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Leading for better outcomes: Social work

as knowledge work.

1 **Abstract**

2   This article explores how leadership practices have the potential to improve decisions

3   and outcomes in social work. Through a literature review, the article identifies social

4   work managers' use of adaptive, administrative and enabling leadership functions and

5   how such functions can aid social workers' performance. The findings indicate that

6   enabling leadership practices are the most prevalent in aiding social workers'

7   performance. In addition, an increasing amount of administrative practices may limit

8   managers' ability to balance the three leadership functions properly, reducing the

9   positive effect of leadership on outcomes. The article concludes with identifying key

10   knowledge gaps to be considered for future research on leadership in social work.

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14 'Leadership' is difficult to define, often leading to problems explaining what leadership is and

15 why we need it (Sullivan 2016; Kelly 2008). Consequently, a wide variety of leadership

16 frameworks aim to break the convoluted term into specific functions that represent some

17 aspect of leaders' contributions (Fernandez, Cho, and Perry 2010; Yukl 2002). Functions are

18 combined with other elements, such as skills and traits, to create integrated models for

19 leadership (Yukl 2002). One such framework with great promise for social work is

20 complexity leadership theory (CLT), based on theories from leading knowledge organisations.

21 CLT divides leadership into three interlinked and necessary functions performed in these

22 organisations: adaptive, administrative and enabling functions (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009).

23   Knowledge work is defined as work in which individuals' main contribution is their

24 use of knowledge, which organisations utilise in service delivery (Sullivan 1999). This article

25 view social workers as knowledge workers who apply their professional knowledge, which

1   social work organisations utilise to deliver services. Leadership theories emerging from

2   knowledge organisations are good tools for identifying and categorising leadership practices

3   in social work because these organisations share similarities in how knowledge is used and

4   how complex decisions are made. Thus, CLT provides a framework for understanding and

5   describing what leadership is and can be in social work and also provides a language for

6   categorising how leadership practices may affect social workers' performance, and in turn, aid

7   or limit outcomes.

8   Especially promising is the CLT framework's ability to designate a specific adaptive

9   function that describes how leaders empower employees to handle situations as they appear,

10 thereby allowing organisations to adapt to changing demands and resources. A changing

11 society presents new challenges, including demographic changes due to an increase in

12 refugees and other factors that may alter social workers' clientele, the ability to adapt is

13 important. In turn, a leadership framework that incorporates this adaptive function is also

14 important.

15   As far back as the 1920s, leadership in social work has been considered an important

16 factor for organisational performance and quality of services (Sullivan 2016). A literature

17 review by Peters (2017) suggested that the social work field in the US lacks leadership, which

18 Peters attributed to an uncertain professional identity, insufficient training, sexism,

19 discrimination and power. In contrast, this literature review examines how leadership is

20 described and performed in social work with an emphasis on the English-speaking world and

21 Europe in order to better understand the type of leadership, the challenges faced, and how

22 leadership affects social workers. Treating leadership as an input factor that affects social

23 workers' performance underscores its significance as an organisational factor and an

24 important influence on better outcomes and services.

1   I use the term 'manager' to describe a formal manager who performs a leadership

2 function. While leadership does not need to reside in formal managers, this article examines

3 research on how formal managers in social work practice adaptive, administrative and

4 enabling leadership functions, and how these practices influence social workers' performance.

5 This article defines leadership as including all aspects of managerial and leadership functions

6 and practices that influence others to do better (Drucker and Smith 1967), which is a broader

7 definition than leadership as concerned only with creating change (Roberts and Hacker 2003).

8 This broader understanding better captures the essence of the leadership that a formal

9 manager executes to influence organisational performance (Sullivan 2016). Therefore, certain

10 leadership practices can contribute to better organisational performance, while others can

11 limit it. This being said, 'good' or 'bad' leadership is an oversimplification as leadership

12 appears to be largely contextual (Castelnovo, Popper, and Koren 2017), or the 'right'

13 leadership for a particular situation (Ladkin 2010). This makes it essential that we study

14 leadership also in the field of social work.

