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The Broken Bridges of Kindergarten Management: A Recognition Theory Approach to Dilemmas and Opportunities in Public Leadership

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Abstract

What is the significance of whether frontline staff in a kindergarten have an understanding of management's pervasive decisions? Using recognition theory, the article argues that employees' sense of meaning and recognition should not be overlooked, even though broader societal norms seem to legitimize management strategies that attempt the leap from management to implementation without taking the arduous path of communicative bridging. This is both because frontline staff are themselves stewards of complex recognition relationships with children and parents, and because educators' practice takes the form of *communicative action* independently of the goals measured by management.

A. Introduction

In public management, tough decisions are sometimes made whose rationale does not always make sense from top to bottom, even if the goals being pursued are formulated on the basis of shared national challenges and general objectives. Focusing on the relationship between public leaders and the welfare state's outermost frontlines of citizens and professionals in contexts of kindergarten management, the article is based on a narrative about the distance in understanding such decisions can cause (B). To analyze the challenges to understanding that the narrative illustrates, the article introduces a recognition theory perspective. The perspective is normative both in its formulation of the societal rationales of public institutions and in its description of the basic needs of modern people. The recognition perspective is formulated by Axel Honneth not primarily as a management or leadership theory, but a narrative that society's central public institutions should express respect for human dignity because this corresponds to a human need. However, the normative perspective in this context leads to a defense of recognition in public leadership of welfare professionals. Management should recognize that they frame frontline staff's ability to deal with the conflicting demands of the public sector and that they have a responsibility to build communicative bridges between political leadership and frontline staff (C). Section D confronts skeptical considerations about whether the recognition theory perspective is compatible with the contemporary demands of public management. The conclusion (E) suggests the key trade-offs that public managers must make in relation to budget management and recognition of the autonomy of frontline staff and the dignity of citizens.

B. Broken communicative bridges

The section illustrates the importance of communication and the dangers of perceiving communication as a hierarchical one-way street.

1. Loss of meaning

A childcare area manager makes a tough decision after 11 months on the job. Parents are informed with a letter in the children's clothes box with two days' notice that four long-serving kindergarten teachers will be replaced. The three newly hired area and pedagogical managers and the coordinator support the area manager, but leave the explanation of the decision to the area manager. In the letter, the decision is justified without further elaboration with 'consideration for the well-being of the children'. The parents are confused by this word. The children are thriving. The four teachers who had been in the daycare

between 7 and 20 years had a great love for the institution and the children, and had a *loving hold on* the children. That' why the children thrive. But it wasn't just warm hands. The children's ability to establish games with creativity and *imagination* was often emphasized by the educators, and the children came home smelling of smoke and talking about nettle and pumpkin soup, etc. A nature guide told them about living with the Sami, and the educators were concerned that the children should learn to *respect nature* (collect garbage in the area; learn to live with the anthill in the playground). So the parents look around at each other questioningly. What does it mean that our children *don't thrive* with these four teachers? After two days, the teachers are sent on temporary assignments around the municipality. The area manager can be contacted by phone, but will not disclose the reason and does not want a big meeting, as the parents will probably be confused and despairing anyway. Speculation thrives among parents and colleagues: What norms had they violated? Is there anything you can't say as an educator before you risk being removed (Willig 2009)? Some parents help make sense of the situation by explaining that the four educators have had to survive constant changes at management level over a number of years. Perhaps they felt that they were alone in fighting for their institution and children and therefore developed a culture that was then difficult to change for a new coordinator with a municipal agenda to implement?

The parents insist on a big meeting, but the area manager is at a loss for words. Well-being has something to do with *pedagogy* and pedagogy has something to do with some municipal *measuring points* and *average values*. Can an area manager overseeing up to 80 institutions after six months really assess whether an institution is below the municipal average, the parents wonder? Daily life goes on. The municipally required and announced 'radical cultural changes', which the four apparently stood in the way of, are slowly taking effect. The children are divided into more purposive categories ('schoolchildren' and 'not schoolchildren' to complement the use of the categories 'caterpillars' and 'butterflies'). The documentation of curriculum work increases and the schoolchildren learn to write 'Well behaving William (with an W) and to hold scissors correctly. There is some temporary unrest, which periodically results in more discipline and scolding, but the municipal strategies for following national strategies are followed, cf. the introduction of pedagogical curricula in 2004, 2007 and school preparation in 2007 (Andersen, Hjort and Schmidt 2008, 15ff).

Communication and context

Well-being can thus be understood in two very different ways depending on whether you

look phenomenologically at the existential encounters in the particularized institutional everyday practices between children and educators or at the area manager's documented or undocumented measuring points. The central point of the story is that it is possible for an institution with children and educators to develop a special way of being together that is meaningful for children, educators and parents in light of one understanding of well-being, and that this understanding of well-being can conflict with the administration's, politicians' and municipal leaders' perception of what child well-being is when there is no full communication about what well-being *also* is.

