possibilities to emerge. Philosopher Martin Buber's work around reciprocity and connection lays an important foundation for the role of collaborative and opportunity-opening training approach. In addition to many other theories of social cohesion and community building, Buber emphasises that reciprocity and true connection can also be created between different people; it does not take support for the same football team or something alike (Morgan & Guilherme, 2010). Similarly, likeness does not directly build connection or community (Tammeaid, 2016). In a dialogical and collaborative relationship act and consequences are dynamically nested and fortify the positive spiral. The possibility to create connected and development-oriented varied

communities is an important task of training and learning in societies full of competing values and norms (Martin, 2019).

Looking at different approaches to training and learning leads us to ask important questions as learning and training designers: what kind of professional orientation are leaders trained for? How do they view the people they encounter – as a resource in terms of deployable assets in person-years or as human beings? What kind of information do they feel they need in their work, how do they define the phenomena they deal with at work, how do they choose their policies and methods and what do they strive to achieve at the individual (personal), public administration (professional) and societal levels? These questions position the participants as subjects of a learning process while the answers to these questions lead the way to formulating learning objectives in a training or other development process accelerating the human-centred approach.

7.1.4 Problem and solutions-focused learning

Awareness of one's own thinking and mindset is at the core of leadership development (Ciporen, 2010). The choice of working orientation determines to a large extent the results (Cooperrider, 2017; Chiva & Habib, 2015; Fredrickson, 2014). Freedom to choose and change one's work orientation is available in any profession and role and in any given operating environment. In organisations work orientations are inherited by those who follow into a job or position so training processes are important, and from the pedagogical point, training should be designed to make that process as fruitful as possible. Shifting the perspective of training and learning to active contextual collaboration and the creation of learning environments, enabling individual and collective transformational learning, is one way to lead public sector leaders and organisations towards the discovery of new perspectives by the questioning of underlying purposes and principles. In the academic discussion of organisational learning this has been dealt with in relation to triple-loop learning (Tosey et. al, 2011; Argyris, 1991).

The opportunity-creating nature of learning processes is realised when learners can act in a situation where everyone involved has their intellect and abilities equally recognised and involved. It is essential here to avoid of presuppositions about what a person can know or understand based on their background and instead invest in their ability to delve into an issue together with others. The solution-focused approach to learning and development puts front and centre the renewal of relationships to issues and people simultaneously, i.e., renewing our spheres of thinking, relating and action as parallel and interactional learning processes. That introduces a comprehensive and multidisciplinary view of abstract, social and human phenomena – something characteristic of all systems-type approaches (Stähle et al. 2020, p. 191) - instead of the prevailing compartmentalised and reductionist tendencies to make sense of the world around us. It also considers that learning is not only a cognitive phenomenon, but a combination of different levels of interacting processes not reducible to each other (Kallio, 2020a, p. 3; Stacey, 2010, p. 158).

The difference between problem-focused and solution-focused learning facilitation can be seen in the ways in which the participants archive change and renew their ways of working (Bannik, 2006, p 1-25; Priest & Gass, 1997). Whereas in problem-focused facilitation, participants are assisted to help

them know more about the problems faced to eliminate them, the Solution-Focused way of working seeks disengagement from problem-focused thinking, sustaining the problem and is instead interested in identifying preferred outcomes and orientating towards new goal setting and resource activation including the identification of strengths and new future possibilities (Grant et al. 2012, Grant, 2011). This approach to engaging in learning, transformation and change-making makes the Solution-Focused approach effective in archiving real change beyond the training sessions. Solution-focused facilitation of transformation and change processes seems to increase perceived goal attainability, self-efficacy, and commitment, generate action steps and reduce the negative impact of problems (Neipp et al., 2016 and 2021; Grant et al., 2012; Grant, 2011). While the problem-focused approach is more likely to elicit thoughts of self-regulation, the Solution-Focused approach seeks to strengthen usage of available tools and resources (Abdulla & Woods, 2020), as well as increase working in a more transdisciplinary way (Medina & Beyerbach, 2014).

To make learning processes platforms of opportunity and renewal as well as incubators for meta-skills development, it is crucial that the trainers and facilitators gear their own thinking and facilitation style to the Solution-Focus rather than the problem-focused approach. This includes adopting the Solution-Focused approach to viewing people as resourceful and learning the Solution-Focused interviewing skills applicable in all formal and informal training settings and in conducting co-operational and interactional group learning (Cloete, 2010; Lipchik & de Shazer, 2017; de Jong & Cronkright, 2011; Bannik, 2006). Solution-Focused facilitative questions focus on outcomes (like hope, difference, benefit and what is wanted), progress (like instances, resources, small steps, options and ratings), means (like engagement, positivity, agency, resilience, confidence, energy and resources) and perspectives (like on possible *locations, relationships, language use and time*) (SF Question Tree in Brooker, 2020.)

While the problem-focused approach seeks to know and describe problems, Solution-Focused interviewing and dialogue pays attention to the crucial link between language and action in curating human systems and as crucial elements of learning to think, learn and transform (McKergow, 2011; Lang & McAdam, 1997; Cronen et al., 1994; Lang et al., 1990). An example of an action-oriented, dialogical, and cross-sectoral leadership training process conducted in a Solution-Focused way is thoroughly described in Virtanen and Tammeaid (2020, p. 95-172).

7.2 Developing meta-skills

Public administration is inherently a human-centred system and the leadership meta-skills discussed in this book possess the ability to strengthen the contents of human centredness. In Chapter 5 above, the organisational landscape of leadership meta-skills was outlined with the help of the interviews of 22 high ranking civil service leaders working in the central government sector in Finland. We were interested in the respondents' insights into the development of meta-skills, and whether they felt they can be taught and if so, how? The interviewees were unanimously positive in this respect – at least to some extent. Their notions of ongoing and desirable leadership and organisational shift within the government as

well as an individual leader's opportunities to meta-skilfully orchestrate development towards cross-sectoral and people-oriented ways of working are presented in this sub-chapter, considering the available scholarly knowledge in respect of relational, motivational, and intentional approaches as well as reflecting on demands for training and development supporting capabilities for renewal.

7.2.1 Towards an enabling shift in leadership and training

According to the interviewees, understanding the concept and value of meta-skills requires continuous training, awareness, and support. Changes within government and leadership culture tend to be long-term cultural processes, but are, nevertheless important and necessary to invest in. The interviewees highlighted four things as being of fundamental importance in terms of public leadership training with a view to developing meta-skilfulness in public sector leaders, namely, horizontal (i.e., cross-sectoral) training groups developing a shared culture within government), 'thought-shaking' and future-oriented contents, sufficient longevity instead of trying to change the world/mindset/government "in two hours" and a focus on leading people and understanding citizen or service user demands. The fourth point, 'people focus-related, elicited a considerable number of comments in the interviews, because the development of human-oriented people skills in leading people depends primarily on having a personal interest in developing oneself.

The skills required to lead are primarily those that are used in coaching leadership, i.e., fostering psychological safety by deep listening, adoption of a dialogic and reflective stance as well as using encouragement and developing a positive feedback culture, learning to learn from failure, harnessing reframing and other thinking skills, shaping organisational culture by reforming practices, enhancing everyday learning and using questions to spark insight in the other person (Ibarra, 2021; Törmänen et al., 2021; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Schein, 2013; O'Connell et al., 2012, Green & Grant, 2003). The relational change this brings about in leadership was described by an interviewed Director General with a government agency affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience from various government branches:

"We will no longer say no, but we say under what conditions this is possible. A civil servant tends easily to say no, and then not much else. Where the organisational culture in build on fear of mistakes and seeking 100% certainty in decisions, then enabling is difficult. It takes courage and the giving up of the premise of security and the omnipotent ability to control [others/society]."

Most of the interviewees noted that various developments in the direction of a more human approach had taken place in the government leadership culture over last 20 years, but there is still a long way to go. One Secretary-of-State interviewee with over 30 years of leadership experience from various government branches reflected on this ongoing process as follows:

"...It involves a whole transformation of leadership. As late as the 1980s, there was a generation that had gone to war as leaders and leadership was through chains of command. Today, such leadership would no longer be acceptable. Dialogue is a prerequisite for coaching or developmental leadership. The coaching approach does not work if the leader is not ready

to drop his/her own authority out of the discussion and move forward on an equal footing. And the more leadership focuses on enabling, the more important this is. In practice, the dialogue skills of government administration leaders vary enormously, and currently these skills are not being thought to us anywhere. For me the best school in this has been international cooperation.”.

Another Director General interviewee with ministerial affiliation and decades of leadership and other experience from government agencies and ministerial organisations of different government branches reflected on the same issue thus:

“Moving from the strategic to the operational level and from there down to ‘hands on’ leadership skills and bringing this whole thing together in a credible way in a modern understanding of leadership, there is still a lot of work to be done. Also, Covid-19 has shown it. We have good conditions and the ability and also support from the top, but we are still on the way.”

