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3.3 Collaborative leadership – a way to support empowerment in organizational life

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Introduction

According to *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2018) published by the World Economic Forum, no country in the world has achieved gender equality. Although women account for one half of the potential global talent base, they face many problems in different arenas of life, including working life, and continue to suffer discrimination in many countries around the globe. Women have more difficulties than men advancing in a career, women's pay is lower compared to men's, women's possibilities of participating in working life are weaker than men's, working women carry the main responsibility for family, and so on. Seen from both the economic and equality viewpoints, working life organizations need to support women's (and also diverse people's) opportunities in order to make possible their equal treatment and better inclusion in working life. This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (2016) of the United Nations, which clearly stipulates the need for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The role of leadership in bringing and promoting inclusion as well as lowering gender inequality among the workforce in an organization is widely considered indispensable. For example, according to Bertland (2009), Alvesson (2011) and Huhtala et al. (2013), leadership is a crucial factor that affects the culture, values, norms and practices, for example, concerning inclusion and equality in organizations. In line with Bertland (2009), who draws on the capability approach put forward by Amartya Sen, the starting point for this article is that leadership should give employees what is just, and they should create an organizational environment and provide encouragement for employees to advance, become empowered, grow, and find fulfilment in their work. This kind of environment also tends to contribute to the achievement of positive employee outcomes, for example wellbeing, commitment, and involvement (Grawitch et al., 2007). We argue that collaborative leadership can be a way to support such a working environment.

This article has many purposes. *Firstly*, we will analyse the concept of collaborative leadership and discuss its role in bringing a developmental change in leadership thinking in organizational life. *Secondly*, we will discuss why collaborative leadership is important from a gender (and in general, diversity) viewpoint. *Thirdly*, we will examine what kind of results previous studies have found of collaborative leadership from women's point of view. *Fourthly*, and finally, we will suggest an agenda for future research.

In our analysis, we focus particularly on the educational organizational context because educational institutions are important pillars of any society and of the economy in general: they are responsible for bringing economic development, and creating a knowledge economy and sustained change (Blackmore & Sachs, 2012). Prior research (e.g. Fullan, 2002; Hallinger, 2003; Van Wart, 2013; Amanchukwu et al., 2015) has argued that the success of educational organizations, such as schools and institutes of

higher education, is positively linked with the quality of their leadership. Leadership is a process that initiates and coordinates processes of change, creates a team spirit, and both motivates and encourages diverse team members' performance in the achievement of common goals (Yukl, 2010).

Collaborative leadership

What does collaborative leadership mean?

Although several definitions of leadership have been put forward, the concept generally refers to “the process wherein an individual member of a group or organization influences the interpretation of events, the choice of objectives and strategies, the organization of work activities, the motivation of people to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, the development of skills and confidence of members, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization” (Yukl, 2010, p.5).

According to Yukl (2010, p.3), leadership can be viewed as both a specialized role and a shared influence process. The specialized role reflects the fact that there is role specialization in all groups, and this is true also of the role of leader. The role-specific responsibilities and tasks are important, and they cannot be shared too widely because the effectiveness of the group will suffer. Seen from this viewpoint, the individual expected to act in the leadership role is called a “leader” and other members of the group are called “followers”. The influence process idea sees leadership as a process of influencing people that emerges within a social system and is shared among the members of the system. Any member of the system can exercise leadership, and no clear distinction is made between leaders and followers.

Broadly, collaborative leadership is defined as the collaboration between a group of people with multidimensional skills who can consistently come up with new ideas and who demonstrate the ability to work closely with different individuals, groups or teams (Rubin, 2009; Kramer & Crespy, 2011). Collaborative leadership arises when essentially motivated people reflect with trusted peers on individual as well as shared organizational goals as they work across subcultural boundaries (Raelin, 2006). Individuals are not in themselves the focus of attention, but the focus is on their embeddedness in a system that creates the conditions under which relational outcomes such as coordinated action, collective achievements and shared accountability can be observed as a collective capacity of the organization (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; Raelin, 2018). Collaborative leadership is an approach that aims to increase the diversity of voices that are heard and helps to expand the opportunities available to both organizations and individuals (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Kramer & Crespy, 2011; Jäppinen & Tubin, 2016). It emphasizes such ideas as think-well-together, learn together, and lead together.