A communicative chasm thus arises between the two perceptions of what the core of the institution's life is, and in the assessment of the degree of quality with which the institution lives up to this level. The area manager cannot explain to the parents what is meant by well-being and pedagogy, as the meaning of these words in the municipal and political communication space, where the focus is on competitiveness in the labor market of the future (with the noble goal of ensuring future welfare), will not immediately make sense to the parents, who in this situation fear how their 3-5-year-old children will experience the disappearance of the pedagogues they have built relationships with from one day to the next.

The story seems to illustrate that the public system can appear as a collection of relatively autonomous subsystems that lack a common language, which is why paradoxes arise in the meeting between a technical-political focus on 'productivity, efficiency, coordination, legitimacy and control and identities, norms and world views' that are linked to the 'organized networks of users, employees, professions and authorities' (Majgaard 2008/9, 272, 269). Communication of a special kind seems necessary to bridge these realities.

2. Leadership legitimacy

The story illustrates the possibility of broken communicative bridges in kindergarten management, but what does it matter that the communicative bridges are broken if the management hierarchy is effective and the goals of strengthening kindergartens as learning communities that consciously build bridges for the children's further journey in the competitive state have broad support among managers, parents, educators and the wider public, and if the children are able to handle major changes and changes in the pedagogical staff? The case illustrates that the administration can justifiably say that there is no need for more elaborate communicative bridges in such a situation. This is based on a correct belief that the frontline workers in the welfare state have generic skills and that staff can be

replaced on a day-to-day basis. When calm descends, there will be less unrest and less need for scolding.

From a historical perspective, NPM reforms have strengthened the belief in the generic competencies and interchangeability of the frontline employee (Majgaard 2007/8, 488). The area manager in the above case also refers to the fact that a decision like the one she has made would not be surprising at Maersk, which also has a strong management hierarchy. If employees are adaptable, institutional experience and accumulated knowledge about the specific children, their situation and challenges can be retained while democratically adopted decisions can be operationalized and implemented. This belief has widespread support.

At the same time, the focus on learning, school readiness and competitiveness has broad public attention and support among broad groups of parents. This discourse also has relative hegemony in the public (Torfing 2004). The administration can thus expect parents to settle down again quickly, not least when the children get used to a new everyday life. The hope seems realistic that when the process is over, the institution is on par in terms of well-being and pedagogy (in light of documented standardized outcome measures), and the management hierarchy from administration to implementation is restored after a period where things were allowed to drift ('what were they doing out there in the woods?') and where a group of educators created their own autonomous unit that would resist the administration's demands. Over time, the new area manager will probably also learn to communicate as a bridge builder between the different levels. All in the context of the administration and local managers and educators eventually getting used to and refining forms of documentation that make sense for all parties (Andersen, Hjort, Schmidt, 3rd part; Hviid & Plotnikof 2012; Majgaard 2007/8, 481f). This leaves a minority of humanities academics who, in the words of Bertel Haarder, know that their children will succeed in the competition and on the terms of free play.

How important is it for management legitimacy that the employees can find meaning in management decisions? How important is it to recognize employees' autonomy to develop practices for meeting citizens that are meaningful to the frontline worker? Surely the public sector is not there for the sake of frontline employees, and the *most important thing* is not whether they experience full job satisfaction in connection with a necessary change process? Doesn't the case simply show that there is room for improvement in terms of management's ability to communicate decisions and handle pressure from confused parents?

3. The technocratic change trap

The above story speaks to the challenges of public management in general. Management faces a major challenge when frontline employees seem to run with the agenda, putting political and administrative work to shame. Since we cannot avoid taking into account budget management, the desire for measurable results as well as ensuring coherence between democratic decisions and concrete implementation, a model for change processes in the public sector has been developed, which Klaus Majgaard has named the "technocratic change trap" (Majgaard 2008, 129).

In the pedagogical field, the trap is set when, with the intention of ensuring the above-mentioned general considerations and at the same time ensuring that implementation actually takes place, management is based on four "technocratic basic assumptions" (Majgaard 2008, 130):

- Firstly, it is assumed that pedagogical programs in the public sector are service offerings rather than forms of existential collaboration (Majgaard 2008, 131; cf. Majgaard 2007/08, 487).

- Secondly, it is assumed that it is primarily the managers who must analyze and design the organization of the pedagogical work, after which the frontline staff must implement the model and intentions (Majgaard 2008, 131).

- Third, it is assumed that it is sufficient to motivate educators to change by listening to their comments on the impending changes.