On many occasions public administration is often discussed in terms of preserving and ensuring continuity. However, as Acemoglu and Robinson note in their famous book *The Narrow Corridor* (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020), a society needs both strong institutions and a strong civil society. To maintain the balance, the public sector and society must run at equal speeds (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020). A Secretary-of-State interviewee with around 30 years of government leadership experience reflects the same issue thus:

“All good leadership is proactive. And then there is this other stream: reactive running of administrative duties. In this process of leadership change has been going on for at least 20 years. A big part of that is that we as leaders should be proactive rather than reactive and take a critical look on how we have done things previously. If there is a belief that some things in government are forever and cannot ever be changed, then nothing will change.”

7.2.2 Motivation and intention at the centre of meta-skills development

The importance of how civil service training is conducted was underlined by many of the interviewees. For example, an interviewed Director General with ministerial affiliation and around 15 years of experience from both government agencies and ministerial organisations noted that

“[...] good education is conducted through living it together [immersion] and discussions”.

And another Director General interviewee with around 40 years of experience of both ministerial and government agency leadership reflected similarly:

“However, the way of learning must be deep learning, in which these things become part of our own identity; one changes as a person, looks at the world differently than before when things become internalised. Therefore, the way of learning must build on the intrinsic motivation of the individual. And the enablers of learning [facilitators, trainers] then bring cognitive dissonance to it and take the group to the space of emergent learning. There we reach real dialogue, polyphony, tolerance to uncertainty and reflection. Via reflection, learning becomes, or does not become, a part of identity.”

Facilitation, planning and conducting this type of learning process sets up the challenge of promoting pedagogic understanding and skills in schools and institutes of Public Administration and other institutions and trainers working with the public sector. Shifting mindsets from teacher-driven course production to dialogical and collaborative co-creation with the participants can, however, be a lengthy process but conscious skills development in conducting open-ended dialogical group processes in a solution-oriented way is what is required here. Giving up the certainty of conclusions and trust in ready-made models represents an important learning journey for educators themselves. Many trainers enjoy being in the spotlight and presenting their own knowledge. The impact of that choice should however be thoroughly scrutinised.

Developing further the argument by Deci and Ryan (2000), it can be said that external change pressure can be associated with poorer motivation and a lower level of change capacity than building on intrinsic motivation via strengthening the conditions supporting competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Although experts may have a profound knowledge of their field, self-generated arguments are more persuasive in behavioural change than arguments provided by others (Müller et al., 2017). This is particularly so if self-generation takes place in environments where it feels easy. This makes professional efforts to create a safe training atmosphere and stimulating learning environments even more important (Sharry, 2004).

Cognitive dissonance serves well as a platform for change, but it is important to bring it into training contexts in such a way that it takes into consideration the identities of the participants (Hinojosa et al., 2017). The Solution-Focused approach argues that paradigm shifts, and new insights occur in a not-knowing-zone, a concept developed in practice and teaching experiences (Malinen, 2004). The not-knowing attitude implies gazing at even quite familiar issues with beginner's eyes, careful pre-judgement free listening and seeing people as the experts in terms of their own lives and circumstances. It is, as Andersson defines it (see Malinen, 2004), about leaving one's own professional descriptions outside the room and inviting others into the collaborative relationship in the dialogical conversation. An important part of using any information or expertise is to take great care of one's own intentionality in providing any knowledge; is it for the purposes of food for thought or imposing a conviction, generalisation or conclusion that might not be applicable and relevant in the context of the discussion partner. Conversations in mental not-knowing-space are worth organising, since they take us to the liminal space needed for new understanding to arise. They also widen our observation skills and touch us on an emotional level releasing energy and creating opportunities for change.

Training conducted in the manner described above promotes the deployment of personal agency to put the new learning into action (Neipp et al., 2016 and 2021; Abdulla & Woods, 2020; Grant, 2011). Agency is referred to here as a critical function referring to the pursuit of the objective's participants have themselves set through insight, a willingness to participate in joint change efforts and doing so in an experimental atmosphere. Agency in this view takes participants as active and resourceful agents of their own work role and profession (Martin, 2019; Bannik, 2006, p. 6-12; Mussmann, 2006). A well-designed training process enables and accelerates that agency.

7.2.3 The relational core of organisations and leadership

Another issue deserving of scrutiny is that of how trainers view public sector organisations. Do they see public sector organisations through mechanistic metaphors: as hierarchical compartmentalised implementation machineries or co-created human-centred learning systems (Lowe et al., 2020; Laloux, 2014; Reed 2006). And do they direct training for developing organisational and managerial thinking that understands the demands of organisations as social constructions (Cooperrider, 2017; Hersted & Gergen, 2016; Jensen Schleiter et al. 2015; McKergow, 2011; Stacey, 2010; Watson 2002).

Echoing Morgan (2016), the images we have of organisations direct our perception and determine what we tend to see and what we tend to leave unseen. Changing metaphors serves as a generative tool for challenging taken-for-granted ways of seeing and as a vehicle to deal with the multidimensional complexity of organisations and their functions (Örtenblad, 2016; Morgan, 2016; Schenck, 2013). Many of the interviewees brought up the notion that leadership does not develop if it is not thought about regularly and as an own phenomenon. One Secretary-of-State interviewee with a long working-life of ministerial leadership described choosing the socially constructed and interactional focus and its implications to training needs in the following way:

“Really looking at how organisations function [in practice] is terribly important in order to develop the ability to form the framework for an organisation to function well. I argue, and this is not my idea, that very talented people may not accomplish anything in a bad organisation. In a well led and organised organisation output is quite different. Training should be directed to seeing what meta-skills mean in leading and creating an organisation. There must be some good routines (this is a bad word) so that basic things work at a sufficient level and reliably, with little effort to make space and time for important things. So, that the organisation is not a prisoner of things that fall on top and run head over heels, [instead] a kind of peace comes to the organisation.”

The referred Secretary-of-State continued:

“[...] and the other important thing is developing appreciative interaction that is the prerequisite of dialogue. It is very much dependent on the organisational culture. Here, by the way, it is not the job of the leader to say what that appreciative interaction is, but rather, to show by example what it is to him/her. Here, the leader should think about how he or she would like to be led in an expert organisation. And it is about surprisingly small things, about really listening to everyone, organising meetings and discussions in groups small enough to be able have a real discussion. If there are too many people, the information can be shared with them in other ways. And that the leader doesn't handle email or anything else at meetings; and begins meetings by listening to what the others have to say. That is the essence of putting things into practice. (...) Leaders need to learn this. And all this must be trained, so that thinking [of leadership] is directed towards it. And that we realise early enough that we are not doing the right things and creating trust needs to be taught. And that the leader lets the experts act or decide differently from what the leader would have thought

or done. Of course, there must be some kind of framework, the rules of the game - not breaking the law - but when [appreciation and freedom] exist it allows for much greater creativity and trust. To some extent, this can probably be taught as can learning how good organisations work i.e., [bench learning] what kinds of practices they really have on a practical level”

The Table 5.1 in *chapter 5* provides practical ideas on how to develop meta-skilful public organisations based on the interviews with the high-ranking civil service leaders working in the Finnish central government. Training meta-skills provides a level of preparedness to be better able to handle the various challenges and situations leaders generally encounter in their work. As a training focus it entails a shift from providing uniform procedures and models to nurturing the elaboration of actions and working forms and orchestrating future-driven collaborative change capabilities. One Director General interviewee with government agency affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience from across various government branches described a succeeded mindset shift in the following way:

“For someone like me who chats easily with others, it just happens that I talk about everything with colleagues and team members and therefore we learn together. For an introvert, it can be more difficult. And it occurred to me that it is important to understand that learning is done together. When you talk about what you have experienced and learned and apply those things in practice, you learn from that. You can also easily ignore learning and just follow the rule and what has always been done. I rather ask that if we have had this kind of a rule, instruction, or way of working, has it worked, has it delivered what it was supposed to deliver?”

According to current research on behaviour change interventions, people need the capability, motivation and opportunity to change (Mitchie et al., 2011). Both leadership and leadership training processes with human-centred learning design possess great potential to provide a platform for these conditions to accelerate development. In a training context this particularly applies to learning design that reaches out of the classroom and uses a wide variety of working methods of active collaborative learning starting from blended learning and storytelling to real-setting experiments and future-scouting (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020, p. 111-113; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 117-172; Laal, 2013; Laal et al. 2012; Laal & Laal, 2012). Training institutions have an important role to play in inviting public sector leaders to (re)connect with the end-users of their decisions and citizens in general. As with any other huge organisational complex, the government also tends to focus on fine tuning its internal procedures in terms of efficiency and smooth-running procedures. Human-centred renewal focusing on fulfilling the societal purposes of the existence of the public sector. This cannot, however, been effectively without a living link to the world outside administration. Leaders are, due to the nature of their work, particularly exposed to the internal and operational functions of an organisation, as described in Chapter 1. Seeing and treating the end-users and citizens as active agents in society is then an important feature of human-centred and enabling governance, while opening these windows represents both an important opportunity and duty for public sector leadership training.

