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Distributed leadership in European schools: a descriptive analysis

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Abstract

In 2013 a large-scale survey was set up into distributed leadership in European schools. This type of leadership is embedded in the workplace and fosters collaboration and initiative, shared responsibilities and knowledge. The aim of the research was to investigate whether distribution of leadership has emerged in school practice and whether there are relationships with organisational features. The findings demonstrate that the majority of the respondents describe their leadership practice as distributed. However, teachers perceive this much less than school leaders and the results point out that the critical issues are especially resided in a dominant top down initiative and relatively limited guidance and opportunities for staff to help creating new ideas. Indeed, the autonomy of schools appears to have an impact on the possibilities to enhance such a leadership practice. But effective autonomy relies on effective school leaders. School leaders play an important role in promoting distributed leadership by encouraging and supporting their staff.

Keywords: school leadership – distributed leadership – school improvement

Introduction

This paper addresses four main questions. Firstly, is leadership distributed in European schools? Secondly, are there differences between respondents based on position, seniority and gender? Thirdly, are there differences between schools (based on school related features)? Fourthly, is there a relationship with the consequences of the financial crisis and with the autonomy schools have? This article starts with a description of the research purpose and a further examination of the meaning of distributed leadership. Following on from this, we will pay attention to the methodological design and review the findings of the research. Finally, we will end with conclusions and some attendant issues and reflect on the limitations of this research.

Research purpose

Historically, schools have not had much freedom of movement in defining the curriculum and setting teaching objectives or in the management of finance and human resources. In addition, the position of school leader was often reserved for the staff member whose seniority was determined by their length of time working in the school. It is only since the 1980s that the movement towards school autonomy began to develop, which, as a result, required more leadership qualities. Consequently, leading a school has been more and more valued as a profession with associated professional standards, study programmes, training sessions and courses. Developments within the educational sector have showed a rise in the number of roles and responsibilities of those who work in schools, with increasing discussion about the range of different kinds of leadership practices. One of these is distributed leadership.

As a result, principals on their own may no longer be able to lead the complex organisations. Schools now operate in a diversity of societies and face a proliferation of legislative frameworks with detailed requirements. No individual can possibly deal with the

masses of interactions and information caused by these developments. However, the need for distribution of leadership within the school is not only a pragmatic issue of proportionally dividing the school leaders workload, it has the positive impact on the self-efficacy of teachers and other staff members by encouraging them to show leadership based on their expertise and by supporting collaborative work cultures (Day et al., 2009; Schleicher, 2012). This in turn is one of the most important conditions for a culture of improvement being at the heart of the school.

In fact, due to the complexity of school organisations, today's school leaders need to enlarge their scope of leadership activity even beyond the school alone. Leadership capacity that is built within as well as beyond their own school on behalf of all children in their locality is called *system leadership*. In this kind of leadership greater decentralisation is coupled with broader responsibility and for contributing to and supporting the school's local communities, other schools and other public services. To establish system leadership, the leadership at the school itself has to be better distributed among the professionals.

There is increasing research evidence that distributed leadership makes a positive difference to organisational outcomes and student learning (Harris, 2008; Day et al, 2009; Obadara, 2013). Gradually the distributive perspective on leadership disseminates in different countries to become a general practice. Some OECD countries, and in particular Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, have more of a history of teamwork and co-operation among their teaching staff, especially in primary schools (Schleicher, 2012).

The aim of the study was to collect data at the European level in order to determine to what extent distributed leadership is present in schools and to identify relationships among several variables. These include those related to school life such as the financial context of the economic recession, the extent of policy freedom of schools, the type of education and national variations are explored together with the respondent's position in the school.

This research project was commissioned by the European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL) and undertaken by the European School Heads Association (ESHA) in conjunction with the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE). ESHA is directly involved as a key partner in the European Programme of EPNoSL which aims at improving policy and practice on school leadership in Europe: "Today's educational leaders face a variety of challenging tasks, bearing responsibility not only for improving the quality of teaching and raising levels of attainment, but also for managing human and financial resources (www.schoolleadership.eu, 2014)." The data were gathered through a web questionnaire between May and September 2013.

The conceptualisation of distributed leadership

Leadership and the criteria for effective leadership have changed over the years. It comes as no surprise, as the environment - in which leadership roles find their expression - has evolved and become more dynamic than ever. Until the beginning of the twentieth century hierarchical, formal leadership roles were dominant and allocated to few within an organisation. In recent years, the individual-focused approach to leadership has been challenged. More and more, researchers and educational policy makers agree that the school's ability to cope with the numerous complex challenges it faces requires more than reliance on a single individual's leadership. Instead, human relations-oriented features such as teamwork, participation, empowerment, risk taking and little control over others need to be emphasised. Furthermore, leadership does not necessarily give any particular individual or categories of persons the privilege of providing more leadership than others. A leadership style that corresponds with these characteristics and shows an increasingly widespread interest is distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership is a concept on which a lot has been written over the past decade. The idea became an issue in school leadership literature around the late 1990s (Oduro, 2004). Different terms, such as dispersed, shared, collaborative and democratic leadership are used interchangeably to refer to 'distributed leadership' resulting in both conceptual confusion and conceptual overlap (Oduro, 2004; Harris & Spillane, 2008). In this research project the following definition of distributed leadership is used:

> *"Under Distributed Leadership, everyone is responsible and accountable for leadership within his or her area. Good ideas come from throughout the organisation, and many people will cooperate in creating change. Distributed Leadership is an environment where everyone feels free to develop, initiate and share new ideas."*
>
> *(*Position paper Distributive Leadership, ESHA, 2013, p.1).

From this perspective, distributed leadership needs to be distinguished from *delegation*, in which distribution is initiated solely from the top (school leader) and *distributed leadership* in which distribution does not solely depend on the school leader's initiative (cf. Oduro, 2004).

The importance of the school leader's behaviour

Although it sounds like a paradox, current conceptualisations of distributed leadership do not imply less demand for leadership from those in formal leadership positions, nor that formal leadership structures within organisations are redundant (Leithwood et al, 2006, Harris & Spillane, 2008). A number of studies, summarised by Bennett et al. (2003) suggested that an important starting point towards the development of distributed leadership may be found in a *'top down'* initiative from a strong leadership model where senior and formal leaders

demonstrate significant influence on the school's culture. Distributed leadership, then, seems to contradict with strong senior leadership, but there is no necessary contradiction. Many staff do not wish to be given leadership roles or to have to take on responsibility beyond their own class teaching (NCSL, 2004). To distribute leadership a strong leader is required to provide guidance and direction, to make people feel confident (Elmore, 2000; NCSL, 2004).

This type of leadership differs from more managerial types of leadership, where 'control', efficiency and hierarchical fixed structures are dominant (Elmore, 2000; NCSL, 2004). Formal leaders who wish to promote a distributed leadership practice need to avoid overly controlling behaviour and actively encourage and value innovative ideas from all members of the school. This means providing time, space and opportunities and knowing when to step back to enable staff members to contribute and participate in decision making and to establish concerted action. Although some organisational functions in the school require control (e.g. finance), school improvement is a process that cannot be controlled fully, since most of the knowledge required for improvement must inevitably reside in the people who deliver instruction, not in the people who manage them (Elmore, 2000).

Hence, to meet the challenges of the 21st century schooling, school leaders must still have sufficient knowledge of facilities, personnel, and finance management but effective leaders today must also foster learning environments where students and professionals in the school are encouraged to share knowledge, build trust and promote a sense of shared responsibility.

Everyone involved

Involvement combines with responsibility and accountability. Distributed leadership does not mean that no one besides the school leader is responsible for the overall performance of the organisation. All individuals are responsible and accountable for their contributions to the

collective result (Elmore, 2000). The formal authority of school leaders must have a complementary responsibility in creating a common culture of expectations, enhancing the talents, competencies and knowledge of the professionals in the organisation and establishing a coherent whole from the diverse qualities of its' staff members. This implies that school leaders understand how individuals vary, how the particular knowledge and skill of one person can be made to complement that of another, and how the competencies of some can be shared with others (Elmore, 2000; 2004).

Thus, all responsibility and accountability relationships are necessarily reciprocal and distributed leadership implies some degree of shared expertise and some degree of difference in the level and kind of expertise among individuals (Elmore, 2000; 2004).

Learning grows out of these differences in expertise rather than differences in formal authority and is both an individual and a social activity. This means that distributed leadership goes hand in hand with *learning organisations*. In fact, distributed leadership is more learning-centered than leader-centered. It is important for all professionals in the school to feel free to experiment and have the courage to make mistakes and to learn from them.

Ways to a distributed leadership practice

A common misinterpretation of the meaning of distributed leadership is that every one leads. Instead, everybody has the potential to lead at some time. The degree to which informal leaders are involved in the process of distributed leadership may vary. A 'top down' initiative may acknowledge and incorporate the existing informal power of leadership relationships into more formal leadership structures in ways seen as appropriate by the senior staff who are creating the distributive structure or culture.

In 2004 NCSL published a full report of their study on the distributed leadership practice in schools. They found six forms which distributed leadership can take without being prescriptive in terms of good or bad; effective forms will depend upon the specific context.

Their taxonomy of distribution consists of *formal, pragmatic, strategic, incremental, opportunistic and cultural distribution*. In the first four forms the top down initiative is more often the starting point. In the formal distribution pre-designated roles and job descriptions are leading where responsibility is delegated when necessary. In the pragmatic form distribution is temporary and ad hoc teams are constructed when external pressure forces a reaction. The distinguishing feature of strategic distribution is goal orientation and not, as with pragmatic distribution, about problem solving. Individuals as team players contribute to new appointments. Incremental distribution is more focused on professional development, by giving more responsibility to professionals in the school and where as people prove their ability to exercise leadership they are given more opportunity to lead.