- Fourthly, it is assumed that (kindergarten) management is best institutionalized as a hierarchical management system, where overall political goals are operationalized link by link to the executing units, and understood as rational in that the upper levels are assumed to be able to analyze for the lower levels and adjust based on feedback from the lower levels.

Why is this a *trap*? In relation to the first assumption, it is tempting but dangerous to understand pedagogical work as a service. Services can be standardized and if one imagines that pedagogical institutions provide a standardized service, then it becomes tempting to believe that the institutions' "processes can be managed through goals and measurements" (Majgaard 2008, 131). This overlooks the fact that the existential relationship between "educators, children and parents" cannot be standardized (Majgaard 2008, 132). The parents leave the children to the educators, trusting that they will also engage with the child as a whole. Learning and organized play are one side of the relationship, but caring and the role

of helping to articulate the child's feelings and making sense of what the child finds confusing are equally important. The way this is done must be strengthened by the pedagogical professionalism, but this relational professionalism is only standardized at a general level. It is the individual educator who, in fulfilling their role, finds their own way of being with the children. Parents do not expect a standardized service. They can be confident that there are different types of educators, as long as there is cooperation to ensure that no child is overlooked simply because the educators are preoccupied with the 'good chemistry' they relatively easily establish with other children. Thus, educators must constantly practice their judgment in relation to the children they are specifically engaged with and must be aware that the children hiding in the corners could use a chat and a little care (Plum 2012, 501). This judgment cannot be handed down as a manual, but requires that new employees are given the opportunity to learn from more experienced educators in a complex learning community. Insights and experiences can be passed on as rules of thumb and with the help of general concepts, but their application cannot be standardized, as this requires the development of a sensitive ability to know when to deviate from the rules of thumb and how to apply the general concepts in specific situations.

The problem with the second assumption is that the further you get from the pedagogical everyday life, the more distant you become from the complex challenges that the daily exercise of judgment among educators strengthens their awareness of. If, in light of the above, we describe pedagogical work as an institutionalized community that ensures that existential practices are maintained through shared sparring and conversation, then the primary task of leaders is to ensure the conditions for those conversations (Majgaard 2008, 132). The leader's analyses and attempts to thematize certain professional conversations must be linked to the frontline worker's perception of what constitutes pedagogical practice.

The third assumption was that educators can be motivated to follow management's instructions at large meetings where their comments are recorded. Such meetings can easily be perceived as manipulative, and the professional group may feel unsure of how to explain the existential practices they uphold. They can easily question their importance in the face of management's defense of the measurable outcomes that are seemingly demanded by the wider population and democratically elected politicians. Educators may then find it difficult to formulate an alternative agenda that does not appear backward and undemocratic. In the public debate, undocumented pedagogy is trumped when it is called unsolidaric, as it does not ensure the dissolution of the 'group of functional illiterates' through quantification, standardization and testing. An apparent consensus in employee consultations can obscure

the fact that the changes affect the employees' pedagogical self-understanding. The employees who hold the fate of children in their hands on a daily basis have often, over time, found ways of handling their task and fulfilling their role that they have found recognition for, identify with and feel comfortable with. There can be great insecurity and fear of loss associated with demands for 'new ways of working' from management (Majgaard 2008, 133f).

The problem with the fourth assumption is that the concrete relationships build specific horizons of meaning. When parents, educators and children talk about children's well-being, it is understood in one way, but when the administration translates the policies, it is typically understood differently. Therefore, the lower levels cannot easily provide feedback on well-being in a way that the upper levels understand, and the upper levels cannot immediately express their perception of children's well-being in a way that the lower levels understand (Majgaard 2008, 135).

C. Recognition in public leadership

The section explains why it is not just frontline workers' sense of meaning that is at stake when communicative bridges collapse. What forms of recognition are at stake in kindergarten leadership?

1. Recognition and social coordination (Honneth)

Recognition theory, as developed by Axel Honneth with inspiration from the 19th century works of the philosopher GWF Hegel and the 20th century theories of Habermas, is a humanistic theory about the importance of recognition for individuals' successful identity formation (for the following section, see Jørgensen 2014). For these authors, however, these theories of identity formation are also central to normative social philosophical theories. The recognition theories themselves are not humanistic in the sense that they simply focus on what is good for the individual. They do. However, theories of identity formation through recognition are just as much normative in a socially oriented sense, as they are developed in the light of social philosophical norms of equality in dignity and the right to effective participation in the formation of the common will (democracy).

The central claim is that people can only be what they are as recognized (Hegel 2004). This means that people cannot develop core self-understandings and dispositions unless someone expresses that they consider what the person is and does to be valuable. Recognition is thus intersubjectively borne; we cannot give it to ourselves alone.