In sum, the positive outcomes of collaborative leadership are that it:

- improves the performance of organization members
- improves the professional development of organization members
- develops the organization as a learning community

- helps to reduce discrimination and competition between organization members
- supports the development of trust and mutual respect between parties
- increases the learning capacity of organization members

Previous research findings (e.g., Chrislip, 2002; Hallinger, 2011) highlight that collaborative leadership is a process that requires time and effort, and it is a process in which appropriate people meet at the right time to employ their knowledge and capabilities to solve genuine problems, influence others to move forward, and emphasize various organization-wide activities that will contribute to the organizations' success. The ability to exchange ideas, work together, do collegial teamwork, learn from one's peers, network, and collaborate in learning, brings us to the notion of '*collaborative culture*', which leads to a newer approach to leadership in educational organizations, that is, '*learning together and leading together*' (Fullan, 2007; DuFour and DuFour, 2010).

Although embeddedness in a social system is emphasized in collaborative leadership, and traditional leadership stresses the positional power and base of a leader, the conceptualization of the collaborative leadership approach often assumes that leaders have visionary minds and consider themselves accountable for any situation. Collaborative leaders create good working relationships with people, facilitate meaningful and purposeful interaction, and keep all participants and stakeholders together to negotiate about opportunities and challenges. Collaborative leaders take on responsibilities and duties in a coalition and can be regarded as *peer problem solvers*. (Miller and Miller, 2012). In Table 1, the key characteristics of the traditional leadership approach and the collaborative leadership approach are compared.

Table 1. Comparison of traditional leadership and collaborative leadership

Criteria	Traditional leadership	Collaborative leadership
Power	Traditional leaders believe that they can lead the organization/department/unit through positional or authority power.	In collaborative leadership, power is exercised in collective teamwork, where equal participation across all levels and among diverse people is the key to organizational success.
Credit of success	In traditional leadership, success is largely claimed by the leaders themselves.	In collaborative leadership, success is attributed to team performance and the achievement of common goals.
Information sharing process	Information and knowledge are the hallmarks of higher authority and they are not willingly shared with followers.	In collaborative leadership, new ideas and knowledge are highly welcomed through the shared learning process; information can also be shared freely and effectively through built-in digital mechanisms such as Intranet and digital platforms.
Decision-making process	In a top-down hierarchy, decisions are made and approved by people in high leadership positions and then delivered to their operational teams	Collaborative leadership facilitates brainstorming and thought-provoking communication with operational teams at the time of decision-making.

Problem-solving approach	Traditional leaders prefer to find the quickest possible solutions for problems.	Collaborative leadership is in synergy to seek out the root cause of challenging issues.
Roles and responsibilities	Traditional leaders distribute specific roles and responsibilities according to their positions.	Collaborative working involves various opportunities when allocating roles and responsibilities based on team members' skills and competencies.

As shown in Table 1, the collaborative leadership approach has greater potential than the traditional leadership approach to get productive results. It treats organization members more equally as subjects of decision-making, information sharing, learning and so forth, instead of their being the objects of leaders' activities.

An important result of our analysis was the identification of the key building blocks in collaborative leadership. The first building block emphasizes the *flow of information*, which builds a strong relationship in professional communities. The second block refers to *shared knowledge* or *thought-provoking ideas* based on *trust, empathy, and mutual respect*; this brings organization members more closely together in collaboration, networking, and partnership. The third block points to the importance of collaborative culture, which means "*learn together and lead together*". This ensures that the organizational goal of organization members as well as students in educational institutions is meaningful learning opportunities.

In sum, based on our analysis, we propose the following definition of collaborative leadership:

Collaborative leadership is a dynamic reciprocal process that promotes collaboration and constantly allows greater independence, information sharing, learning, mutual respect, and trust between and among different people in and around the organization, for the effective achievement of both common goals as well as the inclusion, empowerment, and well-being of all parties involved.

Why is collaborative leadership important?

Over the last few decades, the role of leadership in organizations, especially in many Western societies and working life organizations, has been undergoing a transformation from bureaucratic to collaborative. Several scholars have argued for the emergence of collaborative approaches as a newer, collective, shared or distributed mode of leadership (e.g. Slater, 2005; Ainscow, 2016; Raelin, 2018), so the idea of leadership as a process of shared influence is gaining in popularity. Several reasons for this change can be given, the most significant of which will be discussed here.