The Theoretical Domains Framework summarises 33 psychological theories and identifies 14 domains or influences on behaviour (Cane et al., 2012). This framework advises us to pay attention to knowledge, skills, social/professional roles or identities, beliefs about capabilities, optimism and confidence, beliefs about consequences, reinforcement, intentions, goals, past experiences, attention, and decision processes, the environmental context and available resources, social Influences, emotions, and behavioural regulation (Cane et al., 2012). Interestingly these are consistent with the emphasis and impact of Solution-Focused coaching and facilitation questions presented in the previous sub-chapter 7.1.2 in terms of adopting a collaborative, interactional and future-focused orientation to change making. Solution-Focused questions provide a vehicle for capacity building and practical change-making (Tammeaid & Virtanen, 2020, p. 120-126; De Jong & Kim Berg, 2013; Kim Berg & Szabo, 2005).

In an OECD survey on schools and institutes of Public Administration (OECD, 2017) there is a topical discussion about making use of digital learning possibilities within government. Digital learning works well as a form of blended learning (Cronje, 2021). It does not replace the value of live communication and live training but does provide opportunities for learning detached from time and place. The core question in developing leadership meta-skills is not however the venue – live or digital – but rather, the mindset and perception; not focusing on analysing problems or fighting against the old but directing the energy towards emergent opportunities and supporting the new.

7.2.4 Career development dynamics serving meta-skills development

All the interviewees reflected on their own learning paths in the interviews, considering the deliberate choices they made in taking on new challenges and throwing themselves into new situations, new networks, new organisations, and new professional fields as the most powerful way of learning and developing meta-skills. As one Director General interviewee with government agency affiliation and over 20 years of experience from different branches of government put it:

“Promotion of all of these [meta-skills] takes place in such a way that I have led, done and gone into new roles. Then you can’t cling to the old and it becomes clear that you depend on the skills of others and dialogically you yourself learn from your subordinates and partners”.

Taking care of one’s own opportunities to learn and develop was considered crucial by the interviewees. A lot of it is learning and challenging oneself in every-day duties, walking onto “*weak ice*”, joining, and initiating joint projects with other organisations and starting bottom-up processes. One generally expressed opinion among these leaders was that a leadership role provides great opportunities for learning, but for learning to happen it is required that a leader opens themselves up to learning and develops the attitude of learning-to-learn. An omnipotent attitude kills the opportunity to learn both in our every-day work and in making use of organised learning opportunities. To best preserve the developing and learning-to-learn attitude, interviewees called for more structural learning mechanisms to enhance meta-skills and to identify them in recruitment and appointment procedures. Countries and administrative branches differ significantly in

terms of the level and organisation of leadership rotation and job-switching mechanisms and in making use of the development opportunities it provides (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 110-114). A few interviewees mentioned the Dutch rotation model as an example of a practice that supports the development of leaders through different types of postings, allowing top leaders to change to more consultative roles after periods in demanding leadership positions. In this way, these leaders, it is argued, are better able to 'preserve the sparkle' of development, refresh and 'go again' in a more sustainable way.

Furthermore, many of the interviewees noted that there is still a lot to do in terms of valuing meta-skills and leadership skills in relation to general recruitment, appointments, and qualification requirements. There may already have been a lot of talk about the importance of leadership capabilities, but the actual processes of filling positions still tend to emphasise more formal education and substantive skills. According to the interviewees it is still common in some ministries that heads of unit have been assigned 60% expert work and 40% managerial work. That is a structure that firmly keeps in place the compartmentalised public sector approach and thus the status quo. From the perspective of good public leadership and meta-skilfulness endorsing the valuing leadership and learning potential approach could provide public organisations with an important new dynamic. A Director General interviewee with ministerial affiliation and over 30 years of leadership experience from different ministries describes this in the following way:

“And then there is this thing, a public leader’s ability to lead learning in the organisation. And what is the learning curve of a public leader if the selection criteria are ability, skill and a proven civic citizenship, all of which are ex post. But I strongly state that we should evaluate the development curve. And in those situations where it can be done - within the framework of the law - always take the one who may not yet have all the skills required, but a good ability and interest to learn and develop. In general, these kinds of persons can have a great impact on the learning of the whole work community. Unfortunately, it is often the case that if the perfect ones are chosen and they freeze themselves into the positions of the state, their interest in the work will wane and this will, ultimately, have a terrible effect on the organisation.”

7.2.5 Measuring learning outcomes

How then can we measure the outcomes of training and learning targeted at the development of leadership meta-skills? This a tough question for those embedded in the traditional ways of looking at the public sector primarily in terms of efficiency and results. In that tradition training is often dealt with in an instrumental manner, a multipliable standard “piece of learning” that takes individual know-how in a defined issue from one level to another. This technical approach can also be found in purchasing leadership training or any other training within the government.

This approach is derived from the way in which the discipline of economics looks at organisations and their impacts. There is clearly a desire to measure return on investment and of time and money spent on training in economic terms and in terms of the scale impact of the investment. Deliberate efforts to increase the reach and impact of successful projects to benefit more people

can be seen as a reasonable way to spend taxpayers' money. However, fitting these aspirations into training and learning approaches collides with the non-linear logics of learning, human growth, and transformative development. That is also in general characteristic for systemic endeavours, where functional change essentials like building relationships, establishing shared purpose, and developing shared values do not translate well in terms of measurable metrics (Lowe et al., 2020). Trying to measure them in terms of impact frames can, paradoxically, lead to less rather than more understanding of the real impacts (Lowe & Wilson, 2017).

Most of the 22 interviewed high ranking civil service leaders underlined the importance of the personal growth of a leader, as well as the need for time, space and support for this life-long endeavour to become a better leader. Growth and developing new ways of thinking and working needs safe spaces, transformative learning opportunities and other niches protected from daily operational concerns (Moore et al., 2015). In general, learning and development can be witnessed by the participants themselves and to some extent also by other people. Real growth and development are set to follow some observable changes in terms of our ways of thinking, working, and acting but on an indefinite timeline in following processes of meta-cognition and reflection on self-directed and *ecosystemic* learning (Johnson, 2008, von Wright, 1992). Some effects can be seen in the short term, others can take years before emerging (Kallio, 2020b; Moore et al. 2015).

Systemic, dialogical, and collaborative training and development endeavours call for co-created evaluation and local meaning-giving of the results and scaling opportunities. Measuring systems' bound learning and training results in the return of an investment logic that does not always make sense (Murtonen & Lehtinen, 2020, p. 111-116; Johnson, 2008, Cronbach, 2000). It easily leads to measuring technical details (presence, absence, cost, variable cost, satisfaction rating) instead of actual learning outcomes derived from learning and change targets. In living systems learning and growth also produce so-called unbudgeted benefits, favourable or counter-productive ripple effects that easily remain undocumented and therefore unnoticed (Warwick et al., 2017). In this view, training and learning for public sector leaders is always a social intervention not applicable to handling the logics of performance data (Lowe & Wilson, 2017). Doing so may even disrupt systems change having a good start and lead to oversimplifications of the possibilities to scale a training 'product' without taking into consideration the essential conditions (knowhow, resources etc.) crucial to repeating any success (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 158-170). This can be defined as separating thinking from its relational context (Fisher, 2021, Stacey, 2010). Bateson (2016, p. 83) has also highlighted the uselessness of context-free data, since it leaves out processes of interdependency crucial for understanding complexity around the phenomenon and drawing meaningful conclusions: *"[...] the problem with problem-solving is the idea that a solution is an endpoint. There are no endpoints in complex systems, only tendrils that diffuse and reorganise situations [...] compensations come in crooked streams and don't end up where you thought they would. DDT stopped insects briefly, then became problematic in countless other ways. Increasing the water resources of a city meets the needs of the people but increases the population potential. Treating symptoms, teaching to the test, gathering statistics [...] all of these*

forms of engagement have something in common [...] blindness to the complexity of the issue being addressed.”

Thanks to Kirkpatrick and his successors, professional evaluation of the impact of training is often done by trying to reach out to the co-created assessment of comparing intentions with results and in that way, fortifying continuous improvement from the point of view of both participants and trainers (Kirkpatrick & Kayser Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kaufman & Keller, 1994). Kirkpatrick’s idea of the return of expectations may not, however, be sufficient in a complex world, where training can and should serve as a window to wider horizons, beyond the initial expectations made in the context of a narrower or partial view of the given systemic entity. Positive developments towards measuring the progress made in learning to work together in a cross-sectoral way for the benefit of the end user have been made for example by the Centre for Public Impact (centreforpublicimpact.org) and local coordination agencies in Sweden (nnsfinsam.se/). CPI has done remarkable work on what they call the “*shared power principle*” applied, for example, to modelling social care for children in a manner prioritising time and relationships with children and families (Frontline, CPI & Buurtzorg, 2020), designing the development and measurement of social learning (Lowe & Plimmer, 2021) and using storytelling to make, evaluate and showcase what is happening in systems change (Snow et al., 2021). The Swedish coordination agencies work on matching employability efforts between different authorities and have worked towards producing a national model to verify progress in a way that is fitting to the governmental reporting culture, but true to the same values that guide the work itself. To summarise, both experiences suggest the need to measure the results of the actual learning and change efforts first and foremost by the relevance felt by the end user and the effect on their experienced life quality, the perspective of the front-end officials in how they know that they are moving in the right direction in their work, how engaged they are in their work and how easy they find choosing new relational ways of working as well as the percentage of actual cases solved by the new cross-sectoral way of working. Cost is an important measure in public services, but in this context only one important measure of economic sustainability considering historic costs and the predicted development of service needs. In addition, the anticipatory perspective of what should it be in place that the present services would not be needed at all is an important issue to bear in mind in measuring, to ensure that measuring does not infer standing still but is helps in opening new paths. Swedish coordination agencies have included this in their model of inquiry in the following way: “Have the experiences from your collaboration led to the development of preventive measures?”. Their national inquiry is addressed to all interest groups from end-users, front line and back-office professionals to unit managers and boards of directors. In the same inquiry they are also interested in “*[whether] the resourceful view regarding human possibilities is shared by everybody in the coordinated effort?*”¹⁰.