The initiative can also come from *'the bottom'*. A 'bottom up' initiative is more likely to derive from individuals or groups within the organisation who are already seen by colleagues as having a leadership role or when there is a lack of strong leadership (Bennett et al., 2003). Opportunistic and cultural distribution can be characterised as more 'bottom up' forms of distribution. In opportunistic distribution, leadership is taken rather than given or planned (NCSL, 2004). The success of such a bottom up initiative may depend upon an attempt to bring into line formal and informal leaders within the organisation. Cultural distribution is a form of distribution where leadership is not formally nor explicitly distributed, but a reflection of the entire school culture. This type of leadership is more intuitive, organic and spontaneous and is expressed in activities rather than in roles (NCSL, 2004).

Freedom of movement

Several researchers (cf. Elmore, 2004; Oduro, 2004; Harris & Spillane, 2008) highlight the precondition of autonomy. Effective leadership cannot be imposed through artificial constructs developed by outside policy-makers, but must begin from the inside focused on the

teaching and learning processes in the school. School leaders can make a difference in school and student performance if they are granted the *autonomy* to make important decisions and especially when these decisions include promoting teamwork among teachers, building networks of schools, monitoring teachers, setting strategic direction and developing school plans and goals. The more pressure, the more formal structures focus on risk-reduction, conformity and controlling. The above mentioned autonomy involves the policy freedom within the school system. Additionally, to develop a culture of distributed leadership in the school freedom of movement must also be given to staff. Giving professional space reflects respect and confidence in professionals and offers a positive environment that invites them to take accountability in their profession.

Methodology

Although school heads may have an idea of the concept of distributed leadership, the term itself does not form an integral part of their day-to-day working vocabulary (cf. Oduro, 2004). To investigate whether leadership is distributed in schools, we have developed a web questionnaire. Seven dominant factors of distributed leadership were derived from a literature review: school structure; strategic vision; values and beliefs; collaboration and cooperation; decision making; responsibility and accountability and initiative. The questionnaire consists of four sections:

- Back ground questions about the respondent, e.g. seniority, formal position;
- Questions about the school context and school features: educational sector, country, educational structure, whether education is free, how teachers are, school size, class room responsibilities of the school head, the consequences of the financial crisis on the school budget, influence on school policy (curriculum, HR, financial, strategic development, organisational structure);

- Questions based on the operational definition of distributed leadership consisting of the seven factors;

- Questions answered by teachers about how they perceive their school leader regarding their behaviour to enable and encourage distributed leadership and questions answered by school leaders about how they perceive their teachers regarding the organisational behaviour which enables distributed leadership.

Twenty close-ended questions (divided over 87 items) were submitted to respondents, for the greater part on an interval measurement level. Respondents were asked to denote to what extent they agreed with the statements (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree or N/A[1]).

The questionnaire was translated in six languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Italian and Russian). 15,000 ESHA members (mainly school leaders) were invited to fill out the questionnaire in the Summer of 2013. 132 ETUCE national member organisations representing teachers and school leaders, were invited to further distribute it to their members. Even though the survey was particularly meant for school heads, a reasonable number of teachers also filled out the questionnaire. A reminder was sent three times to the population during this period to raise the number of responses to the questionnaire. Attributed to summer holidays the response rate remained – as expected – moderate. In all, 1,534 respondents filled out the questionnaire partially; 1,088 respondents filled out the questionnaire completely. For the data analysis the respondents that completed at least the questions on the seven dimensions were taken into account (in total 1,093 respondents) and, concerning the comparisons between countries, only countries with a response rate of 50 or higher were included in the analysis.

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[1] N/A means Non Applicable

In the research model, as presented below, the four main questions are incorporated. On the right-hand side of the model the dependent variables consisting of the seven dimensions of leadership distribution and the specific behaviours are shown. This block refers to the first question. Besides describing mean scores on these variables, the relationships between the dimensions and the behaviours were examined. To the left-hand side of the model the various independent variables covering the second, third and fourth research questions are mentioned: the mean scores on the distributed leadership scale of the subgroups based upon the position, gender and seniority of the respondents were compared (Question 2). Next, we examined the variations based on school related features. These variables were controlled for the personal features of the respondent (covariates) (Question 3). At the bottom of the model the consequences of the financial crisis and the perceived influence on school policy are mentioned with the assumption - in this model - that there is a single directional relationship between these factors and distributed leadership (Question 4).