In today's challenging, complex, and increasingly diverse working environment, no single person is likely to have the combined skills that are necessary to accomplish any work effectively, so it makes sense and is important to place greater reliance on collaborative practices. Moreover, empowering a range of people, for example, of different genders, can bring multiple viewpoints and encourage an innovativeness in the organization's culture and activities that will make the organization more effective (Riivari & Lämsä, 2019). This perspective can be called the business-case approach. It stresses that enhancing a form of leadership that is shared among diverse people can bring benefits and achievements that would be impossible for a single leader. Buchanan

& Huczynski (2019, p. 619-620) argued that inclusion and diversity supported by the appropriate leadership behaviour can deliver performance in the organization in several ways. In addition to having a wider talent pool, the quality of decision-making can be improved. Diverse groups can be more creative and innovative because they combine various perspectives, ideas, and experiences. The employer image is tempting to various groups of people and, consequently, the talent pool for recruitment increases.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies in the last few decades has created several interactive digital tools, devices, and channels that are further reducing the gap between individuals, team members, communities, and other stakeholders in an organization (Fullan, 2007). However, the role of digitalization in the development of an inclusive workplace (and the labour market in general) is still an open question. On the one hand, using digital tools may help to diminish the power distance between organization members and contribute to people's, particularly, women's (and other suppressed groups') opportunities to participate in organizational activities, get information, express opinions and, consequently, become more empowered than before. On the other hand, significant gaps exist for women as compared to men regarding the use of digitalization. (Sorgner et al., 2017.) Advancing inclusion and equality from the digitalization point of view will not occur by itself, but requires various initiatives. Among these initiatives, one way can be shared leadership. Creating mutual trust and information-sharing among all members are crucial here.

According to Eagly and Chin (2010), the motivation for introducing collaborative leadership practices is often felt most strongly in multinational corporations, which have a wider demographic presence in different regions of the world and an employment force with greater multicultural diversity and a broader range of social backgrounds. These organizations increase their popularity among diverse workgroups and build multiple relationships throughout the global market. It is expected that the diversity of the voices heard will promote collective decision-making practices and dialogue between individuals, encourage the sharing of views, and develop relationships and networking.

Finally, Rok (2009) says that the tendency to move from the centralized top-down leadership models to more decentralized bottom-up approaches draws on the increasing demands for organizational ethicality and responsibility. Rok stresses that ethical values such as empowerment, openness, integrity and being responsive to feedback from others are crucial aspects of decentralized leadership. Here, the inclusion of women in collaborative leadership is important; they make a vital contribution towards its successful implementation (Nussbaum, 1999). The equal participation of the female workforce in the decision-making process and other tasks has been found to positively influence the organization's image and efficiency (Cavero-Rubio et al., 2019). The inclusion of women in the organizational decision-making process is relatively new: historically, women have been largely excluded from leadership and managerial roles in educational and other organizations (White & Özkanlı, 2010). Against this backdrop, shared and decentralized forms of leadership can be regarded as an important mechanism to create the kind of collaborative and social environment and generally favourable circumstances in which the female workforce can act and perform fully. This underlines the ethical justification of collaborative leadership.

Change in leadership in educational organizations

In today's highly competitive, team-based and partnership-oriented educational environment, the traditional leadership approach has often failed to bring productive

results (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). Nowadays, the role of leadership in an educational organization seems to be becoming less traditional and bureaucratic and more collaborative and relational (Fletcher, 2004; Jones et al., 2012). Despite these advances and developments, driving the change from the more autocratic leadership style to a more shared or collaborative form of leadership is still considered challenging, complicated, and slow in societies and organizations where autocratic leadership styles and practices have been dominant for decades (Lämsä & Pucetaite, 2008; Raelin 2018).

Seen from the point of view of educational organizations, an important motivation for bringing about a change in leadership practices is largely the fact that traditional educational systems and cultures are not considered supportive of collaboration in teaching and learning (Black, 2015). There are also gender-biased processes and outcomes in favour of men (Carli & Eagly, 2001). According to Black (2015), educational organizations place an over-reliance on a centralized and bureaucratic leadership style, and are slow to take up the collaborative partnership and technologies that are used in other sectors of the economy

The 1980s and 1990s can be considered crucial in bringing new leadership ideas to educational organizations (Geijssels & Meijers, 2005; Waks, 2007). During this time, these organizations gradually began to question the prevailing centralized and highly bureaucratic leadership and management systems and move to a more interactive environment. Additionally, during this time, the organizations started to pay attention to the question of diversity amongst their members, although these ideas were still at a very early phase of development.