The central link to societal goals emerges from the fact that in the modern world we

are ideally recognized in three different ways, all of which enable our personal perception of our lives as meaningful and valuable to interact with the collective goals of society (Honneth 2006).

- Firstly, in relation to close relationships (including child rearing), we are recognized as someone who doesn't just selfishly think about their own needs or judge others based on strict abstract rules of living. We are recognized for our ability to recognize others as needy beings.

- In relation to society's institutional norms and democratic practices, we are recognized as autonomous individuals with so much light bulb momentum that we are able to understand and interpret general norms based on our own rational considerations of good and bad. This recognition of our autonomous status enables our ability to engage in democratic conversations and equal relationships with other citizens.

- Society holds value standards for societal goals, and individuals can also be recognized and valued for their special contribution to solving societal tasks and realizing societal goals. By being recognized for our contributions to shared, recognizable goals, we are able to develop an understanding of ourselves as valued; as the special individual we are, while at the same time being recognized for being in solidarity with others in our behavior and actions.

Ideally, on all three levels, we experience that what we do is valuable to others and we receive recognition that satisfies us personally. This fulfillment is not just about having a positive self-concept. It is about the conditions of possibility for us to be able to develop, maintain and express ourselves as autonomous beings at all, and for us to be able to continue to support the key societal practices that can otherwise be experienced as deeply stressful and demanding (i.e. the close and educational ones: others' demands on our constant love; the legal ones: others' demands on our stable law-abidingness; the work-related ones: others' demands on our continuous job-related efforts).

Public management should thus - if the analysis is plausible - ensure that the educational challenges, legal norms and work roles do not appear as purely external demands on the individual. Public sector leaders should recognize that employees have legitimate expectations of being recognized for their ability to contribute to the development of shared norms and tasks in their own way. Thus, there must be openness to the fact that individual employees seek to find their own way at work in order to develop a satisfactory identity. Such attempts should not be immediately interpreted as attempts to get off easy at work or simply to do what one wants to do for selfish motives. Employees

should be recognized as social beings who are both concerned with their personal identity formation, but who are also aware that their personal satisfaction depends on the social recognition patterns they are subject to.

2. Recognition and societal legitimacy (Habermas)

Habermas emphasizes more clearly than Honneth that the social legitimacy of common legal and institutionalized norms and practices depends on whether the affected parties would be able to approve of the practices and norms in an open discussion. However, this procedural determination of public legitimacy presupposes whether the affected parties in such a dialog had actually developed the ability to critically engage with the given norms. This requires that they are continuously recognized as autonomous individuals for whom it is only natural to step outside the practices they are engaged in and consider their rationality. In this way, you are not just a subordinate henchman, but self-reflective. Only people who are recognized in this way can engage in a legitimacy-testing dialogue. Societies in which such legitimacy-testing dialogues cannot take place because the affected parties are not given the opportunity to develop their autonomy, but are instead held in the usual norm management strategies such as reward and punishment systems or collective identity systems, have difficulty living up to the ideals of democracy, freedom and equality (cf. Habermas 1983).

In this perspective, public management must recognize employees as co-thinking, rational and autonomous citizens whose critical observations and comments are not necessarily an expression of unsolidarity or conservative reluctance. Thus, the norm of acknowledging criticism does not depend on whether the manager can immediately see an instrumental purpose in incorporating the criticism in order to improve or deteriorate the current practice. It is grounded in an overarching importance of recognizing the capacity for autonomy among stakeholders in key welfare state institutions for the sake of society's ability to gain and maintain legitimacy over time.

3. What should educators be recognized for?

Kindergarten leaders frame recognition relationships both between themselves and the teachers and for the teachers' recognition relationships with the children. If we focus on the leader-pedagogue relationship, then according to Honneth, they should be recognized both for the potentials ascribed to all human beings regardless of their actual actions and - in the case of adults - for their particular contributions to common societal goals through their actual care work and professionalism. The assumptions of recognition clarify the challenges for public managers to balance the concerns of superiors and subordinates:

(1) People need recognition for their autonomy and judgment, so public servants should feel that their professional identities are recognized and respected;

(2) People seek meaning through communication. Even when our collaboration is purely instrumental and goal-rational, we seek to decode and find meaning in the relationships we enter into with other people.[2]

This article argues that we cannot avoid acknowledging these two assumptions in modern public sector management. This is because frontline staff in the public sector must be expressed and acknowledged in order to express autonomy and judgment.

To understand how autonomy is enacted by educators, we need to draw on a few Greek concepts. Educators' work is relational, and while they can be seen as delivering school- ready children, a large part of their work is performing actions with others that are not oriented towards creating a specific product. This distinction is significant and draws on the Aristotelian categories of *techne* and *phronesis*. Where *techne* is a virtue (a practice disposition) that people exercise when *creating* something, *phronesis is exercised in* the context of *action* (Dunne, 1993, 262).