Both the CPI and the Swedish coordination agencies’ approaches to measurement support the relational, motivational, and intentional essence

¹⁰ Information obtained by interviewing Jonas Wells from NNS and South Dalecarlia Coordination Agency, Spring 2021.

of change-making in human systems where learning is one critical element of a larger systems change and not meaningfully measurable as a separate entity. Or when done, the measuring model forces the measuring process into focusing on smaller and smaller standardised details in order to generate results in the traditional way (see, for example, Taylor et al, 2020; Presseau et al., 2019). A valuable way to look at scaling change efforts here is to consider the concept of *scaling deep* developed in Canada and presented by Moore, Riddell & Vocisano (Moore et. al, 2015, p. 71). They argue that scaling the process of any social change “[...] necessarily involve[s] changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales”.

Scaling for impact thinking is too narrow and too much of a product-oriented approach to grasp the social system of beliefs, connections, and workflows in which the new ways of working are born and spread. The notion of *scaling deep* in the Moore, Riddell & Vocisano model comes closest to the target of leadership training and development describing change-making in meaning, impacting cultural roots. This is done by reframing stories of change beliefs and norms, the mutual sharing of knowledge, investing in transformative learning processes and establishing communities of learning and practice. Undertaking large scale systems change in society usually requires seeking alternative resources, building networks and partnerships, and broadening the frame of the viewing window. (Moore et. al., 2015.)

When the aspiration of the societal change-maker is to impact greater numbers of people or organisations, the effective strategy is *scaling out* with replication followed by spreading the principles of adaptation and the co-generation of knowledge. Scaling out cannot be effectively done by transposing a standard way of proceeding with a standard change process omitting contextual and local knowledge factors. Where it is applicable to pursue changes in laws and regulations to achieve new policy developments, this is called *scaling up*. Mixing these three scaling strategies together is usually required to create a pathway to largescale or systemic impact, they argue (Moore et. al, 2015).

An illustrative example of the alternative approach is evidenced by the technical and superficial culture of measuring outcomes is training institutions and purchasers’ tendency to ask for evaluation forms to be filled in by the participants after separate lectures or other sub-sections of a training programme. This type of approach illustrates the existence of only a vague understanding of learning as a *process*, both in terms of knowledge generation and timely meaning terms. A well-designed learning process is always an entity which it is not possible to reduce to individual parts either which can work or be evaluated on their own (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 95-172; Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012, Cooperrider et al., 2008). Social learning and growth as a leader, professional or human being are deep and multifaceted processes often entailing a lot of bewilderment which is an important part of the process. Mechanical attempts to evaluate learning in the middle of the process can easily disturb the emerging process of deep learning, while regular dialogical evaluation of the learning experience serves not only as feedback, but also as feed-forward to new spheres of thinking and action (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p. 158-170, Carless 2007).

According to a survey made by the OECD observatory of public sector innovation (OECD-OPSI, 2021) the individual level challenges connected to future-orientation, anticipation, and innovation capability among government civil service leaders in Finland were linked first and foremost to the linear, engineering, mindset as well as to a lack of alternative experience and open-mindedness, fear of failure and a strong expert bias. In addition, procrastination, lack of knowledge, risk aversion and rejection of change were also mentioned (OECD-OPSI, 2021). All these hinderances to the future-oriented renewal of public sector leadership can be addressed by training and development efforts designed to harness public sector leadership meta-skills and with training practices following meta-skills thinking and in line with putting meta-skills into action. As discussed above, this requires the promotion of three guiding principles in terms of conducting public sector leadership training and learning, i.e., the *relational view* of leadership, public sector functions, knowledge-creation and systems' change-making, the *motivational view* building on intrinsic motivation and contextual relevance and the *intentional view* strengthening future-driven agency and co-creation.

7.3 Developing public organisations through learning

7.3.1 Leading with learning and strengths

Apart from using schools and institutes of Public Administration and other training institutions, public sector organisations themselves can do a lot to develop a human-centred approach both inside and outside the organisation. Issues of key importance here are to what extent the ideas behind the systems thinking and strengths revolution (Cooperrider, 2017; Hämäläinen et al, 2014, Dutton et al., 2010) have penetrated public organisations and to what extent they act as platforms of active learning and development.

In the socio-constructivist conception, learning in an organisational context implies a shared vision of the direction and organisational support for of individual and group learning (Törmänen et al., 2021; Argyris, 1991 and 1993, Argyris & Schön, 1978). In general, viewing an organisation from the perspective of functional processes that enable (or inhibit) learning and development, it is important to examine how an organisation emphasises learning in its operating culture and how meaning-giving to different things, terms and events is happening in an organisation (Mezirow, 2000, Rosso et al. 2000; Argyris, 1991). Learning and development should be considered a positive and important holistic thing, not something extra or separate from every-day work and life (Caride, 2020; Elliot, 2020), indeed, as one Director-General interviewee with ministerial affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience notes:

“One key factor is that this is what the formal leaders and thought leaders think. Learning culture doesn't come from drawing a new kind of organisational chart for learning or assigning responsibility for it to someone else. It requires a long-term mindset, and that top management appreciates and encourages such thinking. Without this it withers away. And then in terms of meta-skills it is an important point in work and in other spheres of life: a diamond fine insight. To get new ideas and new

innovations, even if we have a great learning organisation, is difficult if you don't get stimuli from outside, then you're deadlocked and that's not enough."

Leadership style is composed of mundane, every-day micro-behaviours (Hämäläinen et al., 2014, Stacey, 2010; Kolb, 1984) in which the interactional choices of those in public administration leadership positions play an important role. Positive attitudes for individual and collective development require reciprocal encountering, a dialogical stance and the social practices supporting them. According to the interviewees these capabilities can be learned from many sources. A Director General interviewee with five years of ministerial affiliation and a vast experience from municipal public sector leadership tells it like this:

"I consider non-professional learning to be very important, for example fiction is often much better reading than management guidebooks. I do that and could do more. Recently also built architecture and fine arts have brought me inspiration."

In organisational life, ordinary social structures like meetings matter a lot (Kauffelt & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2011; Bannik, 2006, p. 134-140). Paying attention to the creation of an attuned and nourishing meeting culture is one of the every-day opportunities to reform public organisations through learning. Meetings serve two general purposes, the symbolic and the functional (Sandwith, 1992). While functional meaning meetings promote shared understanding and the progressing of issues on the table, symbolic meaning meetings define the organisational communication culture and promote the value systems which set the base for meaning making. An open and inclusive communication climate is essential to achieve a better work environment and a lot of that happens in functional communication in meetings (Bergman et al., 2016; Bannik, 2006, p. 135). One Director General interviewee with around 20 years of public sector leadership experience from both ministerial work and other branches of government reflected on the cultural challenges of government in following way:

"What I try to influence is that the ministry is an organisation based heavily on expert work. It is thought to be very hierarchical, but it is more bottom-up. What makes it challenging is that many experts don't see the whole and are very sensitive about their own expertise. In my own group, I make sure that this is not the case, I emphasise that we are not here to perform our expertise but to help the organisation achieve its goals. It's a different angle and has also brought the biggest schisms. People become very concerned if their expertise is in doubt. We have people who think the legislation is theirs."

Even within complex and difficult large entities leaders have opportunities to develop their own organisational units in line with collaborative learning and meta-skills thinking. The interviewees also noted that they had initiated a number of other practical ways to make learning and development a part of every-day work in their organisations or departments including, for example, taking a fully mobile and interactive learning platform (Howspace) into use in the internal communications of the department, making sure that reflective learning is integrated into every process in the department, initiating a theme year around making things "a bit simpler" in terms of internal processes, taking frequent field tours to different parts of the

country, sending follow-up letters after tough negotiations, deliberately appointing persons who bring out-of-the-box thinking to the board, having regular cross-sectoral project reviews in the board meetings, starting talent programmes and systematic future forum work and rotating heads of departments and the responsibility fields of the board members so that a more holistic understanding of and responsibility for issues can develop.

