

Managerial Support for Learning at Work: A qualitative study of first-line managers in elder care.

Eva Ellström

Linköping University Post Print

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

Original Publication:

Eva Ellström, Managerial Support for Learning at Work: A qualitative study of first-line managers in elder care., 2012, Leadership in Health Services, (25), 4, 273-287.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17511871211268919>

Copyright: Emerald

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/>

Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-77911>

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the workplace as an environment for learning, that is, as a site not only for operational activities (e.g. care work) but also a site for individual and organisational learning (Felstead et al, 2009; Malloch et al, 2011). This interest in the workplace as a learning environment mirrors a recognition that workplace learning is key to promote the knowledge and competencies that are required to meet increasing demands for productivity, quality, and flexibility in today's organisations (Clarke, 2005; Eraut, 2000; Flanagan et al, 2000).

How, then, can the workplace be developed into an environment for both work and learning? Because the learning opportunities in a workplace to a large extent depend on the organisation of work, it has been argued that the promotion of workplace learning is an important task for line managers (Ellinger et al, 1999; Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002; Eraut, 2011; Marsick et al, 2011). This line of argument is also supported by more general research on leadership in organisations. For example, as argued by Yukl (2006, 2009), one important leadership function is to encourage and facilitate individual and collective learning in and through work. However, despite this assumed importance of managerial support for learning at work, the empirically based knowledge about how managers understand and deal with learning and developmental issues in the workplace is quite limited (Ellinger, 2005; Gibb, 2003; Wallo, 2008; Yukl, 2009). If one considers the field of care work, and elder care in particular, our knowledge about these issues is even more limited (e.g. Ellström, E., Ekholm and Ellström, P.-E., 2008; Furåker and Nilsson, 2010; Westerberg & Hauer, 2009).

The aim of the present study is to explore the meaning of managerial support for learning and development in the workplace. More specifically, the overall research question concerns how first-line managers in elder care perceive and understand their mission and tasks and how they in practice handle issues of co-workers' learning and development.

Unlike many previous studies of leadership and managerial work that are centred on individual managers and their traits, competencies, abilities or behaviours detached from the contextual conditions of the workplace, the present study focuses on management beliefs, practices and interactions in context (cf. Crevani et al, 2010).

Previous Research

What, then, do we know from previous research concerning how managers understand and deal with developmental issues in the workplace? To summarise this research, there appears to be two different pictures. On the one hand, according to a number of previous studies (Horne and Lupton, 1965; Hales, 1986, 1999, 2005), the work of managers is often characterised as being fragmented and ad hoc. Furthermore, the focus is often on routine activities concerning the day-to-day running of the operations concerned as well as handling events, problems and questions that stem from others and finding ways to resolve these problems. This picture of the work of managers also appears to be rather stable both over time and among different studies. Tasks of a more development-oriented nature, that is, tasks that concern development of co-workers and/or operations, are not prominent, if they appear at all. Many managers also see their work as separate from the role of facilitating and supporting learning processes (Beattie, 2006; Dirkx, 1999), even though coaching has often been seen as an important part of the work of a manager in the more normative management literature.

On the other hand, there are also observations that suggest there are potential opportunities for working with development and learning in connection with the frequent direct interactions that occur daily with employees (e.g. Ellinger, 2005; Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999, 2002; Ellinger and Cseh, 2007; Hales, 2005; Gibb, 2003; MacNeil, 2004; Wallo, 2008; Viitala, 2004). Common among these studies is a focus on different meanings of management support for co-workers' learning at work. For example, Ellinger and Bostrom

(2002) examined managers' beliefs about their roles as facilitators of learning. In line with previous research, they concluded that few managers actually regard themselves as developers and that they perceive the roles of being a manager and that of being a facilitator of learning as distinct from each other. These results were interpreted to be due partly to lack of skills and partly to a restricted view of their tasks as managers but also due to a lack of rewards and recognition for taking on a more development-oriented role.

In a later study, Ellinger (2005) distinguished between seven themes of learning-oriented leadership and management, including the creation of informal learning opportunities, the encouragement of risk taking, the provision of positive feedback, knowledge sharing, and the importance of leaders to serve as role models. Similarly, Viitala (2004) identified four different dimensions of managerial support: (a) to help employees be aware of and understand issues related to learning in the course of day-to-day work; (b) to promote an open and creative climate that facilitates learning at work; (c) to actively attend to and facilitate learning processes at the individual and group levels and (d) to act as a model for learning.