This distinction is crucial for what kind of recognition it is meaningful to attribute to educators. The phronetic virtue sets standards for action in the concrete relationship, while the standard of excellence in the practical virtue of creation (techne) is set independently of the relationship. People are immediately able to assess the quality of a beautiful and dignified table, while the exercise of practical judgment in actions and human relationships cannot be immediately assessed by a passerby. The 'right' action depends on a complex set of characteristics of the actor and the specific situation. What is at stake is the actor's assessment of what the right action is, given the situation and the recognition of one's own qualities, which not every passerby is capable of. It requires careful knowledge of the complexity of the situation and the actor's qualities and self-awareness to assess whether the actor's practical reason was in play in an excellent or weak way in the specific situation. This is naturally frustrating for those tasked with overseeing 78 institutions.

In this light, it is attractive to understand educators' work as a creative activity (e.g. children who can cut hair correctly), because it can be measured and assessed based on standards of excellence that can be observed as a passer-by. If educators are to create something, it must be children with certain skills, but if they are to be understood as

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[2] As Habermas puts it: "Verständigung wohnt als Telos der menschlichen Sprache inne" (1981, 387)

primarily acting, the focus shifts to their ability to enter into communicative relationships. In other words, the ability to create and the ability to act are fundamentally different. The defense of professional judgment is therefore often formulated as a clear opposition to technical, scientific, best-practice forms of know-how (Dunne 1993, 175).

Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* gives perspective to the immediate hegemony that the belief in instrumental and scientific knowledge has today in the field of pedagogy. Here, researchers such as Niels Egelund have a relative hegemony over researchers who emphasize the psychosocial significance of stable relationships.[33] The focus is on creating something rather than actions. Children of a certain type and in a special mold must be created, and the children's actions must document that they are on their way to becoming what we want them to be. Thus, in the public assessment, the actions do not have value in themselves. In this sense, it is of course possible to transcend the opposition between action and creation, as when the child, with an eye for the activity's own values, creates something through actions. Here, decisions must be made about how the material should be processed, whether it should 'look like something' or rather express the joy of imagination, colors and shapes.

However, there seems to be a difference between whether the child is given space to act without regard to the fact that they are shaping themselves in a certain way. If the activity becomes too obviously instrumental, then the child's *phronesis is* not supported and they learn to see themselves as a project that can fail against certain externally determined standards (Dewey, 1993, 99).

The same can apply to the educator's balance between *phronesis* and techne. The hegemonic belief in generic competencies and readiness for change and willingness to implement goes hand in hand with the depreciation of the value of concretized judgment and the belief in the individual educator's reflexive action competencies. In addition, as mentioned, the non-implementable educator is a challenge to the administration's opinion paradigm and is considered to slow down the state's handling of the challenges of globalization, just as the recognition of particularistic *phronesis* seems to counteract the Ministry of Finance's hope of keeping management and implementation costs down through

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[3] In addition to being the most cited education researcher in Denmark and head of center in a strategic research unit working with children's transition to primary school, he has been Denmark's project manager for PISA for a number of years. In addition, he holds important positions in the chairmanship of the Council for Evaluation and Quality Development in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools, the Danish Council for Children, the Globalization Council, the Quality Group and the Task Force for Future Daycare.

standardization.

In the Hegelian view of recognition, we are not simply subject to standards of recognition. If the norms are not satisfactory, individuals should form alliances and *fight for recognition* - cf. the title of Honneth's main work. In this light, it becomes the task of the pedagogical group to articulate and defend their work as relational rather than creative work, which is why the virtue is phronesis and the standards of excellence are particular and relationship-oriented. An alternative and perhaps more effective strategy is to embody, intellectualize and particularize our understanding of the dimensions of technical (creative) knowledge (Dunne 1993, 315ff).

4. Recognition in leadership of professionals

The above supports recommendations to "reinvent and rehabilitate professional leadership" (Majgaard 2007/8, 491). The professional leader has an eye for the "partially autonomous learning spaces" and does not see himself as "the operator of the control apparatus" (ibid). Rather, leadership is an "ethical practice" (ibid). This statement must be understood in Aristotelian categories, where one must therefore make room for and qualify the discussion of how we do things here. Thus, it is important to both "recognize that the value and quality of our services are created in the encounter between citizens and employees" (Majgaard 2007/8, 494), and that management can be used to strengthen employees' reflections on practice so that they do not blindly follow institutionalized and habitual *doxa* (Majgaard 2007/8, 494-500). Management must be aware of the critical balances between control and autonomy, formalism or communities of practice, the short and the long term perspective, and blame versus recognition (Majgaard 2007/8, 500-502).