Adapting the strengths of the leader was also mentioned several times. Strengths and virtues offer great potential for growth and development (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Linley et al., 2010, Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2002) see also *chapter 5*) and this is how one Director General interviewee with ministerial affiliation and around 20 years of public sector leadership experience reflected on the issue:

“First of all, I have to say that this matter of focusing on strengths rather than on weaknesses is the most important thing I adopted from the Renewing Public Sector training. For 20 years, we have discussed in all development discussions that you should try to develop where you are weak. If you’re an introvert by birth, then it doesn’t help for me simply to say that you have now to become an extrovert. Rather, we need instead to consider where those introvert abilities are most suitable and how to make the best use of them in the organisation. Since this realisation, I have used this approach as a load-bearing structure in all development discussions. In other words, I have completely abandoned the weak characteristics focus.”

A key dynamic in terms of adopting the strengths view and the dialogical stance as the backbone of leadership, is widening the opportunities for success on the individual and group level, since through our assumptions and choice of method we largely determine what can become possible (Cooperrider, 2017; Dutton 2010). The concept of meta-skills has been used to some extent in the psychological and coaching literature, but thus far mainly from a problem-focused point of view linking meta-skills to individual features and to problematic mindsets that needed mending (for example Kegan & Lahely, 2009; Eigel, 2005). This use of the meta-skills concept follows in the long traditions of structuralist psychology and learning concentrating on individual competences, taking an external predetermined – i.e., not interactional or collaborative – lens to human talent and analysing and defining hierarchical stages and taxonomies of development (e.g., Kegan & Lahely, 2009; Eigel, 2005; Fischer, 1980). It is however important to note here that the meta-skills conception presented in this book is rather based on a co-created and appreciative view of human collaboration, the usefulness of multi-faceted human potential and of nourishing it for the benefit of the community, organisation and the society (Cooperrider, 2017; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Beverland et al., 2016; Fredrickson, 2013; Linley et al., 2010; Dutton, 2010; Biswas-Diener, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2002). This successfully grounds the idea of respecting the variety of collaborative strengths and their value in different circumstances, reaching out for strategic alliances between people with different strengths working together, as well as defining the leader’s role in providing opportunities for development and growth for everyone from their own starting point (Annala et al., 2020; Linley, 2008; O’Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Godat, 2005). Moreover, Kallio (2020b) has highlighted the “*many-values logic*” and brought up the pitfalls of mechanistic stage thinking, as

well as the importance of adopting an interactive and integrative view on human wisdom (see also Tynjälä et al., 2020, p. 167-170).

The strengths- and resource-based choices of leaders are fortified by combing them with coaching leadership which portrays itself in integrating learning and development as part of the work and promoting the idea of the leader-employee partnership in learning (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Schein, 2013, Goffee & Jones, 2000). Leaders who themselves receive coaching are more likely to be goal- and relationship-oriented and to provide more guidance than managers who do not receive such coaching (Berg & Karlsen, 2016). Moreover, they also tend to have more interest in learning, improving self-awareness and a higher degree of personal development (Devine et al., 2013). One Director General interviewee with around 30 years of leadership experience from ministerial and government agency leadership talks about their role in terms of leadership coaching as follows:

“I actively think about both my successes and failures and how for things have gone well or badly. I have used sparring help, so I have used coaches. There are ideas here that a coach can usefully provide. Personally, I have enjoyed this opportunity. And I’ve been actively working to evolve and it’s just hugely important to all leaders. If the idea is there that you do not need anything, then you are totally lost.”

7.3.2 Opening doors to cross-sectoral policy planning

Given their role, leaders have more opportunities than others to engage in change-making, so it is important that they act on this responsibility in terms of delivering action-oriented systems change (Hämäläinen, 2014, Williams, 2005). Leaders clearly play an important role in setting the organisational culture, they can ‘go against the stream’ where necessary and take action that leaves people, organisations, and the public sector in a better place (Tanskanen et al., 2019; Goffee & Jones, 2000). From a human-centred perspective this applies to initiating emergent cross-cutting policy preparation and by that means, broadening the scope and quality of possible policy choices. In the research literature this function has been dealt with as *boundary spanning* requiring a different bridge-builder’s skill set and social learning (Zingale & Higl, 2021; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018; Carey et al., 2017).

Organisations differ a lot in the ways in which they react to active change-making. As described in the Finnish case-study presented in Chapter 5.4 change-makers can find themselves in very lonely positions in an organisation. The interviewees highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral training, co-creation labs and the increased use of cross-sectoral policy planning to ensure that changes to work processes respond to the needs of 2020s. In situations where public sector organisations have been slow to adapt to new cross-sectoral ways of working we have seen a stream of powerful learning and change-making networks and movements emerge, some international like One Team Government, others more country specific such as Change-Makers and Work2.0 in Finland.

Opportunities nevertheless abound in terms of adopting the human-centred, cross-sectoral approach and using it to shape the way in which the government and public sector organisations more generally organise their daily work. The conviction that these structures should enable target-

oriented co-creation, not *vice versa* was portrayed by one Director General interviewee with government agency affiliation and over 20 years of leadership experience from different government branches like this:

“And when we carried out this reform here, special attention was paid to the fact that structures must not hinder cooperation but, on the contrary, we should support the kind of structures that promote and encourage cooperation. And if only someone would shake this Government entity a little, then what could emerge in between, what kinds of new entities from different perspectives would emerge? But this basic organisation has hardly changed in recent decades. After all, the real idea of phenomenon-orientation would be both the strategic allocation of money and true co-creation.”

Another Director General with ministerial affiliation and around 20 years of leadership experience reflected the same challenge as follows:

“It is important to go into partnerships and working groups that involve other ministries and sectors, so the perspective expands and there you can learn. And even if it happens such that you are left behind or ignored or criticised, it helps to grow and understand the whole. But how is this expansion being done in the basic preparatory work - which is what the officials are doing - this should, by means of leadership, be changed to be actual preparatory [policy planning] work; anyway, the same money we use here in the end and work is done for the same employer [the state]. It shouldn't matter in which ministry's budget allocation a thing is.” One Director General with government agency affiliation and around 30 years of leadership experience described the desired changemaking thus: *“It is important to gather a bunch of people around different phenomena, albeit a little forcibly. Then we would develop in practice through work stuff. And whenever it happens that there is a work thing to do with the colleagues you have met on joint trainings, it's nice and it takes you to a whole new level.”*

Administrative pseudo co-operation was brought up as a cautionary example here. As an interviewed Secretary-of-State with over 30 years of leadership experience from several government branches put it:

“It is important that organisations collect observations and analyse them, here the level of maturity of the organisations concerned may however be very different. In this government entity, for financial and operational reasons, the cross-sectoral approach represents something of a challenge in terms of budget, functionality, and readiness. I do not see any change in the way the [policy]preparation has been made, even though the preparatory work has been formally brought under the prime minister's office. During this term of government, issues relating to our sector have been at the forefront of governmental business, but this has also brought about tensions that are difficult to deal with. Especially if drastic solutions are made quickly without multi-angled dialogue.”

Tackling complex social phenomena requires multifaceted thinking, the broad inclusion of different parties and reaching out to include the construction of new solutions from a human-centred point of view. In this challenging undertaking where of boundary spanning is a necessity, leadership meta-skills are very much required. Paying attention to meta-

skills increases leadership capabilities in “*boundary-spanning behaviour*” which, according to van Meerkerk & Edelenbos (2018), portrays itself in the facilitative style of project management, paying attention to empowerment and integrative participation, as well as resources mobilisation and creating space for the change from the executive side. When different people from various backgrounds collaborate meta-skilfully, the conditions for emergent learning triggering new solutions (Tynjälä et al., 2020, p. 162-164) are at place. Unlocking the potential held in the different parts of the system is not done simply by seeking uniformity but rather by creating the conditions for succeeding with different people and different viewpoints and aiming for results that are better than the separate elements involved. One Director General interviewee with government agency affiliation and around 30 years of leadership experience envisioned a good future like this:

“[...] if the Ministry of Finance were to aim for shared performance targets and leadership agreements across the administrative branches that would create joint efforts across government towards a new societal purpose and these six meta-skills would be needed in many ways and on many levels to help us succeed in that shift.”

7.4. Synthesis – learning as an integral part of human-centred leadership development

In this chapter we have discussed the role of learning in reforming public leadership and public organisations. When we focus on gearing public sector functions to better address the real needs of end-users in a cross-sectoral manner this deliberate paradigm shift in the way leadership training and learning are enabled both inside and outside public sector organisations, requires support. Leadership development has increasingly become something that is accomplished together in dialogue with other people by solving common societal, institutional, and organisational challenges.

The six public sector leadership meta-skills presented in this book provide a practical concept for accelerating the cultural shift in public organisations and institutions. Highlighting meta-skills fortifies collaboration and co-creation recognising the multiple voices within public organisations, the government and society. It also improves the public administration’s capabilities to renew its ways of working in pace with emerging societal phenomena enabling it to deliver on the needs-based public services agenda.

Through theoretical, conceptual, and empirical scrutiny we can see that the job orientation of “*a homo novicius publicae*” is

- *future driven* - with “what do we want to create in terms of the mission and purpose?” being the key question in mind.
- *daring to trust* in emergence instead of insidious planning - creating individual and joint agency.
- *context sensitive* instead of seeking one-size-fits all solutions - utilising a variety of viewpoints and people instead of looking for rigorous consensus or uniformity.