In many respects, Amy (2008) verifies Ellinger and Bostrom's (1999, 2002) results on the basis of interviews with employees. A further development in Amy's study is that both supportive and constraining behaviours with regard to the learning of employees are clarified. For example, it is shown that the ability of a manager to communicate with the employees is a highly important factor in stimulating learning processes. The study also shows that managers who are not enthusiastic and interested in communicating with their staff are an obstacles to learning. An authoritarian attitude, a defensive attitude and a lack of sensitivity to the needs of the employees are mentioned as examples of obstructive, constraining behaviours. Ellinger and Cseh (2007), present similar results in their study of the facilitation of co-workers' learning through everyday work.

A general criticism that may be levelled at much of the research on managerial support for learning and development cited above is that it does not take into account the significance of the organisational context and instead is primarily based on an individual perspective (cf. Dirks, 1999). Contrary to such an individualistic orientation, the present study, as stated in the introduction, focuses on the practices and leadership of managers as important aspects of the work organisation and of the learning environment of a workplace (cf. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Crevani et al, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010). Furthermore, many previous studies in this field have to a large extent relied on ratings of leadership behaviours through questionnaires. As argued by Yukl (2009), the validity of these methods may be strongly questioned in studies of more complex and interactive leadership practices, which are the focus of the present study. Furthermore, the contextual character of leadership practices that is emphasized in this study is difficult to capture through questionnaires. As a promising alternative approach, Yukl (2009) suggests the use of case studies conducted over time in one or preferably in several organisations, an approach that also makes it possible to combine different methods of data collection.

Method

In line with the methodological suggestions made by Yukl (2009), the present study was carried out as a comparative multiple-case study of eight managers in eight different service units in the home-help division of a Swedish municipality. According to law, Swedish municipalities have an overall responsibility for long-term care services of the elderly and of people with disabilities. The tasks of the home-help services depend on the needs of the individual client, and could include rehabilitation activities, medical treatment, but mainly practical chores (e.g. cleaning, laundry, shopping) and social tasks. Mainly assistant nurses carry out these services through regular visits to the clients in their homes.

The eight service units were selected from telephone interviews that were carried out with all 24 managers in the home-help services in the municipality. The purpose of these interviews was to gather general information about the service units (e.g. size, socioeconomic status of the area and the care workers' educational level) before the selection of units was carried out. The eight cases were selected through theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Based on results from a previous study (Ellström, E., Ekholm & Ellström, P.-E., 2008), the units were selected in order to get a variation primarily with respect to socioeconomic status of the municipal area in which the service unit was located and ownership of the elder care unit (public or private).

The subjects consented to participate in the study based on the information they received about the overall research plan, the aim of the study, the methods to be used and the fact that participation was voluntary. Furthermore, all participants were informed about how the collected data would be handled so that no specific individual could be identified, and that the data would only be used for research purposes.

The Eight Cases

The majority of the clients in the service units were elderly people, but some of the units also took care of clients with other needs, such as young people who needed home help due to alcoholism or psychiatric problems and families in need of support and help due to their social situations. The size of the eight service units, with respect to the number of care workers, varied between 12 and 40 employees. However, most of the units (seven units) that were finally included in the study had between 30 and 40 employees. Four service units had a public owner (the municipality), and four units had different private owners. The majority of the clients in the service units were elderly people, but also to some extent people with various disabilities in need of home-help services.

All managers in this study were women. Six of the eight managers had an academic degree in social and/or educational studies. Two of the managers had worked as assistant nurses for about ten years and had no academic degree; however, these managers had received management training as further education. In one of the larger private service units, the manager had two deputy managers (assistant nurses), and in two other larger private service units, the managers had two assistant nurses as administrative support. The amount of the managers' experience in managerial work varied from six months to 24 years. The majority of the managers had worked as managers in elder care between three and eight years.

Methods of Data Collection

Data were collected using the following methods: (a) interviews with managers; (b) observations of managers as leaders of team meetings, and (c) observations of managers during their daily work ("shadowing"), followed by a concluding interview at the end of the day. The combination of interviews and observations of managerial practices and interactions under different contextual conditions made it possible to gain both a deeper and a more holistic understanding of the managers' day-to-day work, including data about the way managers think about their work, their relations to and communication with co-workers, and their ways of handling different situations.