It makes a difference if management supports the institutionalization of reflexive communities, where a sufficient degree of security is established and a sufficient degree of benevolence is expressed so that employees' everyday experiences with paradoxes and conflicts can be articulated and discussed systematically. Hviid and Plotnikof (2012) have analyzed how reflexive communities can both release the creativity of paradoxes and strengthen the educators' ability to articulate their experiences. Perhaps the conclusion will be that "paradoxes are accepted as a fundamental and dynamic feature of the way in which we constantly create and maintain organizations and patterns of interaction" (Majgaard 2008/9, 281).

On the basis of reflective communities where both leaders and employees reflect on pedagogical practice, the contradiction between creating and acting can be addressed. For example, creativity, action and communication can become a core part of *learning* (as

opposed to focused and documented instrumental ways of imitating and preparing for further disciplining). [4] [4] Collegial reflections can build on the existing curriculum dimensions and find ways to tell stories about how children's psychosocial competencies and relational self-understanding and collective autonomy are strengthened through the institution's practices, actions and ways of being and communicating together. The experience of meaning for professionals is something that can be discussed collectively on the basis of their professional and professional ethical educational and everyday experiences rather than a purely subjective issue (which could thus be fundamentally at odds with citizens' experiences of meaningful encounters with the public).[4]

D. The benefits of recognition in leadership of professionals

What do we gain from two-way communicative bridges, and what is there to lose when management flexes its muscles? Should management even appreciate stubborn employees who stick to a certain professional understanding and defend the practices they have developed over time in the specific institution - even when these seemingly go against the implementation hopes? Why should management acknowledge conflicts and paradoxes (Majgaard 2007/08; 2008/09)? Why should management even help educators put everyday paradoxes into words? Isn't it primarily about making the ship sail for all parties? The overall perspective of the article may not seem to recognize the pressure the manager is under. Hviid & Plotnikof (2012) point out that creative spaces for reflection are expensive to institutionalize, and one could add that the demand for nationally standardized goals and measurement tools weakens the possibilities for local experiments and local professional involvement in the setting of goals and measurement tools. Some would argue that this is *the* reality we should relate to and acknowledge. In this perspective, management must of course consider what is to be gained in terms of the children's individual and social development, that the educators' own understanding of goal paradoxes in everyday life is recognized and becomes a creative counterpoint to national standards developed by experts. After all, it is possible to enforce policy on a relatively weakly articulated professional group, and there is no shortage of manpower. How should we value the importance of being a leader in an organization where leadership helps stimulate employees' ability to find meaning in their professional work with citizens relative to the management of the general considerations of budget management and policy implementation? For the individual

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[4] Egelund compares the school to a prison, which children must be prepared to enter without disturbing the peace and order.

leader, the trade-off depends on whether we as a society recognize leaders who develop the ability to create meaning and build bridges, but also on the hierarchical incentive structures that should motivate middle managers to seek recognition upwards rather than downwards.

To assess the value of recognition and bridging in leadership, we must first assess it on its own terms. The article indicates that public organizations' paradoxes and cross-pressures from lower professional layers are often experienced as instigated by upper management layers. Communication between management and professionals can be strengthened by management acknowledging that paradoxes are not just something we are all subject to, but that management, from the perspective of professionals, helps to stage a paradoxical reality. Based on such recognition, the relative autonomy of frontline staff can also be articulated and recognized. This recognition should take both an individual and a collective form, so that not only individual educators are recognized as having a privileged autonomy, but so that management also recognizes the educators' right to develop a common language for articulating their professionalism as one that may conflict with municipal and national policy considerations. The challenge here is not only that the municipal management is subject to management pressure, but also that managers, parents, children and educators alike have a desire to make daily life run smoothly without having to confront the paradoxes and conflicts.

However, the form that cross-pressures and paradoxes take depends on the framework that management sets to establish communicative bridges. For example, without communicative bridges, holistic understandings can only be formulated locally and in a particular way. When the bridges are one-way, it is perceived that the public managers at the overall level pass on the complexity and the responsibility for interpreting it to the lower level (Majgaard 2008/9, 272f). The following actors' experience of cross-pressure as paradoxical is thus exacerbated if you do not trust that your manager has an overview or even an understanding of what the pressure looks like from the underlying level. Thus, it makes a difference if upper management recognizes that the paradoxes are not just something we are all subject to, but that management, from the perspective of the professionals, helps to stage the cross- pressure.