15   In this next section, I introduce CLT and the argument for its utility for the social work

16 profession. Next, I present a literature review on social work leadership, outlining a

17 conceptualisation of how the three functions I have described are realised as leadership

18 practices in social work and how these practice influence social workers' performance. After

19 a discussion of the findings, I identify key knowledge gaps for future research.

20 **Complexity leadership theory in social work**

21 Complexity leadership theory (CLT) is a framework for knowledge organisations that

22 includes adaptive, administrative and enabling leadership functions (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and

23 McKelvey 2007). These functions are interlinked, meaning that organisations need all three

24 functions, albeit to varying degrees and for varying reasons. This tension strengthens the

1   framework, allowing us to identify how the interactions between the different functions can

2   pose challenges for managers (Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson 2016; Yukl 1989).

3   Although others within an organisation may perform these functions (Uhl-Bien,

4   Marion, and McKelvey 2007), for this article, I focus on how formal managers use them with

5   employees to provide information and support (<u>adaptive</u>), to exercise control and reporting

6   tasks (<u>administrative)</u> and to mediate adaptive and administrative functions in the organisation

7   (<u>enabling)</u>. The formal manager applies these functions to facilitate employees' creative and

8   adaptive capacity within the organisations' formalised structures, such as controls, laws and

9   budgetary demands, among other elements (Lawler and Bilson 2009). The characteristics of

10   these interlinked functions are discussed in more detail, with invented examples to illustrate

11   how they may be manifest in a social work organisation.

12   ***Adaptive leadership***

13   Adaptive leadership is an 'informal emergent dynamic that occurs among individual

14   interactive agents' (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 305). Adaptive leadership aids

15   members of an organisation to interact to solve problems. Concerned with empowerment,

16   adaptive leadership is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the more controlling

17   administrative leadership function (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). Adaptive

18   managers facilitate employees close to a situation to use their knowledge to make decisions

19   that stimulate adaptive outcomes (Lichtenstein et al. 2006).

20   Adaptive managers stimulate adaptive practices by facilitating interaction and

21   exchange of knowledge among employees (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). They aid

22   information distribution and enhance collaboration and coordination among employees

23   through efforts such as teamwork. Good adaptive managers use their knowledge to create

24   visions and goals and then facilitate employees' performance as they empower them to do

25   their jobs (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). Adaptive managers rely on the principle

1 that empowered employees close to a situation possess more information and ability than a

2 hierarchical leader removed from it.

3   One strength of adaptive leadership is the ability to address emerging challenges,

4 which, similar to 'wicked problems', are too complex to be solved with existing procedures or

5 knowledge (Grint 2005). As both a process and a leadership function, adaptive leadership

6 facilitates interaction, with the belief that the interaction of knowledgeable employees, and

7 not a manager's directions, will allow the organisation to respond to changing environments

8 and create solutions for the problems at hand (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007).

9 Adaptive managers plan, facilitate, aid and develop rather than tell and control.

10   Adaptive leadership is exemplified in a social work office when a manager prioritises

11 time for the social workers to meet on a Monday morning to discuss difficult cases from the

12 previous and upcoming weeks, despite a busy schedule. Adaptive leadership practices

13 continuously emphasise and protect the importance of these interactive, interpersonal and

14 empowered processes among employees.

15 *Administrative leadership*

16 On the other end of the spectrum, administrative leadership is exercised, often by a classical

17 hierarchical leader, through coordinating and structuring activities having to do with work

18 management (Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson 2016). Where the adaptive manager is

19 concerned with interactive processes, the administrative manager is concerned with control

20 and hierarchy. Using their hierarchical authority, the administrative manager aligns goals and

21 preferences through implementing, controlling, and managing administrative tasks (Uhl-Bien,

22 Marion, and McKelvey 2007).

23   An example of this function in a social work office is when a manager organises the

24 same Monday morning meeting but asks employees to write a plan for the week, setting

25 targets that allow the manager to control organisational resources and account for the office's

1 production. These practices and functions, which may easily be labelled bureaucratic 'red-

2 tape', are somewhat necessary to ensure service delivery (Ebsen 2016).