[Figure 1: Research model]

To answer the research questions, several statistical analyses were executed: a Principal Component Analysis (Varimax Rotation) for data reduction and a Reliability Analysis to determine the internal consistency of the dimensions of distributed leadership. The reliability of the variables of distributed leadership, of the perceived behaviour by the professionals and of the perceived influence on school policy was tested. Provided a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher, scale variables were constructed, presenting the dimensions of distributed leadership. To examine differences based on features of the respondent and school a Chi Square test, a General Linear Model/ UNI-ANCOVA's, independent T-tests and ONEWAY-ANOVA's with post hoc comparisons (Bonferroni) were executed. Finally, a correlation test (Pearson product-Moment) and a Linear Hierarchical

Regression Analysis were used to examine (causal) relationships. In all tests a significant level of $p \le 0.05$ was applied.

Results

Is leadership distributed in European schools?

It is clear that the majority perceive that school leadership is distributive. All dimensions, except 'Initiatives', show an overall mean score of 3.5 or higher on a five- point scale. In the table below these mean scores of all respondents together are presented.

[Table 1: Dimensions Distributed Leadership, mean scores]

The overall high mean scores are mainly attributable to the fact that over 80% of the respondents say they can make their own decisions related to the content of their work, in how they organise their work and regarding their professional development. An equally large group mentions consultation meetings on a regular basis. In almost three quarters of the cases the school structure formally provides everyone opportunities to participate in decision making and about 60% believes that the formal structure facilitates informal leadership at all levels in the organisation. In most cases the school has common values for all, there is a mutual respect among staff and they express their opinions on a regular basis. Furthermore, almost all respondents (96%) feel responsible for their own performance and according to 80% staff take ownership of their own tasks and activities. In the majority of the cases people work collaboratively at their school to deliver results, although time appears to be an inhibiting factor: in less than half of the cases time was said to be sufficient to collaborate with colleagues. All in all, especially the dimensions 'Decision Making' and ' Responsibility and Accountability' show very high mean scores (both 4.1).

Still, more than half of the respondents also mentions that tasks and responsibilities are hierarchically decided and less than half of all respondents say that these tasks are assigned on the basis of the professionals' expertise. Also, in most cases decision making happens within predetermined boundaries of these responsibilities and accountabilities. In addition, leadership roles are formally agreed according to a large majority and in 60% of the cases decisions are said to be made from the top. So, the teachers' freedom to make decisions seems to relate to the content and organisation of their specific work and professional development. Regarding the creation of new ideas and taking initiative, about one third of the respondents say that these mainly come from the top, whereas 41% disagree. Nevertheless, more than three quarters indicate that there is sufficient amount of freedom for staff to contribute own ideas to improve the work.

Are there differences between respondents based on position, seniority and gender?

Emerging distributive leadership roles and responsibilities are significantly much more recognised by school leaders than by teachers (σ=0,000). On all seven dimensions school leaders score significantly higher than teachers do (see table 2).

[Table 2: Dimensions Distributed Leadership by school leaders and teachers, mean scores]

This is in part because critical aspects according to many teachers are found where there are restrictive school structures and cultural aspects. As we mentioned earlier, most of the respondents indicate that the school structure provides everyone the opportunity to participate in decision making and a small majority that informal leadership at all levels in the organisation is facilitated by the school structure. Yet, it concerns mainly the school leaders that believe so, in contrary to the teachers. For example, only 1% of the teachers strongly believes it is common in their school that everyone is involved in decision making, compared to 17% of the school leaders. And less than one third of the teachers agree on the

statement that tasks are assigned on the basis of the level of their expertise, whereas half of the school leaders agree.

Concerning the presence of a strategic vision and shared values, there is dissension as well among school leaders and teachers: school leaders believe more strongly that the strategic vision and values are shared and that there is a learning culture. Whereas 81% of the school leaders believe mistakes are seen as learning opportunities in their school, just 37% of the teachers agree. The points of view are also worlds apart with regard to cultural values such as confidence in each other's abilities and mutual respect. Finally, 85% of the school leaders say it is common at their school to express your opinion regardless of your formal status, compared to 29% of the teachers who agree on that statement.

In relation to responsibilities and accountabilities 45% of the teachers believe they are allowed to take responsibility without asking compared with 82% of the school leaders who believe so. Furthermore, much less teachers than school leaders experience collected responsibilities for each other's behaviour at their school. Top down initiative is mainly felt by the teachers (42% agree) and more than one quarter of the teachers experience a lack of direction and lead.

Besides submitting statements to the respondents on the situation in their schools, school leaders were asked to give their opinion on the behaviour of the professionals and the teachers to give their opinion on the behaviour of the school leader, respectively five and nine statements were submitted. The findings demonstrate that school leaders perceive the professionals as actively showing initiative, demonstrating responsibilities and sharing knowledge. A much smaller group but still a majority of the school leaders also believes the professionals are engaged and committed in participating in leadership roles and decision making. This positive view is consistent with their opinions on the earlier mentioned situation in their school.