In this light, there are significant gains to be made by managers and professionals developing an awareness that conflicts can live on in the open in a way that stimulates rather than weakens mutual respect between groups of employees; that conflict can be managed through dialog, rather than fear of reprisals if the apparent consensus is broken. The big challenge is to create spaces where trust can develop. Trust can be fostered through honesty

about the contradictions when the professional groups recognize that both parties have an interest in ensuring that the core tasks are not neglected; i.e. developing spaces for children's individual and social development. In the light of recognition theory, educators should be able to defend their perception of relevant pedagogical professionalism or at least ask that conflicting understandings of 'well-being' can lead to pedagogical debates where there is an understanding that transformative learning takes time and is associated with loss (Majgaard 2008, 133f).

However, there is also a negative lesson to be learned from the recognition perspective. It is not primarily about ensuring employee satisfaction, but about avoiding the experience of meaninglessness in institutions that manage the care of citizens. The power of the administration can otherwise be perceived as a systematic way of suppressing conflicts with educators, resulting in a loss of meaning. The educators may reach a point where the loss of meaning is repressed and they do not see that they are losers in a professional and identity struggle, where their professional conflict with the administration regarding pedagogical goals and means is consciously suppressed in routines where the administrative power remains untouched due to the educators' weak positions (we'll just hire someone else) and due to the narrative hegemony of the administration (which parent wants to make their child a loser in the future competition for jobs?) (Warren 1999, 219). The loss of meaning can have consequences for the encounter with citizens (failure to respect their dignity) and employees' job satisfaction, but it also deprives the manager of the opportunity to be recognized for his or her ability to support the experience that the work functions are meaningful. Thus, recognition in leadership is not just about promoting a comfortable manager-employee relationship. It is about the future of the child and the country as a society where respect for the dignity of individuals is expressed.

Ideally, the gain for managers is that by processing the frontline staff's experience of meaning in the paradoxes, they can frame public meetings that are meaningful for the three key players (educators, children and parents), and that, on this basis, they have an increased opportunity for recognition of their work.

E. Conclusion

The public sector contains conflicts of interest, dilemmas and paradoxes (Hviid & Plotnikof 2012, 4). Cross-pressures and paradoxes seem to be "a fundamental feature of public organizations" (Majgaard 2008/9, 267). The question is how to deal with such tensions? The power and conflict of interest perspective should at least make us skeptical about

whether communicative bridge-building becomes the order of the day, or that communication in the governance hierarchy naturally encourages management to help bring paradoxes and conflicts, as experienced from the perspective of frontline employees, to light (cf. Flyvbjerg 1991, 376; Jørgensen 2014). Governance in the public sector often has a schizophrenia built in between the manager's recognition of both freedom for employees and demands for standardization (Majgaard 2007/8, 485). This schizophrenia has something permanent about it, as it is the frontline employee who, through their judgment, must act as an instrument of management. On the one hand, this requires recognition of the frontline worker's freedom, and on the other hand, it requires control of the frontline worker. The fear is that the employee develops an understanding of their own task that contradicts the managerial goals. The permanence of schizophrenia is rooted in widespread notions of generic management skills and strategies (Majgaard 2007/8, 491) and standardized objectives that enable comparisons. Quality comparisons therefore take on a very abstract character; an abstraction that must later be abstracted from. It *is the* well-being level we measure in the 78 institutions.

The instruments of the state are among the strongest there are - for better or worse (Warren 2008). When the public leader shows his or her iron fist ('Maersk-like'), actions can gain both public and administrative legitimacy in ways other than dialog with stakeholders. Public support can be seen in the adherence to the solidarity principle of guaranteeing everyone the opportunity to earn a place in the labor market of the future and in the sustainability principle that we as a society must be competitive. In administrative terms, the legitimization of technocratic management strategies can be traced back to seven reports from the Ministry of Finance from 1985-2003 (Majgaard 2007/8, 481f).

The recognition theory perspective justifies why leaders should recognize both the autonomy of educators and should work to provide a framework for frontline staff to communicate with each other about the types of recognition they themselves are stewards of. The ideal of human dignity and children's development of their potential for autonomy sets limits on how children can be treated, just as recognition theory provides guidance on which recognition relationships children depend on in order to develop autonomy and the ability to love, respect and solidarity.

According to this perspective, public policy governance should be based on the recognition that relationships in public institutions have a special character when frontline staff are obliged to manage the public recognition of respect for the dignity of all people despite their concrete actions and abilities (i.e. despite being children, old, unemployed,

sick, disabled, offenders, drug addicts, etc.)

In this article, the recognition theory perspective is supplemented with a communication theory perspective. Based on an understanding of the importance of communicative bridge- building, the development of conflicting horizons of meaning (Gadamer 1990) and the above-mentioned political power and conflict perspectives, the concrete effects of which have been documented (Willig 2009), there is reason to be skeptical about the optimism regarding communicative bridge-building in daycare management.