3 *Enabling leadership*

4 Although necessary, administrative leadership tends to limit adaptive leadership, and thus a

5 tension is manifest between autonomy and control in a modern 'commercialised

6 professionalism' (Hanlon 1998). Between these elements of empowerment and control lies

7 the third leadership function—enabling leadership—which serves to motivate and spur

8 performance within a hierarchical structure.

9 Enabling leadership is the mediator between administrative and adaptive leadership,

10 allowing adaptive leadership to thrive by managing the clash between adaptive and

11 administrative logics (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009). Such mediating efforts may include

12 motivation, implementation and translation of the logics of hierarchy and professionalism so

13 that they align. Tailoring administrative and adaptive functions to work together, enabling

14 leadership facilitates the flow of knowledge and creativity from adaptive to administrative

15 structures and vice versa (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009).

16 Enabling leadership is most valuable to organisations in which adaptive and

17 administrative functions are not effectively interlinked. In such cases, the enabling function

18 becomes the linkage to balance and interpret the other functions. For example, a manager may

19 find a way to align the organisation's need for written reports with the social workers' need to

20 spend time with clients by communicating the importance of both. Adept in both functions,

21 the enabling leader may be concerned with aiding and empowering social workers within the

22 hierarchical structure or with increasing control, depending on the needs and the particular

23 organisation's balance between administrative and adaptive functions.

24 Enabling managers are able to understand the context in order to identify when to

25 prioritise administrative or adaptive leadership, a skill that requires them to be able to foster

practices that increase interaction and interdependency among employees (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). If the administrative aspects are too dominant, the enabling leader may empower employees by giving them freedom to act in teams. Likewise, when control is lacking, these leaders may instruct employees or implement rules to ensure practices are performed. As enabling leadership is exercised differently depending on organisational needs, an understanding of how social work managers may practice this role is essential to understanding leadership in the profession.

In the social work office, the enabling function may be exemplified when managers motivate and ensure that social workers follow up with their allotted clients by controlling production. Alternatively, managers may practice enabling leadership as they allow social workers to work adaptively, lifting quotas and permitting a team effort to spend time solving a tough case.

Social work and CLT

A central tenet of CLT is that leadership is not based in hierarchical authority alone, but rather is a complex distributed process of interaction and co-creation among individuals with knowledge (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). CLT is useful for social work and other human service organisations, predicated on highly knowledgeable employees in settings that require a balance between professional autonomy and organisational control (Hasenfeld 2015). CLT efficiently incorporates the combination of freedom and control that characterises leadership in social work. Such a leadership model facilitates adaptive systems, allowing individual knowledge workers to utilise their expertise, while exerting some administrative control and standardisation to ensure that the work is accomplished with the right quality and tempo.

For social work, like in other professions experiencing tensions between administrative control and professional autonomy (Øverbye 2013; Aili, Nilsson, Svensson,

1   and Denicolo 2007), striking a balance between adaptive and administrative functions is

2   especially important. Such a balance includes the degree of control and freedom social

3   workers are allowed in their role, as well as the identification of enabling practices that affect

4   performance, while acknowledging that measuring 'performance' in such work is difficult

5   because of conflicting demands and measurement challenges (Andersen, Boesen, and

6   Pedersen 2016). Studies included utilize a variety of performance measures, such as

7   production numbers, self-reports, motivation and satisfaction. Neither of these are perfects

8   measures, but they are used to indicate 'performance' to some degree. In addition, knowledge

9   work and social work are both exercised within organisations that must be considered

10 complex as they manoeuvre fields with a high-degree of causal uncertainty, tacit knowledge,

11 contradicting demands and intertwined processes (O'Sullivan 2010; Fossestøl et al. 2015;

12 Leung 2007, 2009; Hasenfeld 2015).

13   Bearing these similarities in mind, the social work profession may glean lessons about

14 leadership from other knowledge work. To that end, this article reviews published articles to

15 conceptualise CLT practices in social work, identifying what may work to improve

16 performance and how these functions interact with each other in the context of social work.