Interviews were conducted with a focus on the following areas: (a) the focus of their work, that is, what the managers prioritised in their daily work; (b) management attention to employee learning and development; (c) conditions for learning in the workplace; (d) the care workers' commitment to their tasks; (e) scope for working with development and change; (f) time pressure; and (g) expectations from different stakeholders in their work (personnel, clients, the relatives of the clients, managers, employers and politicians). Each of these interviews lasted between two and two and a half hours and was conducted in a separate

room at the workplace. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Because the interviews took place on the premises of the different units, there were opportunities for site visits and informal talk in connection with the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted according to an interview guide based on 15 open-ended questions within the seven areas mentioned above.

Furthermore, participant observations of two team meetings and the managers' actions were conducted with a focus on (a) the content of the meetings, (b) the type of communication used during meetings (e.g. information and/or discussion), and (c) how questions from the care workers were handled.

Each of the managers were also observed ("shadowed") by the researcher over two days with a focus on their daily working practices, communication and interactions with co-workers. During the shadowing, there were ample opportunities for dialogue with the managers concerning, for example, the tasks that were carried out and the meaning of different interaction episodes. At the end of the day, a shorter (15–30 minutes) concluding interview was carried out with the manager concerning how she had experienced the day as a whole ("Was this a typical day?") and how she retrospectively experienced and understood different events and episodes during the day.

Data Analysis

The eight managers included in this study were considered as cases within a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2009). The analysis of data was conducted in two main steps. In a first step, the transcribed interviews together with data from the observations of team-meetings and the "shadowing" of the managers were integrated into a narrative text for each manager. The purpose of this was to get a "holistic picture" of each manager's beliefs as expressed in the interviews together with observed practices and interactions. The composition of this

narrative was guided by the main areas included in the interviews and the focal areas covered by the observations (see above).

The triangulation between data from the interviews and data from the observations made it possible to get a more complete picture of the managers work in different respects (cf. Tobin & Begley, 2004). In addition, in this way it was also possible to compare the managers' own perceptions and understandings of their work as expressed in the interviews, with how they "actually" worked in different situations according to the observations. Another important way of strengthening the validity of the study was the interviews that were carried out as part of the "shadowing" of the managers. Through these interviews it was possible for the researcher to get a deeper and more complete understanding of the managers' beliefs, practices and interactions in different situations, but also to directly compare and discuss the researcher's interpretations of the observations with those of the observed subjects.

In a second step, an analysis across the eight cases (managers and units), i.e. a between-case analysis (Yin, 2009) was conducted. As a basis for this comparative analysis, meaning units that addressed the aim and the research question of the study were identified, coded and grouped into categories. The codes were discussed and compared by two researchers (the author and a colleague working in the same research project) concerning the consistency of the classification. As a result of this second step of analysis, four main categories were identified, representing different patterns of managerial support. In order to further strengthen the validity of these findings, the managers that had participated in the study were invited to a seminar for data feedback and analysis, where they had opportunities to discuss, confirm or falsify the interpretations made by the researcher.

Results

Considering the content of the managers' work and how much time they devoted to various tasks, there were great similarities among all units, including both public and private.

However, despite these overall similarities with respect to the content of the managers' work, that is, with respect to *what* they do, it was possible to distinguish different patterns concerning *how* the managers performed their work. In other words, it was possible to distinguish different patterns in how they perceived and understood their mission and tasks and how they acted and interacted with co-workers in relation to development-oriented issues. More specifically, it was possible to distinguish the following four distinct patterns:

- Working with development issues as an integrated part of everyday work
- Working with development issues in specific arenas
- Ambitions to work with development issues exists, but routine tasks take over in practice
- A main focus on operations and routine tasks.

Working with development issues as an integrated part of everyday work

The two managers included in this category (public unit 1 and private unit 4) expressed a great interest in a development-oriented way of working. Furthermore, their actual work was “permeated” by a development-oriented approach during team meetings and in the course of the day-to-day work. During meetings with the employees, the managers' focus was on discussing and resolving different types of everyday problems. In the day-to-day work, they attempted to create opportunities through which the employees themselves could handle problems of different types. One of the managers expressed this concept as follows:

I feel that it is important to encourage the employees to solve problems that come up in the course of the day-to-day-work because they know best. They must be encouraged to take responsibility themselves. (Manager Private Unit 4)

This manager also tried to encourage the employees to take more responsibility by working with continuous improvements. The aim was to get the employees to learn to be aware of different problems and to raise them for discussion at team meetings. She saw a danger in managers seeing themselves as “problem solvers”, as this could lead to the employees not shouldering responsibility for solving the problems that arise in the course of the daily work.