Therefore, the article recommends that there should be increased awareness of the technocratic management trap, where management technologies since the 1980s led to "the measurable becoming the essential" and that "batteries of numbers grew up" even though they did not measure the essential lacked "credibility when they were more an expression of registration methodologies than deep professional reflection" (2007/8, 481f). The trap means that the lower ranks cannot give meaning to the goals and that the upper ranks lack understanding of the cultural roots of the lower ranks (2007/8, 482). We thus need discussions of both goals and means in the public sector, recognizing that there is a deep split between ideal goals of equality, human dignity and communicative inclusion on the one hand and standardization in management strategy and impact goals on the other. The debate about governance in the public sector thus depends on broader debates about the trade-off between societal goals for the degree and form of recognition of those individuals who are not directly productive in the labor market.

The emphasis on the particularity of *phronetic* action challenges management strategies of monitoring via transit between 78 institutions. One cannot assess the central dimensions of pedagogical practice via spreadsheets. Similarly, the distinction between action and creation clarifies that the pedagogical creation of children's competencies is only one dimension of the work. In addition, the concrete reports will never represent the truth about the institution's creation work, as the documentation of the creation dimension requires concretization in order to be meaningful in the specific institution.

In summary, public leadership should embrace the following forms of recognition in relation to frontline educators:

1) that it is in the nature of the pedagogical task to be phronetic-relational and communicative acting rather than technical-instrumental creating.

2) that the pedagogical work contains paradoxes and conflicts that, from the frontline staff's perspective, can be experienced as initiated by management's overall, independent

and particularized view of the frontline staff's tasks.

This means that management's recognition of this can be motivated by management's immediate recognition of being *professional* leaders in the public sector, where conflicts should not be resolved by stimulating subordinate frontline professionals to adopt management's (particularistic) perspective in order to suppress the paradoxes. Rather, it requires a more open involvement and stimulation of educators' reflections than, for example, holding a traditional pedagogical day where shared values are discussed. One of the challenges is to understand why management should be reluctant to do something that seems to have an impact. It requires understanding that educators may feel uncertain about how to defend and articulate their professionalism in a way that can compete with that of managers and consultants. They therefore keep their mouths shut so as not to appear naive and poorly articulated to management. The fighting spirit is weakened not only by the challenges of rhetoric, but also by the content of the message you may think you are up against. There is something obviously right about the idea of documenting, ensuring a minimum level, making the transition to school easier for children, stimulating their language, etc.

The challenge for the pedagogical professionals and their professional struggle is to formulate why communicative action is not an unproductive breakdown of instrumental and purposive reason, but rather constitutes a productive starting point for focused, qualified and value-creating and meaningful work (Benhabib 1986, 224ff). Both processes require that the parties mutually recognize each other's intention to contribute to creating a pedagogical environment where children thrive and develop individually and socially.

Calls to give pedagogical employees the freedom to formulate their own goals for their efforts naturally risk leading to disorientation and a weakening of public governance on the basis of democratically legitimized prioritization of public spending and the budget management requirements that naturally follow from this (Majgaard 2008/9, 261f). The call is not to give educators complete freedom to promote their particularized goals at the expense of other social considerations and outside democratic control (cf. Majgaard 2008/9, 266).

The educators' professional group should support the development of arguments for the importance of employees who build a relatively firm understanding of why their profession makes *sense* and why flexibility cannot be the primary competence. The arguments must be based on understandings of the pedagogical tasks that can gain general and local legitimacy. This also means that the employee group and its local leaders

must be strengthened in their ability to formulate what 'the good educator' is for a practitioner.

Against this background, in collaboration with the management, reflection spaces can be institutionalized where the actors can jointly insist on the paradoxes and conflicts and develop their language for the children's diverse developmental activities. Such spaces of reflection require that leaders creatively demand and acknowledge the diverse perspectives of professionals from everyday life and that they are trained to support a systematized interpretation and assessment of these (cf. Hviid & Plotnikof 2012). Generally speaking, such a struggle and such learning spaces can be included in an analysis of how recognition of the functionally differentiated tasks of professionals can be included in a reflective discussion of the further development and purpose of the welfare state (Jørgensen 2014).

In light of the recognition perspective and the introductory narrative, stop blocks should be put in place to prevent upper managers from skipping several local management levels, just as the area manager should also become a gatekeeper, with an eye for the work being done on the other side of the chain of command, and with an understanding that there may be an immediate conflict between the practitioners' and politicians' understanding of the good educator. There should also be an awareness that changes in the management hierarchy can lead to frustration for the new leaders if they have a clear agenda and this is underplayed by the frontline actors. This puts them at a disadvantage in fulfilling their role in a way that enables them to be recognized by their managers. All of these challenges should be addressed through open communication in order to present both the general societal concerns discussed by leadership and the particular experiences and interpretations of pedagogical practice valued by frontline staff.

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