17 **Method**

18 I operationalised this literature review of leadership in social work as leadership studies

19 related to the needs of the employees, experience of leaders and normative writings on

20 leadership in social work. My criterion for inclusion was 'leadership of social workers', and

21 therefore, articles on 'leadership of clients' were not included, nor were articles about

22 leadership outside of social work. The broad understanding of what constitutes 'social work'

23 posed a challenge, which I solved by including only research identified as social work or

24 appearing in such journals.

To collect the literature, I performed a search for 'management + social work' and 'leadership + 'social work' through Web of Science (TS), and a supplemental search through Google Scholar to identify articles not found by Web of Science. These searches led to abstracts of more than 900 published articles including duplicates. After reading abstracts to remove those that did not fit the criterion, I used a 'snowball-approach' to identify additional articles and books through references frequently cited in the articles I had read. The total number of reviewed texts numbered more than 1,000, including duplicates.

The 48 articles used for this review were taken from the 1,000, excluding all duplicates and any that did not fulfil the criterion, and are presented in tables and discussed in the findings section. This review represents a comprehensive look into the current state of leadership studies of social work. Although some articles are surely missing, this review provides as complete a picture of the field of peer-reviewed articles on leadership in social work as possible.

A majority of the research is from the English-speaking world and European countries like Sweden and Finland. Despite the different locations, they describe similar trends. These similarities suggest that international studies can be relevant for a Nordic context, although additional research on leadership is necessary within the specific Nordic social work context. Especially so because of the tight integration with public welfare services and the welfare state. In addition, the data do not allow a comparison of the role of national context and any related differences, which would be interesting for future articles to examine. This article may inspire future research on leadership and CLT practices in social work.

Most of the articles are conceptual, utilising previous research to describe leadership practices. These conceptual articles are used at the beginning of each section to identify which adaptive, administrative and enabling practices researchers were able to identify. Next, empirical studies are discussed to identify managers' adaptive, administrative and enabling

1 practices. Research aimed at testing the effects of leadership are discussed towards the end of

2 each section to indicate how adaptive, administrative and enabling practices may impact

3 performance in social work organisations.

4 *Limitations*

5 This study is a conceptualisation of how complex leadership functions are practiced in social

6 work. The concepts are ideals that describe the researcher's findings of leadership in social

7 work organisations and are not intended to be an accurate description of every social work

8 manager. Rather, this study is a collection of the ways research has captured social work

9 managers' practices described through my categorisation of them as adaptive, administrative

10 or enabling functions.

11 The article discusses how leadership can be a positive force for social work, enabling

12 social workers to do their jobs and thereby providing better delivery and outcomes for clients.

13 The potential negative effects of leadership are real (Shipman and Mumford 2011) and should

14 always be considered to avoid seeing leadership as purely a beneficial organisational input.

15 This article discusses the effects of different leadership practices, but little research on

16 detrimental practices was found, which represents a limitation for this study and for the field

17 as we risk ignoring potential detrimental effects from leadership.

18 **Findings**

19 *Adaptive managers*

20 Adaptive leadership practices, identified in Table 1, include vague categories like ensuring

21 information flow, assessing problems and communicating desired results (Jacques 1998).

22 Similarly, Wimpfheimer (2004) mentions practices such as advocacy, governance and

23 planning as important for social work leaders. Other researchers cite adaptive leadership traits

24 as creating a vision (Holosko 2009) and having a boundary-spanning work function (Menefee

25 1998). Rank and Hutchison (2000) interviewed social work managers who noted the

importance of maintaining the profession's reputation, a dedication to ethical standards and altruism. Lawler and Bilson (2009) see managers as having a responsibility to be reflective and to develop adaptive powers among their employees. Although guidelines and procedures cannot stop errors, they argue that reflective capabilities are imperative to tackle the unique problems inherent in social work.

[TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]

In empirical studies, hospital directors of social work saw strategic elements related to their positions as a major part of their jobs (Guo and Company 2007). Similarly, a small survey on social work managers in the health care sector revealed managers as aware of challenges and a changing world around them (Mizrahi and Berger 2001).