- *possesses the mindset focusing on opportunities and enabling* instead of on problems and constraints – i.e., resource-, strengths- and solution-oriented.
- *human-centred* instead of decision-maker centred – i.e., opens gates for everyday creativity and nonlinear spaces of opportunity.
- and finally *understands that legitimacy is built socially and change happens through interaction* – i.e., creating inclusion and systems' change by means of these choices.

Leadership training and learning needs updating both by public leaders themselves and by the institutions that enable learning. It also requires the development of pedagogical skills and mindsets supporting a systems view of change. Learning is an important catalyst for human-centred societal change if it is conducted in a collaborative and co-creational manner, it builds on intrinsic motivation and strengths while bearing the citizen and end-purpose of the work in mind. Succeeding in this task requires an understanding that the tools of public leadership in the 2020s stem from the promotion of cross-sectoral co-operation, enabling agency and the taking of skilful action for bridge-building between different angles of entry.

Investing in the development of leadership meta-skills equips public sector leaders with the ability to carry out human-centred government reforms and public service initiatives based on citizen's demands. This change in leadership approach is characterised by being future-driven, collaborative, and relational in the design of transformational processes while lowering the threshold for boundary crossing. It is about taking an active view of the world and of leadership instead of a problem-focused and passive structure-bound stand.

Public sector leaders need different meta-skills in different leadership positions during their career. Moreover, as organisations, institutions and governance networks evolve, new competencies are required and old ones must be discarded. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain constant learning as an essential component of public sector careers from the beginning to the end and to ask what kinds of meta-skills strengthen boundary-spanning capacities in different situations as well as triggering the emergence of new solutions for the benefit of the citizen. Human learning then is a key component of change making both at the individual level and the societal level.

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Article IV: Tammeaid, M., Virtanen, P. & Jalonen H. (2022). Upskilling public sector leadership in the context of the new normal of public governance and public policies.

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Abstract:

Building on complexity theory, on the epistemic nature of complex government institutions and on the emergence of service ecosystems addressed, for instance, in the ‘wicked problems’ literature, this paper maintains that crossing organisational boundaries and siloes within government calls for the upskilling of public sector leadership embracing meta-skills and collaborative governance. This upskilling is a prerequisite for different governance institutions to consolidate their actions supporting unified public policy interventions focusing on policy coherence and the governance capacity to deal with emergent societal phenomena.

Based on a case study from Finland, this paper maintains that investing in leadership meta-skills accelerates the shift from compartmentalised, reductionist, position-based and power-driven leadership to more future-driven, co-creational and renewal-oriented leadership. It also harnesses a leadership style that values a variety of human strengths and the ability for self-organising as the starting points rather than mistrust, command, and control.

Key words: public sector leadership, meta-skills, collaborative governance, leadership development, complexity

1. Introduction

There are many ways to approach government and its functions. A widespread tendency is to examine government through power structures based on a legislative framework and hierarchical relationships driven by that (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Torfing et al., 2020; Fawcett, 2018; Bourgon, 2017). Another approach is to highlight the government first and foremost as a sphere of political and democratic decision-making (Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016, p. 104; Dahl & Soss, 2014; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). Both angles reveal some parts of the public governance functionality while omitting others, for example the role of civil servants and civil service leaders as active agents in ensuring that public governance fulfils its role in promoting the public good (Bozeman & Crow, 2021). The dynamic leadership approach interested in how the public sector adapts to complex and constantly changing societal challenges, and plays its role as an enabler of human and societal flourishing in the complex world, leads us to pay attention to the tension between complexity throwing new challenges and

intertwined societal changes to the desks of civil servants and the classic approach to bureaucracy characterized by hierarchical decision-making, fairly stable and predictable procedures and strict division of labour in any circumstances (Martela, 2019, p. 6-7).

This paper suggests that “the new normal” for the public sector is to strive for tackling the complexity challenge. The challenges the governance is facing have been labelled as wicked, i.e., full of intertwined social problems that are difficult to define, continuously altering, easily escalating, and involving different actors with conflicting values (Termeer & Dewulf, 2018). The cumulative effects of climate change, migration flows, shifting economic patterns and new health hazards on modern societies represent examples of ambiguous and wicked problems that cannot be dealt with using standard procedures or planning rationale conducted in separate parts of the public administration (Torfing & Díaz-Gibson, 2016). Wicked problems contain inherent and conflictual problem settings and cannot be erased or solved as such (Head 2022; Termeer et al., 2015). Therefore, they are also difficult to address by any single public sector body or institution alone. They call for collaborative governance at all governance levels, cross-sectoral joint goal setting and adopting a service dominant -logic rationale (e.g., collective use of siloed financial resources) in organising public policies and ensuring policy consolidation.

This paper asks what kind of mindset and leadership skills development is needed in tackling this challenge of collaborative and future-oriented governance and making wicked problems more ‘manageable’ within government. It highlights broadening the public sector intervention logic towards more dynamic, convening, and catalytic roles also taking a multiangled view on wicked issues and furthermore citizen, service users and relevant stakeholders better on-board in decision-making and policy formation. The paper argues that taming wicked problems – or even noticing the challenges they bring – is hardly possible without obtaining meta-skills. True reciprocal collaboration across governmental siloes and sectors does not happen on its own but requires perceiving the role of meta-skills and gearing the focus of public sector leadership development to improving meta-skills.

2. What are leadership meta-skills?

From a complexity point of view, it is important to look at the government (and more generally the public sector) as a systemic whole, where collaboration is the key to finding a balanced pathway between emerging wicked problems, long-term targets, political priorities, citizen’s needs, and a variety of the permanent tasks the government must take care of in all circumstances (Head, 2022, p. 53-56; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). For example, a pandemic like Covid-19 cannot be successfully handled by seeing it only as a hazard to physical health and thus the responsibility of health sector, since it also severely impacts, for example, education, mental health, social relations, business, and the ability to earn one’s living in certain sectors as well as profoundly impacting working life more generally. Moreover, this boundary-crossing nature in respect of societal phenomena is not limited only to sudden and exceptional circumstances, but it also impacts the basic needs of human life. For example, the wellbeing of children and youth is not only derived from the policies and services specifically

targeted at them but also from the wellbeing of their parents, their labour market status, and the quality of working life as well as the urban or environmental planning surrounding family life and communities. Despite that, the wellbeing services themselves tend to be organised (legislatively and administratively) along problem-focused reductionist lines, while human life at the same time is rich and organic (McAlister, 2022).

Situations where an organisation's established operating models are no longer sufficient to take advantage of the opportunities or to combat the threats that arise from the environment have been termed 'complexity gaps' (Casti, 2012). Two strategies have been suggested for bridging the gap: one focusing on simplifying complexity (e.g., Collinson, 2014), while the other emphasises increasing organisational diversity for action (Kirton & Greene, 2017). Both strategies have their pros and cons in different situations, but simplifying complexity is more likely to lead in the direction of a dead-end. Simplification of complexity is not possible, because complexity is, by definition, a phenomenon involving ambiguity and conflicting views. Simplification strategy tends to offer sub-optimising solutions, at worst creating even more vicious challenges.

To combat the organisational tendency to respond to complexity through hierarchical, simplified, formal and top-down approaches (e.g., Uhl-Bien & Arena 2017), a focus on leadership meta-skills can play a role as a game-changer. Strengthening the public sector's capacity for increasing organisational diversity (cf. Ashby's 'the law of requisite variety', Gershenson, 2014) and policy consolidating collaborative governance are needed to gear the governance culture towards the acknowledgement of new opportunities and to use them for the benefit of the ultimate target of governance, namely, creating a better life for citizens. Tackling problematic phenomena with long-lasting and widespread effects – for example obesity or loneliness - requires approaching the multifaceted issues simultaneously from different administrative sectors and the weaving together of the horizontal networks of collaborative governance. Joining forces between different actors for a common goal is something that is particularly required when difficult challenges, different views, or divergent interests emerge in dealing with a phenomenon. Similarly, when activities or their effects are fragmented, they do not respond well to the needs of service users or citizens, thus there is a need to create new thinking and new solutions.

Cross-sectoral networks are important in consolidating public sector actions, in strengthening policy coherence and in raising governance capacity to better deal with emergent societal phenomena. To be successful, the networks have to be able to share and create meanings between different parties, manage asymmetric relations and appreciate diversity, build wider visions and new priorities in relation to social problems, create trust, win-win situations and new solutions, as well strengthening a shared commitment for action (Torfig & Días-Gibson, 2016). Success in these important and demanding horizontal tasks is hard to see without a new kind of leadership recognising, using, and consciously developing skills for bridge-building between different parties (Goldstein et al., 2017).

Adaptive, networked, and collaborative governance can refer to broad involvement of different stakeholders, citizen or service-user dialogues or inter-governmental co-operation around a shared societal concern, and it

can involve long and widespread change initiatives or be composed of short ad hoc cross-sectoral consultations (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012) but in all cases, it involves curating social space favourable for multi-angled viewing of issues at hand (Goldstein et al., 2017). These crucial skills conducting fruitful mutual learning and problem-solving we have called meta-skills.