Another way to get the employees to take more responsibility, according to this manager, was to give them specific “areas of responsibility”. She underlined the importance of matching these tasks to the employees’ “interests” and “abilities” to ensure that the responsibility was perceived as being engaging and interesting and not as an “extra burden”. In this connection, she also emphasised how important it was that she as a manager recognised and acknowledged this work so that the employees would “grow” and feel involved, thus increasing their degree of commitment to the care work. Her assessment was that delegating responsibility to the employees also made her own job easier and relieved the time pressure on her:

I don't understand those managers who are scared to death of delegating for example care planning. I understand why they get buried in work, why things don't work for them.

(Manager Private Unit 4)

The other manager in this category also worked in a development-oriented way in relation to the employees. She initiated various projects with the aim of generating development and learning. She also demonstrated a development-oriented attitude in relation to the day-to-day work:

We are working to develop and improve our contacts with the clients. We have also developed an introduction programme for new employees. One of the employees also participates when we conduct interviews as part of the recruiting process. (Manager Public

Unit 1)

Although this manager was involved in several projects, she did not experience any particular time pressure or stress in her work. Nor did she feel that it was stressful to have several things going on at the same time.

This manager was also positive about her staff members, whom she characterised as “highly client-oriented and interested in both major and minor improvements”. She saw the care workers as being “full of ideas” about possible ways to make things better for the clients and about what could be changed in different parts of the operations.

Both of the managers in this category felt that the employees were committed to working with the clients. The team meetings were also used to a great extent to discuss client-related issues, and the managers themselves raised questions in order to get the employees to reflect and discuss. They can thus be said to have a responsive and listening attitude that contributed to the development of a consensus “from below”. They did not go in and give orders and instructions. Both of these managers felt that the employees were interested in various types of training, and they discussed the employees' needs for further training in individual interviews.

Working with development issues in specific arenas

The two managers in this category expressed an interest in working in a development-oriented way, and they also worked with a focus on development and learning in certain specific arenas (e.g. through special work groups with different responsibilities or in team meetings). However, these managers did not do this as comprehensively as the managers in the previous category, in which development constituted an integrated part of the everyday operations. One of the managers in this category (private unit 2) worked with quality groups, through which the care workers in her unit focused on different parts of the operations and discussed and worked with various proposals for continuous improvements concerning, for example, care practices, different routines and the work environment.

Most of the employees were involved in such a quality group. According to the manager, there was a lot of confidence in the reports and proposals that came from the quality groups, as everyone knew that “a lot of work had gone into them”.

The other manager in this category (public unit 2) focused more on development and learning in connection with team meetings. At these meetings, she called on the employees to reflect on ways of resolving various care-related problems. During discussions of how to handle clients, she often raised follow-up questions to move the discussion forward. Example questions included, “What do you mean?” or “What are your thoughts about this?” She listened and gave feedback by praising not only changes that had been made, but also that the employees were prepared to think about important changes and present their thoughts and ideas to the group. Most of the employees took an active part in these discussions. She also helped to sum up their ideas once they had decided how to proceed.

Both of these managers felt that there were a lot of opportunities for the care workers to learn from each other in the course of the day-to-day work. However, they disagreed about whether or not there was a need to organise such learning. One of the managers (public unit 2) said that there was indeed a need to systemise and support learning in the day-to-day work. The other manager (private unit 2) believed that learning in work happened spontaneously and without specific management support.

With regard to resolving client-related problems, both of these managers had a listening attitude concerning the ideas and initiatives of the employees. Decisions on how to proceed on a particular matter then developed gradually in discussions with the employees. The managers thus acted more as “sounding boards” than as problem solvers. Even though the daily work of the managers involved dealing with a wide variety of matters, they did not feel that they were under any direct time pressure.