Among the few studies identifying the effect of adaptive practices is a US study on learning and innovation in non-profit human services agencies (Elpers and Westhuis 2008). This study showed a relationship between employee perceptions of top management's support for innovation and employees' trust in management and their perceptions of organisational commitment and of their supervisors' support for their empowerment. These findings suggest that adaptive managers who communicate top management's support for employees work can increase feelings of empowerment, trust and commitment among employees.

Administrative managers

Rather than examining leadership at the practitioner level by describing practices, most research on the administrative function look at the context in which leadership occurs. Context is an important mediator for what managers are able and expected to do because managers must receive support to be successful (Obolensky 2014). Managers who do not

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1   receive support in resources, time and other necessary measures will encounter challenges to

2   their leadership.

3   The context for leadership in social work appears to be trending towards a distribution

4   of managerial powers to the local level in the UK and Nordic countries (Lawler and Bilson

5   2009; Harris 1998; Dustin 2016; Kirkpatrick 2006; Øverbye 2013; Fossestøl et al. 2015;

6   Christensen and Lægreid 2011). At the same time, this trend may not mean increased

7   discretion for local managers because local control is paired with greater standardisation and

8   increased performance demands (Carey 2003; Mizrahi and Berger 2005; Lawler and Bilson

9   2009; Røysum 2010). Some find increased control to be hurtful to employees, services and

10 clients because managers lack time to lead (Shanks 2016; Mizrahi and Berger 2005; Olsen

11 2016), plan (Shanks 2016; Healy 2002; Egan 2012), exercise organisational influence (Shanks

12 2016) and perform social work (Aronson and Smith 2010; Shanks 2016; Healy 2002; Carey

13 2003). Others studies indicate that as increased managerialism has delegated more control,

14 autonomy and influence to the local level, more room has been created for practicing social

15 work in the discretionary 'grey areas' (Berg, Barry, and Chandler 2008; Evans 2009, 2011;

16 Kirkpatrick 2006).

17   According to the literature, social work managers perform plenty of administrative

18 tasks—perhaps too many to be able to fully function as adaptive and enabling leaders—and

19 may experience their role as administrators as both limiting and empowering. However, little

20 research exists on specific administrative leadership practices. Therefore, I have identified

21 two types of managerial identities which influence leadership practice, one that managers find

22 limiting and the other, a hybrid that has positive effects on managers (Noordegraaf 2015).

23 These types are summarised in Table 2.

24

25 [TABLE 2 NEAR HERE]

Administrative managers are frequently found to engage in management and social work tasks, which necessitates the ability of these managers to balance both. Thus, they experience their administrative leadership role as either limiting or compatible with their professional identity. Some managers favour the administrative function with control and standardisation (Carey 2003; Mizrahi and Berger 2005; Lawler and Bilson 2009; Røysum 2010), and thus, see themselves as more managers than social workers (Olsen 2016; Lawler and Hearn 1997). On the other hand, some are able to keep their identity as social workers despite increasing managerialism, taking on a hybrid role (Shanks 2016; Evans 2009; Egan 2012; Kirkpatrick 2006). Shanks (2016) looked beyond identity to practices among Swedish social work managers, finding that heavy demands of administrative leadership responsibilities leave social work managers limited ability to perform adaptive and enabling leadership.

From the challenges to the managerial role with more emphasis on control to the hybridization experienced by some managers, the literature indicates that administrative tasks can limit leaders' ability to perform enabling and adaptive leadership functions. Although some leaders report that an expanding administrative function has allowed them to act with more managerial discretion. Managers appear to face a balancing act between becoming overextended with too many tasks and having sufficient responsibility and discretion to lead.

Enabling managers

The literature I examined reflects a strong tradition for interpersonal leadership in social work, representing the enabling leadership function. Managers are described as empowering their employees through supervision, development and distribution of power rather than control.