[Table 3: Perception professional's behaviour by school leaders, mean scores]

This consistency also accounts for the teachers, but represents a more critical attitude towards the school leader's behaviour. Almost one half of the teachers feel that their school leader doesn't bring them into contact with information that helps them to create new ideas and doesn't give advice and guidance on their own development. Also, there is little support felt to make their own decisions and stimulants to reflect on their own work by more than one third of the teachers.

[Table 4: Perception school leader's behaviour by teachers, mean scores]

The opinions of the school leaders and the teachers differ widely. This result was the most significant in this research project. Looking at gender, we found a significant effect within the group of school leaders: female school leaders tend to be more positive in their perception of the leadership practice at their school than male school leaders are ($\sigma=0.021$). Also, the length of working in a school matters regardless of the respondent's position: on average, people who have worked less than 2.5 years in the school are more negative than people who have worked there for 10 to 30 years ($\sigma=0.023$).

Are there differences between types of schools (based on school related features)?

The overall results are dominated by responses in the primary and secondary educational sector with respondents from eight countries strongly representing the Northern and Western parts of Europe. Leadership styles seems to be more distributive in the Northern countries (England, Scotland, Sweden and Norway) and much less so in the Southern countries (Italy, France and Spain) ($\sigma=0.000$).

[Figure 2: Distributed Leadership, overall scale, countries, mean scores]

Regarding the national variations, differences are mainly found in the school structure, values and beliefs and collaboration and cooperation: school leaders in France, Spain and Italy perceive less opportunities in the school structure for teachers to participate in decision making and to take informal leadership roles. Consultation meetings are less common and professional development is not as strongly supported in these countries, compared to the Northern European countries. Furthermore, the Southern countries are critical to a greater degree regarding the presence of a learning organisation, confidence in each others' capabilities and setting high standards for the professionals.

In relation to the educational sector, a higher education level (educational sector) goes hand in hand with a less perceived extent of distributed leadership (ρ= -0.36; σ=0.000). In particular, within the primary sector a distributed leadership practice is perceived more strongly than in the secondary sector. Some small but significant interaction effects were found with the educational structure and with the type of employment in secondary schools: schools following a common core structure[2] scored less positive on distributed leadership than schools with a single or differentiated structure. Also, schools with staff employed by the government were critical to a greater degree than schools with staff employed by the school board (both σ=0.000).

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[2] **Common core structure** is a system where after completion of primary education, all students follow the same curriculum at lower secondary level. This differs from a **single structure**, where there is no explicit transition between primary and lower secondary education, and from a **differentiated structure**., where at the beginning or some time during lower secondary education students are enrolled in distinct educational pathways.

Is there a relationship with the consequences of the financial crisis and with the school's autonomy?

More than 75% of all respondents experienced a reduction of the school budget since the start of the financial crisis in 2008-9: 34% a drastic reduction, 44% a slight reduction. It is noteworthy that among these respondents, a drastic reduction is mentioned more often by teachers than by school leaders. In just 5% of the cases an increase in the school budget is mentioned and 17% say the budget has remained the same. Respondents were asked which consequences emerged in the case of reduction of the school budget. The consequences of the financial crisis are clear, especially in the Netherlands, Scotland and Spain where this is most often expressed in terms of a reduction in school supplies and services. In the figure below, these consequences are presented.

[Figure 3: Consequences of financial crisis according to school leaders and teachers, relative frequencies]

In contrast to expectations, the study showed no conclusive evidence of a causal link with distributed leadership. However, a positive causal relationship has been found between the influence on school policy and distributed leadership (adjusted R^2=0.49; ß=0.22). The least influence is felt on the curriculum content and the school budget (table 5). The latter gives reason to believe, despite a non-significant relationship between the impact of the financial crisis on distributed leadership, that financial capacity does influence the possibility of promoting distributed leadership in schools.

[Table 5: Influence, according to school leaders and teachers, mean scores]

Furthermore, little influence is mentioned on HR policy, such as employment conditions, recruitment and selection, especially compared to the perceived amount of influence on strategic development planning and organisational structure. The significant

relationship with distributed leadership confirms the need for granting sufficient autonomy to schools to actually spread and share responsibilities.

Conclusions and limitations

A response rate of more than 1,000 respondents makes it – in general - possible to make statements with a reliability of 95% and an accuracy of 5%. Yet, the responses from specific subgroups (such as certain countries and sectors) weighed heavily in the overall findings. Therefore, results regarding the extent of distributed leadership in Europe in this research need to be interpreted considering the impact of these dominant features.