In general, these initiatives in collaboration and diversity resulted in planning and creating knowledge-based communities which emphasize knowledge sharing and cooperation. Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) argue that a significant change was that processes of social interaction began to be recognized as important in the field of education. These processes were targeted at leaders, employees, students, stakeholders and professional communities to collaborate in order to face the challenges of 21st-century educational institutions.

Another key to the change in leadership ideas was that, particularly in the 1980s, the concept of a change agent was borrowed from the general organization change literature and was introduced and implemented in many educational organizations. This motivated the start of a period of systematic change and development, and many members of staff, often teachers, were designated as change agents to coordinate and lead the processes of change in their respective organizations (Geijssels & Meijers, 2005; Wedell, 2009). The duties of these designated change agents were to create an enabling environment for change, facilitate the smooth and successful implementation of a change agenda, popularize the concept of change, create awareness, motivate organization members towards change, and create a strong learning environment by developing shared values. The idea of designating change agents was to bring a sense of quality both in education as well as leadership and organizational practices. The notion of change agents also introduced the idea of working collectively, in contrast to the traditional system and culture in educational institutions where people, especially teachers, tended to work alone, in isolation.

By now, the collective approach in leadership has been introduced in many educational organizations around the world to motivate and enable staff and students to work together with various stakeholders. The purpose of this collective approach is to build and support the abilities of organization members, improve the quality of organizational

practices (e.g. teaching methods), and nurture meaningful work for the organization's members (Waks, 2007). The idea in the educational world nowadays tends to be that leadership is not a '*One Man Show*' but is preferably shared. The change towards the collective approach is a multi-dimensional and continuous learning process (Fullan, 2007; Holbeche, 2007; Waks, 2007).

Collaborative leadership and women

Gender has been considered one of the key dimensions, but a frequently overlooked one, in leadership theories and practices in educational contexts (Collard, 2001). Now, given the demographic changes and increasing diversity of many societies, researchers have started to investigate various aspects of diversity in collaborative leadership in educational organizations. Among these aspects, particular attention has been paid to gender. The motivation for leadership studies examining gender issues is often the fact that women have now started to appear in positions of leadership in educational institutions, and their influence in strategic decision-making processes is therefore increasingly felt (Chin, 2013).

Several researchers (e.g., Blackmore & Sachs, 2012; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2017) have argued that women can be the agents of change in leadership practices because of their greater inclination to share knowledge and care for people. These characteristics are increasingly considered features of professional leadership in educational organizations – and in expert organizations in general. Prior research has claimed that unlike their male counterparts, women are generally more collaborative in nature as well as relational and transformational which help to promote robust leadership (Collard, 2001; Chin, 2013); women are expected to put greater reliance on collaborative strategies in their leadership roles (Rosenthal, 1998; Carli & Eagly, 2001). The transformational leadership style, which also involves the relational element in terms of caring for others, seems to be the most preferred leadership style used by women in educational organizations (Trinidad & Normore, 2005).

Today's workforce is increasingly diverse and needs innovativeness in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Benschop et al., 2015). These features demand an inclusive approach to strengthen multi-dimensional skills and capabilities, which makes all organization members valuable and trusted peers. In this context, Here, gender diversity in leadership roles and women's better access to such roles are considered a way to 'move knowledge around', through collaboration, collegial teamwork, and partnership within and beyond the organization (Bear & Woolley, 2011). Bear & Woolley emphasize that women's participation in team collaboration improves the quality, productivity and performance of the team. To sum up, it has been concluded in previous studies on collaborative leadership that working women can act as change agents, providing opportunities for organization members' participation, agency, growth and development by replacing the traditional leadership behavioural pattern with a more collaborative approach (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Parker, 2004; Chin, 2013)

According to Madden (2005), although many educational organizations nowadays regard gender equality in leadership as a crucial aim, still, gender stereotyping – obviously often unconscious – occurs, and this discriminates against women and slows down their career advancement in leadership positions. Madden argues that the masculinized leadership culture of higher education organizations pushes women to adapt to the existing culture, and changing it is difficult. Although collaboration as a leadership approach is viewed as one of the most effective approaches in educational

organizations nowadays, and is an important theme in feminist leadership and management discussions in general (Madden, 2007), behaving collaboratively can be a risk to a woman's credibility in a leadership position. If women's behaviour differs from the traditional leadership behavioural pattern, they may be belittled and seen simply as confirming the stereotype of women as only nurturers (Madden, 2005).