Enabling leadership practices, as shown in Table 3, include supporting employees' participation while also controlling and evaluating them (Jacques 1998), which underscores the interrelated nature of adaptive, administrative and enabling functions. Wimpfheimer (2004) cites leadership traits such as development and human resource management to improve management skills in social work organisations, and researchers see interpersonal 'social-work values' as valuable for managers (Moran, Frans, and Gibson 1995; Tolleson Knee 2014). Lawler (2007) suggests that many interpersonal aspects of leadership, such as professional identity and teamwork, are inherent to social work. The literature indicates that social work managers are good at practicing interpersonal traits, focused on creating positive change for employees (Holosko 2009), which suggests that they possess the necessary skills for enabling leadership.

Empirical research that can be identified with enabling leadership practices in social work concentrates on the importance of interpersonal relations and collaboration (Beddoe, Davys, and Adamson 2014; Menefee 1998; Menefee and Thompson 1994) as well as distributed leadership (De Gibaja 2001) and enabling dialogue among social workers (Leung 2009). These interpersonal practices include supervision (Beddoe, Davys, and Adamson 2014), relationship-building (De Gibaja 2001) and motivation and support (Gellis 2001; York 1996). Managers are reported to find joy in interacting with their employees and making a difference (Watson and Hoefer 2016). Rating 'people skills' as the most important skill set, social work managers in Hoefer's (2003) study saw themselves as having characteristics of interpersonal enabling leadership. US social work managers indicated they spend more time on adaptive and enabling leadership functions (supervision, facilitation, communication and teaming-building) than administrative functions such as policy and resource management

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1 (Menefee 1998). In addition to this research, a whole field of literature, beyond the scope of

2 this review, examines the effects of supervision and in-job training, with obvious similarities

3 in the utility of close one-to-one contact (see Magnussen 2015).

4   Studies measuring the effect of enabling leadership largely indicate that managers who

5 support and motivate their employees, and with whom employees identify, increase employee

6 well-being and self-reported performance. Employees describe these enabling leaders as

7 representatives for the organisation (Eisenberger et al. 2010), going beyond self-interest

8 (Gellis 2001), interacting individually with employees (Gellis 2001; Jaskyte 2004), acting

9 more transformational than transactional (Mary 2005; Gellis 2001; Sullivan 2012; Tafvelin,

10 Hyvönen, and Westerberg 2014; Fisher 2009) and providing supervisory support (Acquavita

11 et al. 2009; Smith and Shields 2013). A meta-study of a combined 10,867 employees in child

12 welfare, social work and mental health indicated that supportive practices such as task

13 assistance, social and emotional support and supervisory interpersonal interactions were

14 positively related to 'beneficial outcomes', including satisfaction, organisational commitment,

15 empowerment and well-being (Barak et al. 2009).

16   Other research indicates that traditional 'soft leadership', such as transformational and

17 relational leadership, may not be the only means to enable social workers. Boehm and Yoels

18 (2009) found a similar positive correlation between effectiveness and both transformational

19 and contingency leadership, and transformational leadership did not lead to more satisfied

20 stakeholders than transactional leadership. Suggesting that interpersonal leadership is one

21 popular and efficient way, but not the only way to enable social workers.

22   To summarise, the literature indicates that the practices of the enabling leadership

23 function in social work are focused on interpersonal relationships, which appear to positively

24 impact motivation and performance. These findings suggest that social work managers tend to

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1 act as enabling leaders, leaning towards making the work more adaptive, which perhaps

2 reflects the importance they place on professional knowledge over managerial control.

3 **Discussion**

4 This literature review reveals that social work managers engage in adaptive, administrative

5 and enabling leadership practices to varying degrees. Applying the CLT framework to these

6 studies, we can see that researchers are concerned with how social work managers execute

7 adaptive leadership, although few have closely examined how this leadership function is

8 practiced or its effects. In addition, interpersonal leadership practices (the enabling manager)

9 appear essential to improving social workers' perception of their performance and their job

10 satisfaction—a fortuitous linkage because managers with a social work background appear to

11 possess important inherent skills for such an interpersonal leadership style.