Public sector leadership meta-skills evolved as a concept when exploring the challenges the societies and public sector are facing in 2020's in different parts of the world and pondering of how to equip public sector leaders' with learning that builds capabilities to face the complex, ever changing challenges in a non-compartmentalized but a holistic and phenomena-based way (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020; Tammeaid et al., 2022; Virtanen et al., 2022). Meta-skills can be characterized as transferrable skills promoting flexibility and relational abilities (ibid.; also Gergen, 2013). They portray themselves in a future-oriented co-creative and facilitative style of leadership, paying attention to integrative thinking, participation, and empowerment, as well as in resource mobilisation and the creation of space for the change (Virtanen et al., forthcoming 2022; Tynjälä et al., 2020, p. 162-164; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018). As such, public sector leadership meta-skills can differ in time and place, since they are needed in different contexts and situations, but as skills and capabilities they are crucial in generating renewal and good results. Looking at this challenge for co-created renewal and upskilling of leadership abilities from the point of view of coaching psychology (Figure 1.) leads us to pay attention to meta-skills.

Upskilling public sector leadership

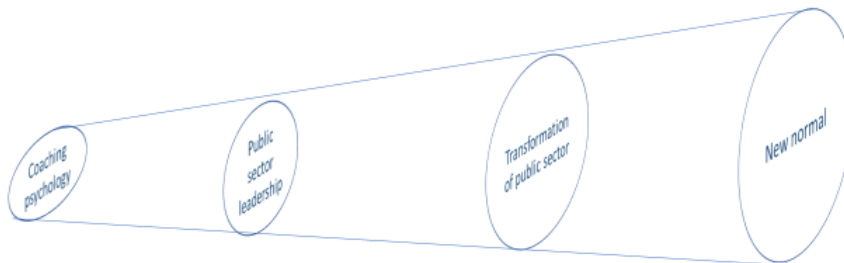


Figure 1.

Leadership meta-skills are **qualities of thought and action** that tend to shift the perception of leaders and their colleagues from restrictions and a narrow perspective (profession-specific, statutory, sector-specific) on the matter at hand to one which embraces possibilities, available resources (tangible, intangible, explicit, tacit) and the creation of longer term and joint goals with vertical and horizontal congruency (Grant, 2019). This shift is specifically required to render wicked problems more “manageable”, i.e., enabling the co-creation of cross-sectoral solutions or mitigating the consequences of wicked hardships. Gearing the focus to joint goal formulation, pragmatic action, and the co-learning of small wins (Termeer & Dewulf, 2018) can make even the wickedest problems a little bit more “manageable” and divert attention away from the vastness of problems and

onto available resources, possibilities for action and an orientation to the future (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020).

3. Empirical reflections from Finland

Last year, 22 high ranking civil service leaders working for central government in Finland were interviewed to explore how top civil service leaders (i.e., Secretaries-Of-State, Under-Secretaries-Of-State and Director Generals) from different ministries and other government functions identify and understand the role of meta-skills in their work. In the interviews they described how meta-skilfulness is portrayed in the thinking, leadership behaviour and performance of a top civil service leader (Virtanen et al., forthcoming 2023). The interview material gathered confirms that leadership meta-skills accelerate 1) the shift from compartmentalised, reductionist, position-based and power-driven leadership to more future-driven, co-creational and renewal-oriented leadership. At the same time meta-skills also 2) harness a leadership style that values a variety of human strengths and the ability for self-organisation as its starting points rather than the traditional tropes associated with mistrust, command, and control.

In the interviews we were especially interested in six meta-skills (Figure 2.) facilitating good trans-contextual interaction and promoting integrative change and renewal (Tammeaid et al., 2022; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, 2021): 1) learning to learn - i.e. nurturing positive curiosity and the leader's own learning ability in the routine and bustle of everyday work, 2) taking systems approach – understanding the public sector as a web of societal interactors working for the benefit of the society and the citizen as a whole, 3) dialogical positioning – both a reciprocal and equal communication attitude and a skill of interaction, giving room for different views expanding everyone's understanding of the issue at hand, 4) thinking skills – the ability to break away from habitual thought patterns and look at things from versatile, surprising, and creative perspectives, 5) enabling mindset – the ability to appreciate different abilities and to see opportunities and versatile action options even in difficult situations, to seize the opportunity and build the conditions for renewal, and 6) putting things into practice – trying new ways of working quickly and shaping the future through action.

ROLE OF PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP META-SKILLS IN CULTURAL SHIFT OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS THE REQUIREMENTS OF 2020'S

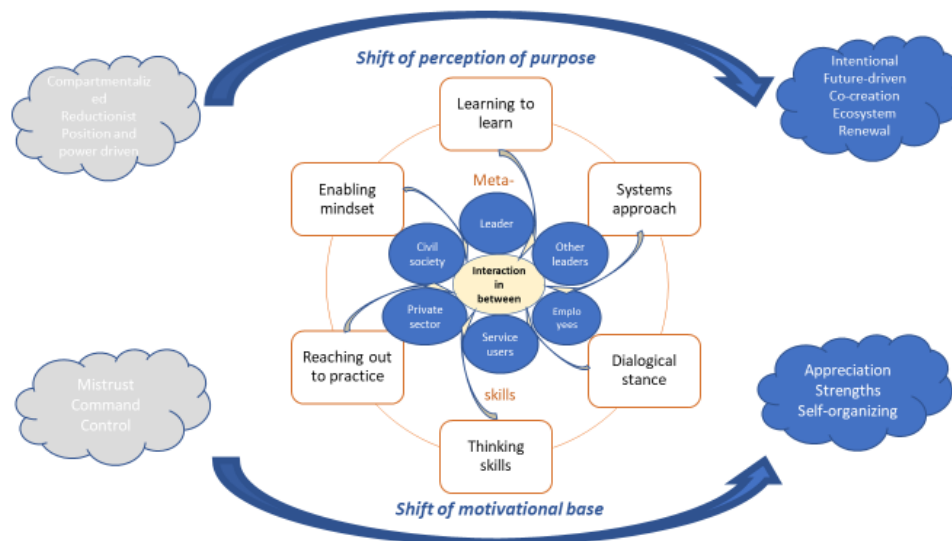


Figure 2.

According to the Finnish interview material gathered, this shift in the perceptions of the purpose of governance (Figure 2.) towards the helicopter view or “the whole” is portrayed in these public sector leaders’ **thinking**, i.e., in the deepened understanding of everything new being born in the interfaces of different fields and that there is no “pure knowledge” for decision-making anywhere – also experts opinions differ according to and within the field. Furthermore, in understanding that dialogue is a prerequisite for knowledge creation and decision-making and in recognition that deep listening and showing appreciation does not mean agreeing with someone’s opinions or interpretations. And finally, in the insight that any desired change is a timely process.

The future-driven, co-creational and renewal-oriented goal setting was portrayed in leaders’ **relational orientation**, i.e., in being explicit in one’s own behaviour so that others feel that they can express themselves without fear; finding that the essence of leadership is portrayed in attuning to developments in the world more than to management systems while focusing only on the issues of one’s own sector is not enough and in developing one’s own skills in relation to deep listening and dialogue, as well as personally holding an interest in issues beyond one’s own field, and **view of good performance**, i.e., not just “performing in one’s own expertise area” but helping the government as whole to achieve its societal goals, not working only here and now, but towards the future; investing time and effort in thorough discussions and in creating common targets (not rushing to conclusions) and highlighting that a good decision is not a partial result achieved via rational reasoning, but something that connects to the context and entirety in a purposeful way; also actively opening channels of communication and discussion with civil society and the private sector and not losing track of the every-day challenges in the field even at the highest cadre level.

Meta-skilful leadership can be viewed in opposition to the narrowing of leadership down to management processes and the misunderstanding that a decision-making process cannot be dialogic. It is also an antidote to turning a blind eye to hard unsolved matters and hoping that somebody else takes on the task of agency. Meta-skills also draw attention to the fact that decisions do not implement themselves, that leading strategy execution is necessary and also a part of decision-makers job description – and starts already in the way decisions are prepared.

Meta-skills, as defined above, also shift the motivational base of agency and action (Figure 2.) in the civil service. According to the interviews the shift is portrayed in adopting an **appreciative attitude** echoing a positive perception of human beings, renewing mindsets rather than computer systems, shifting the focus from control, order and prohibition to creating the circumstances for people to make their own choices and succeed. This also involves seeing the nature of people and organisations as becoming (instead of being) and also recognising the leader's own biases, perceptions and basic assumptions while also being ready to treat them critically.

This appreciative leadership orientation is primarily revealed in the leader's **every-day behaviour** of providing their own example in terms of dialogic leadership and thus in breaking ingrained expectations of 'the omniscient boss', harnessing one's own ability to be fully present in various situations and connecting to different realities. In practice, this is often about learning to ask better questions and in such a way that provokes positive curiosity and creativity, organising workshops alongside and as part of meeting-driven policy preparation processes, showing the way to understanding the big picture, future vision and strategic goals and making room for people to find different ways to reach them.