The manager at one of the units (private unit 2) believed that the employees were highly committed to working with the clients and that most of the employees were also interested in further training. The other manager (public unit 2) felt that the level of commitment to the work and interest in further training varied among the employees.

Ambitions to work with development issues exists, but routine tasks take over in practice

The two managers in this category (public unit 4 and private unit 1) expressed an interest in working with the development of the employees but felt that this interest was difficult to realise in day-to-day work. Both managers also expressed ideas about how they would like to work to develop the operations by “doing more things together with the staff to get smarter ideas together”. However, they get things started, but “then something else comes up”.

Both of these managers focused a lot on the administrative work, including ensuring that the schedules were in order and a lot of time was devoted to maintaining their own control over the operations.

I check that everything gets done, make sure that everyone does what they're supposed to do and – it's my responsibility to point things out and to inspect things. (Manager Private Unit 1)

At both of these units, information and staff-related issues were in focus at the team meetings. One of the managers (private unit 1) provided little scope for discussion and reflection regarding client-related issues that were brought up by the care workers. The focus was on resolving any problems as quickly as possible on the basis of "stated rules and instructions". At the other unit (public unit 4), the manager sometimes tried to initiate a discussion concerning client-related problems, but this seldom led to a discussion through which the problems were solved. Thus, despite the fact that both of these managers said that they felt it was important to work in a development-oriented way, client-related issues were not used as a starting point for problem solving or for developing the care work. In cases when the staff raised problems, there was a tendency on the part of both of these managers to

either suggest solutions themselves or to talk about the problems for a while without solving them.

Both of the managers in this category (public unit 4 and private unit 1) experienced time pressure in their work. One of the managers (private unit 1) said that the primary stress factor was "never being left in peace" because she was expected to "always be available with an open door". Another stress factor was that the unit had a negative budget situation and that she as a manager did not know how to improve the financial situation. The other manager (public unit 4) experienced a high level of stress in connection with the delivery of assignments of various kinds to "levels higher up the system". She was also stressed about the pressing budget situation and having an economic deficit that she did not know how to come to terms with. Neither of the managers felt that they had any administrative support with regard to dealing with economic matters; the expectation was that they should cope with these matters themselves.

With regard to the employees' commitment to the care work and their interest in training, both of these managers felt that there was relatively little interest in learning and development among the care workers. This lack of interest was especially evident among the care workers who had worked at the unit for a long time because they already "know what is right" (private unit 1).

A main focus on operations and routine tasks

In this category the managers (public unit 3 and private unit 3) expressed little or no interest in working in a development-oriented way. Rather, they had their focus on the daily operations and on administrative issues. In one of the units (private unit 3), the manager had access to two "team managers" who carried out certain tasks within the framework of their work as assistant nurses (e.g. scheduling, leading personnel meetings, and conducting personal development discussions).

A common reason given for not focusing on development and learning was a lack of time and resources. Both of the managers in this category focused to a great extent on client and financially related issues in their management work.

The assignment is to see to it that our clients have the best possible care, obviously, that's why I'm there. Then, depending on the situation, there are a lot of different things that are most important at one particular time, and the financial situation is always important.

(Manager Private Unit 3)

Neither of the managers in this category expressed any ambition to work with development and learning issues in their work as managers. Nor did they conduct personal development discussions with their staff. One of the managers had delegated these discussions to the team managers (private unit 3), whereas the other manager said that there had not been enough time to conduct personal development discussions during the last year.

The team meetings focused mainly on practical staff-related issues with no direct connection with the care recipients: for example stand-in staff, vacation planning, and breaks. One of the managers said that she did not feel that it was the task of the manager to take up important client-related issues at these meetings and that "the care workers themselves must take responsibility for raising important questions for discussion - it's not my role" (public unit 3).

The other manager (private unit 3) seldom participated in team meetings but had delegated responsibility for and the leadership of these meetings to the team managers. The managers' focus at these meetings was primarily on providing information. On one occasion, one of the managers (public unit 3) informed the personnel that a network had been formed for care workers where the aim was to "learn from each other". She referred to the fact that the municipality "wanted them to join in", but she as a manager did not feel that it was important. At a follow-up interview it emerged that she was negative to "all the proposals" that came from the central level with regard to different forms of training.

Both managers felt that a great deal of their work was “ad hoc”; that is, they addressed the problems that arose during the day, and they also tried to solve the problems directly themselves.