12 The studies indicate that social work managers may find the administrative function

13 too comprehensive and limiting to their full realization of adaptive and enabling leadership,

14 although some studies note that increased managerial discretion may provide freedom to enact

15 adaptive and enabling practices. Few studies examine the effect and practices of the

16 administrative function beyond noting administration as an important contextual factor for the

17 manager.

18 Essential in this discussion is the size of the administrative function in relation to the

19 other two leadership functions. An increasingly stringent focus on finances and administration

20 could potentially weaken the adaptive and enabling functions (Adams, Dominelli, and Payne

21 2009; O'Donoghue 2015; Jones, Gould, and Baldwin 2004) as these practices become

22 crowded out by administrative tasks. Some managers appear to successfully negotiate this

23 tension as they perform enabling leadership activities, while others are unable to do so. The

24 potential limiting effect of the administrative function represents a great challenge for social

work because providing managers with the time, resources and training needed to perform adaptive and enabling leadership functions is essential for efficient performance.

Applying the CLT framework helps identify different leadership functions in social work, how they are practiced and how they intertwine. In addition, the framework is useful for identifying each function's particular challenges for implementation and practice and the pitfalls when one function dominates the others.

Knowledge gaps

The adaptive leadership function is under-researched in social work, and future efforts should seek to better describe this function's practices and whether it is needed or even possible. Discussions on the need for adaptive practices should be seen in conjunction with a growing discourse on the need for social work to be innovative, a claim that also should be examined critically before implemented on a larger scale (Sturdy and Grey 2003).

We need research utilising observations and interviews to identify how adaptive leadership happens and to what degree formal or informal leaders and managers carry out this leadership function throughout the social work field. Research concerning adaptive skills and training of individual social work managers is important, as well as research into the interlinked leadership functions and how managers handle the tension between them. It is worth nothing that the practices of these functions could depend on the hierarchical levels of managers (Kaiser et al. 2011). Although beyond the scope of this study, future research should examine whether adaptive, administrative or enabling practices are more prevalent at the street- or top-levels of management.

Additional studies on the relationship between different practices of enabling leadership and performance in a Nordic context are needed. Studies should test the effective relationship between leadership and group and individual performances, and include descriptive studies on why and how these practices do or do not work. Such research can

increase our understanding of how managers aid the development and performance of social

workers.

The context of social work can be a potential obstacle to adaptive and enabling

leadership, and therefore, research is needed to examine the contextual influence on leaders.

Questions to explore are how (or if) managers can be adaptive leaders within the confines of

laws and governance, and why some managers are able to balance the administrative function

and others are not.

Additional research is needed to identify administrative leadership practices embedded

in administrative tasks, and to what degree these tasks support a functioning organisation.

Finally, with the progress of 'big-data', artificial intelligence and automation, social work

needs research on how these tools could aid the field and free time for managers to perform

adaptive and enabling leadership.

This study did not examine whether adaptive and administrative leadership should be

of equal importance in social work or how best to balance these logics. Rather, the research

suggests that administrative leadership could dominate some managers' time to the extent that

they are unable to perform other tasks, although increased managerial discretion also could

support adaptive and enabling functions. However, increased administrative tasks may leave

managers too busy to be resources for their employees and to perform adaptive and enabling

functions. In turn, social work organisations may suffer as enabling leaders are unable to

foster innovative practices for the betterment of their clients. Additional research is needed to

determine how social work managers spend their work time and how their leadership benefits

the performance of social workers and services.

Conclusion

Using current research to conceptualise social work managers' adaptive, administrative, and

enabling practices, this study indicates that social work managers have been found to perform

1 all three functions, with enabling practices as the most essential for aiding social workers'

2 performance. Future research should not ignore the other two functions, however, but rather

3 view all three as interlinked and necessary to knowledge workers. The greatest challenge for

4 leadership in social work is the potential limiting effect of an expanding administrative role

5 on leaders' ability to be adaptive or enabling. As scholars address the identified knowledge

6 gaps, future research may shed further light on how social work managers' practices can

7 improve outcomes.

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