Discussion and further research

Our analysis suggests that no single concept of leadership has emerged which focuses on an inspirational and innovative environment and at the same time seeks to achieve individual autonomy, and cultivate a collegial atmosphere and social inclusion. In addition to collaborative leadership, concepts such as participative, distributed, shared, democratic, horizontal and team leadership have been put forward. They all share a common meaning but there are also differences between them. In this study, we only compared the collaborative leadership approach to the traditional leadership approach, which stresses hierarchy and autocratic leadership. One limitation here, then, is that no conceptual comparison was made with the afore-mentioned leadership concepts that are close in meaning to the concept of collaborative leadership. It would be interesting to try to do a detailed comparative analysis of all the leadership concepts that highlight the significance of cooperation and teamwork.

Seen from the practical point of view, we may say that the collaborative leadership approach, which replaces the traditional model of a corporate hierarchy and autocratic leadership, can contribute to creating a certain kind of organizational culture (Huhtala et al., 2013). Such an organizational culture stresses common learning and doing, as well as a low power distance between leaders and followers. This kind of culture has the potential to produce inclusion, wellbeing and other positive outcomes for working and learning. Collaborative leadership can be a process of creating novel ways of thinking, motivation and synergy between leaders and followers to develop a new environment for collective and meaningful activities. However, at the moment we know too little about the process of leadership change towards a collaborative way of acting in and around organizations, or the outcomes of the collaborative leadership approach. These both require more research in the future.

Because much of the literature concerning collaborative leadership emphasizes its positive aspects, its problems and drawbacks remain largely invisible; they should be considered more in future research. Moreover, the definitions of collaborative leadership tend to see employees instrumentally, that is, as a means to organizational and group results. However, we think that people are not only a means to an end but also important and valuable in themselves. This idea calls for more research on collaborative leadership from an ethical and value-based viewpoint.

As we have understood from the literature, educational organizations require new beliefs, learning attitudes, and various mindsets in their shared and collective endeavours. Collaborative leadership can be an engendering and empowering process, and this includes the idea that leadership belongs to everyone in the group or community. Truly collaborative leadership develops over time and it takes patience and time if people are to be involved in the decision-making processes and the organization of goal-oriented actions. One idea for future research is the longitudinal development towards collaborative leadership in educational organizations, as well as the turning points in that development process.

Collaborative leadership brings a vision of the recognition of the importance of various perspectives and different voices in organizational performance. The empowering effect of such leadership can be significant in organizational life if the process of change from the traditional leadership approach to the more collaborative approach is successful. One argument in favour of the change that has often been put forward is that more women are necessary in leadership positions to promote change because their leadership behaviour is more collaborative than men's (see e.g. Madden, 2005). However, the research results on comparisons between men's and women's leadership behaviours are inconclusive. Generally, studies on collaborative leadership and gender have tended to emphasize a comparative gender-as-a-variable viewpoint. As a result, a simple dichotomy of genders as well as stereotyping women's leadership behaviour as merely collaborative (and feminine, nurturing) can be seen as limitations of previous research. We suggest that a more detailed analysis of gender, its production and the gendered nature of collaborative leadership require much more consideration in the future. Women's own experiences should also be investigated. Particularly the idea of positionality – the consciousness of how the woman's position and its change to a leadership role affects her perceptions (Madden, 2005) – could be a fruitful subject of study.

Finally, previous research on collaborative leadership is highly concentrated in the developed regions of the world, typically the Anglo-Saxon context. It would be useful if future research could investigate collaborative leadership in emerging and developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia as well as in different African countries. These areas are interesting because, according to, for example, Hofstede (1980), they tend to be collectivist cultures that may offer a fruitful basis for collaboration in general, as well as in leadership. However, at the same time, these societies tend to rely on masculinist cultural features that stress the traditional distribution of gender roles. This reduces women's opportunities to participate in leadership, because women are usually considered "others", not right for inclusion in the "normal" group of leaders. This means that leadership tends to be male-dominated in these cultures. All in all, this shows that gender alone may not be an adequate viewpoint, but the intersection of gender and nationality, as well as other diversity dimensions such as ethnicity, social class and age, are likely to play a role here. Finally, after analysing past research, we have observed that although some initiatives relating to collaborative leadership practices have been taken in these regions, they have rarely been investigated academically. We suggest that future research should explore collaborative leadership as a contextually and historically embedded phenomenon. Finally, an intersectionality lens might offer a useful perspective on the topic.

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