Taking account of these limitations, the research findings put forward several indications that leadership is distributed in schools to a certain extent. More specifically, the distribution of leadership still seems to have a more formal character, comparable to the category 'formal distribution' of the taxonomy of NCSL. This could certainly be a result of little influence on school policy. Policy autonomy within the school system is to be considered a precondition for effective school improvement, but also school leaders play an important role in enhancing school performance by influencing the motivation and competencies of teachers and affecting the climate in which they work and learn. Although a lot more school leaders than teachers filled out the questionnaire, the sharp differences between both groups should not be underestimated. Whereas school leaders themselves have a strong positive view on the leadership practice in their school, teachers highlight some important critical issues which could be taken up by school leaders. It is suggested that they enter into dialogue with one another. By doing so, the school staff actually can make a first step towards a distributed leadership practice. We will address some additional points of interest:

- Make sure there is a shared vision and collective ambition; give guidance to professionals to deliver results instead of controlling each process and decision;

- Bring staff into contact with information that helps them to create new ideas and solve problems and stimulate bottom-up initiative;

- Arrange and encourage teamwork and collaboratively learning. Give staff the necessary space to identify urgent and relevant issues and to take informal leadership roles in handling these issues;

- Show that making mistakes is allowed as an opportunity to learn from these mistakes;

- Actively engage with their professional development, know their expertises, qualities and talents and acknowledge these;

- Address the individuals of their responsibilities. School improvement is not only the responsibility of the formal leaders in the school. It is a shared responsibility of school leaders, teachers and all other staff members.;

- Monitor and evaluate with the teachers their performances and give a sufficient amount of professional freedom in how to achieve the required results;

- Last but certainly not least, create a climate of trust, respect and confidence. These values are crucial for the self-esteem, self-efficacy and courage of staff to actively take leadership roles.

Distributed leadership is not to be seen as a new technique, but rather as a way of looking at leadership. School leaders need to be aware that leading a school has become far more complex and that leading a school exceeds what one person alone can achieve. Additionally, most school leaders will retire in the next ten years and the current characteristics of the school head's position have a low attractiveness among many future

potentials. School leaders that want to distribute leadership in their school are faced with challenges to adapt their habits and modify their leadership behaviour and strategies. Although distributed leadership is not equal to delegated leadership in our definition, the implementation of a distributed leadership practice is in most cases likely to begin with delegation before leadership can become truly embedded in the school culture.

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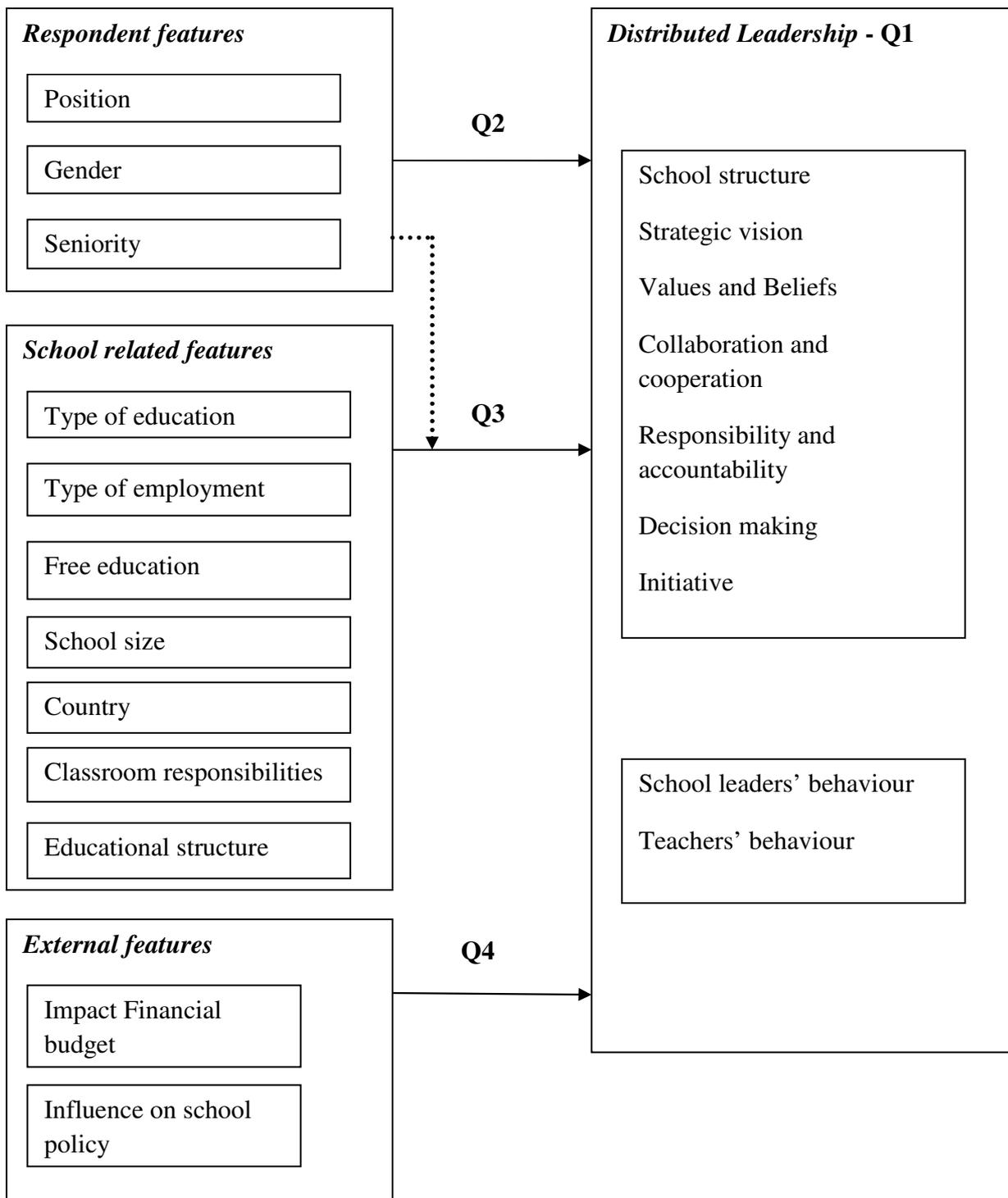a descriptive analysis of distributed leadership in schools.