A lot of things fall into your lap all the time, as soon as you open your mail there is something that has to be dealt with. I am constantly being asked to do things by everyone here. I also prefer to deal with things directly. (Manager Public Unit 3)

The economy is priority one. If one figure points in a wrong direction, you must act at once. (Manager Private Unit 3)

The managers said that there was a lot of pressure from their superiors to balance the budget for the unit and not run at a loss. The managers felt that this demand was particularly stressful. Other stressful factors mentioned by the managers were strong demands from their superiors to participate in administrative meetings and to deal with different administrative problems without any support.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the meaning of managerial support for learning and development in the workplace. The overall research question concerned how first-line managers in elder care perceived and understood their mission and tasks and how they in practice handled issues of co-workers’ learning and development.

What then are the main results of the study and what conclusions can be drawn? First, the results show that there were considerable similarities across all units, both public and private, regarding the content of the managers' work and how much time they devoted to various activities, that is, with respect to the *what* of their work. Despite these overall similarities with respect to the content of their work, it was however possible to distinguish between four different patterns concerning *how* the managers understood and enacted their tasks. Specifically, the four patterns of managerial work differed with respect to how the managers acted, communicated and interacted with their co-workers.

Now, these four patterns of managerial work may be ordered along a continuum ranging from an enabling pattern to a constraining pattern of managerial work, depending on the degree to which they focus on and deal with developmental issues in their everyday work as managers (see Table 1 below). The underlying assumption is that an enabling pattern of managerial work is likely to encourage and facilitate co-workers' learning at work to a greater extent than a constraining pattern of managerial work (cf. Ellström, E., Ekholm & Ellström, P.-E., 2008; Fuller & Unwin, 2004).

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

As is clear from Table 1, two of the four patterns of managerial work can be characterised as *enabling* but to different degrees. In the cases that we may designate as highly enabling patterns of managerial work, the managers' work with development issues was integrated with and "embedded in" a range of everyday activities (cf. Hales, 1986; 1999). The managers in these cases did not issue directives and instructions but instead had a listening attitude towards the co-workers and facilitated their reflection on various issues. This attitude created scope for the employees' own thinking and increased their sense of responsibility, which in turn can be assumed to promote learning and development (cf. Viitala, 2004). In the cases that are were categorised as enabling but to a lesser degree, the managers worked in a development-oriented way in certain specific arenas but not integrated with the day-to-day work. This means, for example, that they worked with quality teams or that time was allocated at staff meetings for discussion and problem solving with regard to specific operational issues.

Common to the enabling patterns of managerial work was a *dialogue-oriented* practice, which meant that to a great extent, the managers used the meetings to discuss and resolve a range of client-related problems. They listened to the issues that were raised by the staff and encouraged discussions during meetings. This practice has affinities with what Wallo (2008)

calls a development-oriented leadership with an emphasis on the encouragement of learning and critical reflection. It also has a lot in common with what Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) describe as a facilitating, rather than directive, type of leadership, characterised by a listening attitude and informal relations to co-workers.

The two patterns of managerial work defined as *constraining* are characterised by a lack of focus on learning and development issues on the part of the managers, even though they may have had an ambition to work with such issues. Although the managers in some cases expressed development ambitions and ideas, they did not realise them. Considering the pattern of managerial work that was interpreted as the most constraining, the managers expressed little or no interest in working with learning and development. The main focus was rather on the operations and the day-to-day work of the units.

Common to these latter patterns of managerial work was an *instruction-oriented* practice, which meant that the managers, in a largely one-way information process, "laid down the law" on different issues. A clear example of this attitude was when a manager used a team meeting to get the personnel to read various care and healthcare routines and guidelines and then sign a paper acknowledging that they had received this information. This activity was conducted without discussing the content of the various routines, and after the meeting, the manager said that she was pleased that everyone had now signed the paper. To what extent this procedure helped the staff to understand the content of the different routines was not the central point – she had "solved" the acute problem. This practice comes close to what Wallo (2008) calls a performance-oriented leadership and what Ellström, P.E. (2006) has called a logic of production with a focus on a leadership that tries to meet high demands for effective action, standardisation and the mastering of routines and procedures.