The shift towards an appreciative and strengths-based, (i.e., enabling) leadership style (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p.107) described above does not happen with ossified perceptions of human development possibilities, micromanaging, keeping up the expectations of hierarchical all-knowing management and organisational defences or without learning to ask, 'what is well', 'what is working' and 'how do we co-create paths forward'.

4. Meta-skills and wicked public policy problems

The value of public sector leadership in dealing with complex challenges in public sector functions and policy-making meta-skills stems from three sources: **1)** meta-skilfulness helps to notice and identify occasions where proceeding along the established administrative pathways is not sufficient or enough from the perspective of the larger purpose or the viewpoint of the citizen/end-user and therefore more multi-angled coalitions are needed for policy or decision-making, **2)** it turns the complexity challenge that is already quite well described in research literature into actionable skills that can be learned, trained, developed, and harnessed, and **3)** point out that true reciprocal collaboration across governmental siloes and sectors does not happen on its own within the public sector characterized by strong inherited bureaucratic traditions of vertical and horizontal compartmentalization. It requires noticing the role of meta-skills and gearing the focus of public sector leadership development to improving meta-skills.

The first challenge mentioned above, noticing and identifying occasions where proceeding along the established administrative ways is not sufficient or enough, underlines the point that complexity informed governance capacity requires paying attention to perception and learning as an everyday duty and possibility in the civil service. A narrow understanding of effectiveness and productivity combined with a rapid multidirectional information flow, a highly politicised public decision-making environment, conflicting objectives, and the continual development over time of citizen's needs creates a bad mix easily dropping out thinking time and the need for copious cross-sectoral co-creation time in order to tackle challenging societal phenomena.

Thanks to tightly packed schedules and technology, it is not however uncommon for leaders and others to go through an entire working day without any opportunities for anything else than linear thought and just responding to issues flowing in (Seppälä, 2022; Rosenhead et al, 2019). Such a situation takes us far from the ideal of enabling leadership creating platforms for success in renewal and broadening the width of the policy palette in terms of collaborative governance and people-orientation (Virtanen et al., forthcoming 2023). This situation is, moreover, particularly deleterious in the fast-paced and turbulent work of government leaders whose activity has long-lasting and widespread effects on society.

For **the second challenge mentioned above** meta-skills fill the gap of complexity and wicked problems challenge well described in research literature (Head 2022; Termeer & Dewulf, 2018; Termeer et al., 2015), but seldom translated to actionable skills or otherwise scrutinized from the point of view of upskilling needed. We suggest that, in the context of public sector leadership, there are benefits in applying the idea of upskilling along the lines paved by applied positive psychology, i.e., by placing the interface of skills and context at the centre of the process (Linley et al., 2007). Skills development is central in accelerating and deepening interaction (Basten & Haamann, 2018, p. 10) and meta-skills provide an important issue to recognise by leadership trainers and developers working to promote leadership improvement within government.

The third challenge mentioned above, the true reciprocal collaboration across governmental siloes and sectors, does not happen on its own within the public sector bearing robust bureaucratic traditions of vertical and horizontal compartmentalization. To develop in pace of the societies and global challenges public administrations have to pay attention in developing public sector leadership meta-skills with conscious dynamic and structural measures (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020). Meta-skills are important in preparing the ground for public governance that is constantly learning alongside its every-day work. There is no single appropriate way to organize public sector responses to wicked problems (Daviter, 2017, p. 581). Policy studies have a tendency to highlight importance of analyzing and comparing alternative strategies and seeking to match normative choices to different kind of challenges (Daviter, 2017, p. 584). From the point of view of open systems and learning approach that might not be the most fruitful way to approach complexity. It continues to uphold the idea that societies and organizations can be ruled and controlled. Approached from open systems angle, complexity is characterised by unpredictability and is not redactable to its components (Cilliers, 2000, p. 24). However, this does not mean that

nothing can be done, and the governments are helpless when faced with complexity. Meta-skills approach suggests that consciously building individual and collective skills for facing changing and unpredictable developments is an agile and sustainable way of raising public sector preparedness for cross-sectoral collaborative action, and now timelier than ever before.

5. Meta-skills in the context of collaborative leadership

Collaborative governance has been defined first and foremost as a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage with non-state stakeholders in a collective and deliberative decision-making process (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Subsequently, Emerson et al. (2012) developed a broader definition of collaborative governance which also including the work across the boundaries of public agencies and levels of government and fulfilling public purpose by that (Emerson, 2012). This is an important amendment, since compartmentalised government governing structures also demand an increased collaboration across different line ministries as well as sectors and levels of government, such that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts (also Head, 2022, pp. 54-56). In order to find novel solutions to intertwined phenomena both are required: cross-sectoral collaboration and solution-building within government and the involvement of civil society, including citizens and service users.

Collaborative governance is not just networking but aims to produce a concrete outcome and strives to build broad ownership and a multilateral experimentation or implementation-base for advancement. According to Emerson et al. (2012) acknowledging the interdependence between fields as well as leadership play an important role in terms of driving collaborative governance (Emerson et al., 2012). The research literature of collaborative governance has introduced roles of a convener, facilitator, and catalyst (Torfing et al., 2020, p. 294; Torfing & Días-Gibson, 2017; Hartley et al., 2013) as an answer to developing capabilities for collaboration and public sector innovation. How these roles are adopted is however less addressed in the literature of collaborative governance.

Also, adaptive leadership bears kinship with public sector leadership meta-skills. Adaptive leadership has highlighted the role of informal leadership processes that generate adaptivity and new solutions, engage people across differences and facilitate recombination (Uhl-Bien, 2021, p. 151; Murphy et al., 2017, p. 695). Also, leadership capabilities like relationship building, open-mindedness, building interactive dynamics and social capital as important ingredients in successful adaptive governance can be found in research literature (Wilson et al., 2020, p. 27; Galuska, 2014, p. 35). Partly the research literature of adaptive leadership focuses more on identifying structural and policy mechanisms increasing the adaptability of the governance (Garavaglia et al., 2021; Keys et al., 2014).

In general, the leader-centred approach on leadership seems to sneak into even the best pieces of collaborative governance and adaptive leadership literature repeating the 'leader sets the strategy', 'leader selects the "right" team for the issue', 'leader clarifies the roles' canon of official authority (for example Torfing & Días-Gibson, 2016, p. 107) or referring to charisma and personal traits as key success factors (Sharma-Wallace, 2017, p. 174, 180).

Characteristics for meta-skills approach is looking at leadership as truly shared, i.e., beginning from a collective and systemic framework (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2021, p. 2). This makes it also suitable in terms of navigating the complex world and its intertwined issues. Gathering cross-sectoral and multi-angled human, financial and intellectual resources around solution-finding and decision-making, requires getting rid of the leader- and position-centric view of leadership. Conceiving leadership as a social process is platform building for collaborative action and gathering a wide pool of competences for solution-building around wicked problems. Instead of building a team according to the rationale of one leader, meta-skilful dialogical leadership uses 'we-language', makes proposals and is curious of other understandings. With this it, at the same time, builds reciprocity and trust, two crucial elements of collaboration (for example Liu et al., 2022). DeRue points out that the majority of leadership research is sticking to the idea of permanent roles of leadership and followership, though in shared leadership these appear in two-way and changing patterns according to an issue at hand (DeRue, 2011, p.133-135).

6. Conclusions and further research agenda

In the complex world of wicked problems, the task of an effective leadership is to create the conditions for success and foster the emergence of shared learning spaces for the wider system and its parts (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021; Bateson, 2015; Nonaka, 1994). A transition needing attention, mindset change and updating is the way we see leadership. The world is full of (public and other) organisations that would like to see others embrace their mission and help them to achieve their goals more effectively. Meta-skilful leadership instead gears the focus to the building of joint purpose, joint targets, and the viewpoint of the end-user/citizen. Embedded in meta-skills thinking lies the understanding that public sector leadership meta-skills are useful as applied in relation to the situation and environment, and that makes them especially useful in facing complex challenges (Tammeaid et al, 2022; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020).

It is fair then to say that the research on public leadership meta-skills is still far from fertile yet. Although meta-skills are a generic feature of human behaviour and skillsets all over the world, it is likely that cultural differences exist in terms of their prevalence and importance across different governance traditions. Based on our sample of top civil service leaders, we know only about the characteristics of government leadership meta-skills in Finland. It would be interesting and important for to extend the examination of meta-skills to other countries, different cultural, socio-economical contexts, and administrative traditions as well as regional and local governance levels.

Governments all over the world face similar types of challenges and have started to generate response to them via different type of action and movements like the reimagining government initiative in Australia and New Zealand (<https://www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/resources-tlss/reimagining-government/reimagining-government-2021>), the One-Team-Government movement, that has already spread to many countries (<https://www.oneteamgov.uk/>) and investment in the coaching and innovation skills of public sector leaders for example in Singapore (information obtained via interviews at Prime Minister's Office, Singapore

in Summer 2018). It would be valuable to gain more scholarly attention to leadership meta-skills and gradually accumulate knowledge of meta-skills as an empirical phenomenon. Further research would be also required in relation to how the atypical and creative solutions of meta-skilful collaborative governance co-exist with rigid top-down approaches and what kinds of dynamics are created in such mixed and fluid situations.

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