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Figure 1: Research Model

Respondent features
- Position
- Gender
- Seniority

School related features
- Type of education
- Type of employment
- Free education
- School size
- Country
- Classroom responsibilities
- Educational structure

External features
- Impact Financial budget
- Influence on school policy

Distributed Leadership - Q1

- School structure
- Strategic vision
- Values and Beliefs
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Responsibility and accountability
- Decision making
- Initiative

- School leaders' behaviour
- Teachers' behaviour

Q2

Q3

Q4

Table 1: Dimensions Distributed Leadership, mean scores (n=969)

	Mean score
School structure	**3.9**
Strategic vision (scale variable)	**3.9**
Values and beliefs (scale variable)	**3.8**
Collaboration and cooperation (scale variable)	**3.8**
Decision making (scale variable)	**4.1**
Responsibility and accountability (scale variable)	**4.1**
Initiatives [a] [b]	
1. Initiatives and ideas *not* mainly from the top	**3.0**
2. Sufficient amount of freedom to contribute own ideas to improve the work	**3.9**
3. *No* necessity to take the initiative and responsibility due to a lack of direction and lead	**3.4**
4. Assignment tasks based upon the level of expertise	**3.3**
Overall scale Distributed Leadership	**3.8**

[a] *Separate items are presented, because the internal consistency is too low to construct a sub-scale variable.*

[b] *For a one-direction interpretation (the higher the mean score, the more positive the meaning), items 1 and 3 were recoded.*

Table 2: Dimensions Distributed Leadership by school leaders and teachers, mean scores (n=969)

Mean scores on a five point scale	School leader	Teacher
School structure *	4.0	3.3
Strategic vision (scale variable) *	4.0	3.2
Values and beliefs (scale variable) *	4.0	3.1
Collaboration and cooperation (scale variable) *	3.9	3.2
Decision making (scale variable) *	4.2	3.5
Responsibility and accountability (scale variable) *	4.2	3.5
Initiatives [a] [b]		
1. Initiatives and ideas *not* mainly from the top *	3.1	2.7
2. Sufficient amount of freedom to contribute own ideas to improve the work *	4.0	3.1
3. *No* necessity to take the initiative and responsibility due to a lack of direction and lead *	3.5	2.8
4. Assignment tasks based upon the level of expertise *	3.4	2.9
Overall scale Distributed Leadership	3.9	3.2

* Significant at 0.05 level

[a] Separate items are presented, because the internal consistency is too low to construct a sub-scale variable.

[b] For a one-direction interpretation (the higher the mean score, the more positive the meaning), items 1 and 3 were recoded.

Table 3: Perception professional's behaviour by school leaders, mean scores (n=820)

The professionals at our school....	Mean score	% (strongly) agree
are engaged in and committed to participating in school leadership roles	3.6	62%
actively participate in decision making	3.8	75%
actively show initiative related to school improvement	3.9	76%
demonstrate their responsibilities in their work	4.0	85%
help one another by sharing knowledge	3.9	76%
Perception behaviour of professionals (scale variable)	3.8	

Table 4 : Perception school leader's behaviour by teachers, mean scores (n=147)

The school leader at our school....	Mean score	% (strongly) agree
enables me to make meaningful contributions to the school	3.2	45%
encourages me to share my expertise with my colleagues	3.2	45%
welcomes me to take the initiative	3.1	41%
formally acknowledges my teaching abilities	3.1	45%
brings me into contact with information that helps me to create new ideas	2.7	29%
stimulates me to reflect on my work in order to improve	2.9	34%
has high expectations regarding my professional standards	3.4	54%
supports me to make my own decisions in my work	2.9	30%
empowers me by giving advice and guidance on my own development	2.7	24%
Perception behaviour of school leader (scale variable)	*3.0*	