Viewed in this way as ordered along a continuum (see Table 1), the patterns of managerial work identified above may shed new light on what seems to be a major result of

previous research in this field. As was described in the review of previous research presented above, two main pictures can be distinguished. On the one hand, the pictures of managerial work as fragmented and ad hoc with an emphasis on routine tasks and little or no focus on issues of learning and development. On the other hand, a picture that indicates that there are also potentials in managerial work for dealing with learning and development issues. Now, given the results of the present study, these two apparently conflicting pictures of managerial work can be reconciled if one views them as expressions of the endpoints of the continuum that ranges from an enabling pattern to a constraining pattern of managerial work. However, additional studies are required to provide knowledge on the individual and organisational conditions under which an enabling or a constraining pattern of managerial work is likely to predominate. Considering the main criteria for the selection of cases for this study, that is, the ownership of the unit (public or private) and the socio-economic status of the area where the unit was located, neither of these factors were clearly related to the patterns of managerial work that were identified.

The empirical generalizability of the results presented in this study is clearly limited by its character as a multiple case study of eight managers in eight different work units in a municipality. However, as argued by Yin (2003), the strength of a multiple-case study lays in its potential for analytic generalisations, that is, its ability to identify theoretically meaningful convergences across a number of cases. The patterns of managerial work identified in this study could be seen as examples of such analytic generalisations. The fact that the identified patterns are also in agreement with previous research in this field attests to their validity. The validity of these findings is further strengthened by the uses of different methods of data collection, which allowed for a triangulation of findings, that is, in this case, the ability to check on the correspondence between interviews and observations (see also the section on Data Analysis).

Conclusion

At an overall level, the findings of this study indicate that the meaning of managerial support for learning and development in the workplace to a large extent depends on how the managers understand their mission and tasks as managers (cf. Sandberg and Targama, 2007). Whereas some viewed working with development and learning as a significant part of their managerial work, others viewed this as something outside their tasks as managers. In line with this, the results reported above that some managers mention a “lack of time” as a reason for not working with development-related issues might indicate that these managers do not prioritise development issues due to how they interpret their tasks or to a lack of knowledge and skills in supporting workplace learning and development. If this interpretation is correct, an important practical implication is the need for management development programs that promote a broader understanding of the task as a manager of elder care and that also promote the development of knowledge about and skills in leading and organising learning and development processes at a workplace. As shown in this study, such skills are not so much about technical matters or about how to use special educational tools or methods. Rather, managerial support for learning and development seems to require a listening and informal way of working in order to create engagement, participation and interest among co-workers (cf. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003), that is, what I above called a dialogue-oriented leadership.

Furthermore, there is a need for management attention to how situations in everyday work could be used as opportunities for individuals to become involved in and receive support for learning in and through work (Billett, 2001, 2004). This is in line with the ideas about levers of control proposed by Simons (1995). In particular, the articulation of values and directions by senior managers concerning the importance of managerial attention to

issues of learning and development appear to be an important condition for developing organizations into environments for both productive work and learning.

References

- Alvesson, M. and Sveningsson, S. (2003), "Managers doing leadership: The extra-ordinarization of the mundane", *Human Relations*, Vol. 56 No. 12, pp. 1435-59.
- Amy A.H. (2008), "Leaders as facilitators of individual and organizational learning", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 212-34.
- Beattie, R.S. (2006), "Line managers and workplace learning from the voluntary sector". *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 99-119.
- Billett, S. (2001), "Learning through work: workplace affordances and individual engagement", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 13 No. 5, pp. 209-14.
- Billett, S. (2004), "Learning through work: workplace participatory practices", in Rainbird, H, A. Fuller, and A. Munroe (Eds), *Workplace learning in context*, Routledge, London.
- Clarke, N. (2005), "Workplace Learning Environment and its Relationship with Learning Outcomes in Healthcare Organizations, *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 185-205.
- Crevani, L., Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2010) Leadership, not leaders: On the study of leadership as practices and interactions. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 77-86.
- Dirkx, J.M. (1999), "Invited reaction: Managers as facilitators of learning in learning organizations", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 127-34.
- Ellinger, A.D. (2005), "Contextual factors influencing informal learning in a workplace setting: The case of 'reinventing itself company' ", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 389-415.