Figure 2: Distributed Leadership, overall scale, countries, mean scores (n=902)
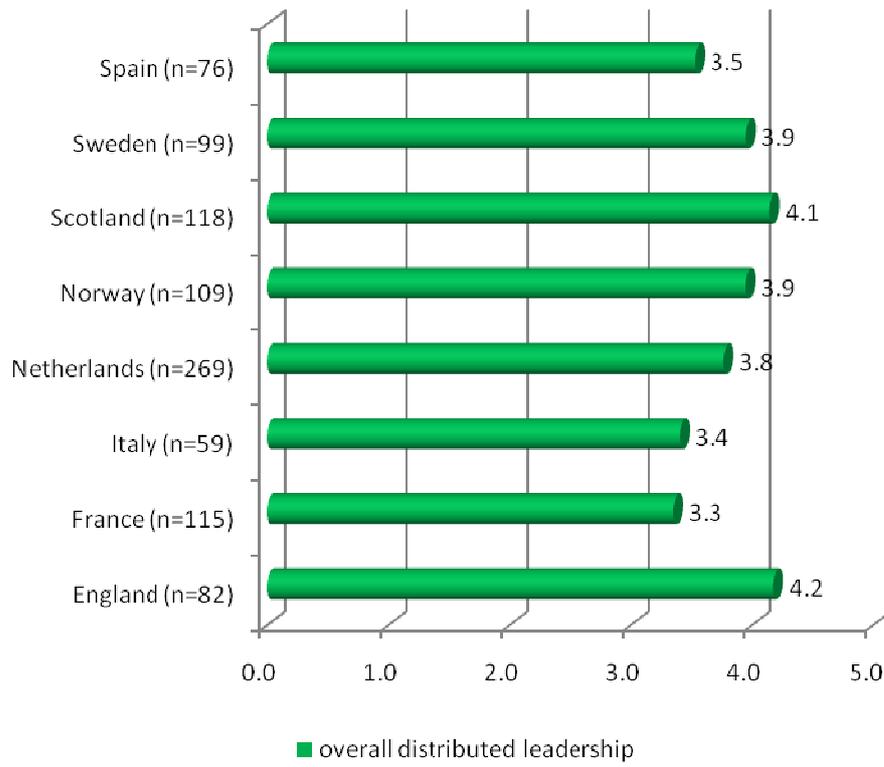
Figure 3: Consequences of financial crisis according to school leaders and teachers, relative frequencies (n=974)
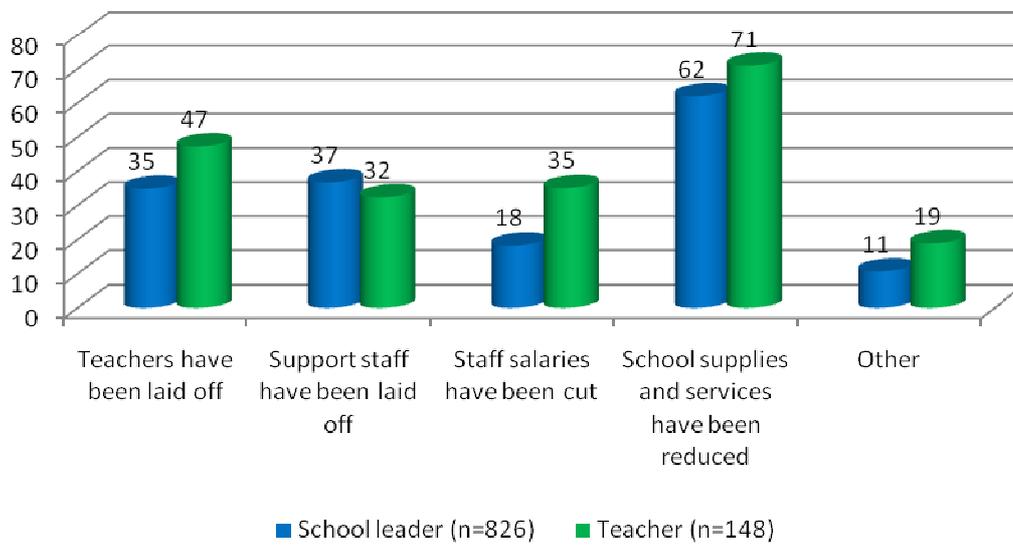
Table 5 : Influence, according to school leaders and teachers, mean scores (n=961)

	School leader	Teacher
Curriculum Content	2.8	2.8
Curriculum Delivery *	3.6	3.3
The school budget (Financial)	2.8	2.8
HR Policy (e.g. employment conditions, recruitment, selection)	3.0	3.0
Organisational structure	3.5	3.5
Strategic development planning	3.7	3.5
Professional development *	3.6	3.2
Influence (scale variable)	*3.3*	*3.2*

* Significant at 0.05 level