- Ellinger, A.D. and Bostrom. R.P. (1999), "Managerial coaching behaviours in learning organizations", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 18 No. 9, pp. 752-71.
- Ellinger, A.D. and Bostrom. R.P. (2002), "An examination of managers' beliefs about their roles as facilitators of learning", *Management Learning*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 147-79.
- Ellinger, A.D. and Cseh, M. (2007), "Contextual factors influencing the facilitation of others' learning through everyday work experiences", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 19 No. 7, pp. 435-52.
- Ellinger, A.D., Watkins, K.E. and Barnas, C.M. (1999), "Responding the new roles: A qualitative study of managers as instructors", *Management Learning*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 386-412.
- Ellström, E., Ekholm, B. and Ellström, P.-E. (2008), "Two types of learning environment: Enabling and constraining. A study of care work", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 84-97.
- Ellström, P.-E. (2006), "Two logics of learning", in Antonacopoulou, E.P. et al. (Eds) *Learning, working and living. Mapping the terrain of working life learning*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Eraut, M. (2000), Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 70, pp. 113-36.
- Eraut, M. (2011), "How researching learning at work can lead to tools for enhancing learning", in Malloch, M., Cairns, L., Evans, K. and O'Connor, B.N. (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Workplace Learning*, Sage, London.
- Felstead, A., Fuller, A., Jewson, N. and Unwin, L. (2009), *Improving working as learning*. Routledge, New York, NY.

- Flanagan, J., Baldwin, S. and Clarke, D. (2000), "Work-based learning as a means of developing and assessing nursing competence", *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 360-8.
- Fuller, A and Unwin, L. (2004), "Expansive learning environments: integrating organizational and personal development", in Rainbird, H et al. (Eds), *Workplace learning in context*, Routledge, London.
- Furåker, C and Nilsson, A. (2010), "Age care managers in residential facilities - aspects of competence", *Leadership in Health Services*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 33-45.
- Gibb, S. (2003), "Line Manager involvement in learning and development. Small beer or big deal?", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 281-93.
- Hales, C.P. (1986), "What do managers do? A critical review of the evidence", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 88-115.
- Hales, C.P. (1999), "Why do managers do what they do? Reconciling evidence and theory in accounts of managerial work", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 335-50.
- Hales, C.P. (2005), "Rooted in Supervision, Branching into Management: Continuity and Change in the Role of First-Line Manager", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 471-506.
- Horne, J.H. and Lupton, T. (1965), "The work activities of middle managers - An exploratory study", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 14-33.
- MacNeil, C.M. (2004), "Exploring the supervisor role as a facilitator of knowledge sharing in teams", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 93-102.
- Malloch, M., Cairns, L., Evans, K. and O'Connor, B.N. (Eds) (2011), *The SAGE Handbook of Workplace Learning*, Sage, London.

- Marsick, V., Watkins, K and O'Connor, B.N., (2011), "Researching workplace learning in the United States, in Malloch, M., Cairns, L., Evans, K. and O'Connor, B.N. (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Workplace Learning*, Sage, London.
- Sandberg, J., and Targama, A. (2007), *Managing understanding in organizations*, Sage, London.
- Simons, R. (1995), *Levers of control: how managers use innovative control systems to drive strategic renewal*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Strauss, A and Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of qualitative research*, Sage, CA.
- Tobin, G. and Begley, C. (2004), "Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework", *Methodological Issues in Nursing Research*, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 388-396.
- Wallo, A. (2008), *The leader as facilitator of learning at work. A study of learning-oriented leadership in two industrial firms*, Dissertation, Linköping Studies in Behavioural Sciences No.137, Linköping University Linköping.
- Westerberg, K. and Hauer, E. (2009), "Learning climate and work group skills in care work", *Journal of workplace learning*, Vol. 21 No. 8, pp. 581-94.
- Viitala, R. (2004), "Towards knowledge leadership", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 25 No. 6, pp. 528-44.
- Yin, R.K. (2009), *Case study research. Design and methods*, Sage Publications, London.
- Yukl, G. (2006), *Leadership in Organizations*, Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- Yukl, G. (2009), "Leading organizational learning: Reflections on theory and research", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 20, pp. 49-53.

Table 1: *Four Patterns of Managerial Work*

Enabling Patterns of Managerial Work

- Working with development issues as an integrated part of everyday work
 - Working with development issues in specific arenas
-

Constraining Patterns of Managerial Work

- Ambitions to work with development issues exists, but routine tasks take over in practice
 - A main focus on operations and routine tasks
-