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"My Identity is as a Professional Leader"; The Practice of Leadership of Child Welfare Managers in Norway

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how leadership in child welfare is practised in a context with co-existing institutional logic. The article is based on a qualitative design using document analyses and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis is based on seven documents and interviews with 20 child welfare managers (CWM). The data indicate that CWMs practice leadership in line with professional logic, and let professional logic be decisive for managerial assessments. They relate to the managerial logic governing national expectations, but only when necessary. The managerial logic is strengthened in the ongoing child welfare reform in Norway. The CWMs' leadership practice does not seem to contribute to the expected professionalisation of leadership because of a gap between the local context, where the professional work takes place, and the national context, where expectations appear. We contribute to the child welfare management literature by providing insights and knowledge about how CWMs relate to and respond to co-existing institutional logic because of reforms. We also contribute to the institutional logic literature by identifying how CWMs respond to the strengthening of managerial logic through reforms. A practical implication of this study is to provide insights and knowledge for policymakers and other actors in close contact with child welfare services.

Introduction

Over the last decades, the public sector has become more complex and challenging (Jacobsen, 2019; Klausen, 2019). Modernising the public sector and introducing the New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1995) has increased attention to efficiency, financial operation, and cooperation to develop effective solutions and ensure democratic anchoring. Public services are said to be managerialized (Noordegraaf, 2016) and public managers increasingly have to deal with several stakeholders, markets, civil society, and the state (Orazi et al., 2013; Svensson & Svensson, 2021). Child welfare managers must act more strategically, separating them from the professionals they are assigned to lead

(Klausen, 2001). This has challenged child welfare managers because they must prioritise work tasks that are not always in line with their professional background and the wishes of their professional staff.

The context where professional public managers exercise their role is often characterised by co-existing institutional logic. An institutional logic can be defined as "the socially constructed historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 51). Institutional logic prescribes what constitutes legitimate individual and organisational behaviour in a social context and the social mechanisms that influence that behaviour. In this context, professional public managers must be mediators or translators of different institutional logics, emphasising contradictory norms, expectations, and practices (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012).

As a result of recent reforms following the NPM, as the child welfare reform in Norway, we studied how child welfare managers (CWMs) encounter and handle situations where they have to deal with co-existing institutional logic (Greenwood et al., 2010; Northouse, 2018; Reay & Hinings, 2009) where the managerial logic has been strengthened through the reforms. How leadership in child welfare services unfolds in the context of different logics is an unexplored area (Elofsson et al., 2016; Shanks et al., 2015; Tham & Strömberg, 2020). This article will address this phenomenon, and our research question is: How do CWMs practice leadership in a context with co-existing institutional logics?

The article is based on two primary sources of data: interviews with 20 managers from municipal child welfare services in Norway and an analysis of central national documents. We contribute to the CWMs literature by providing insights and knowledge about how CWMs practice their leadership in a context of co-existing institutional logic because of reforms. We also contribute to the institutional logic literature by investigating how professional public managers respond to a strengthening of managerial logic through reforms.

In the next section, we develop our theoretical framework. We further present the research setting and our research methods. We then offer and discuss our empirical findings before concluding.

Theoretical framework

We develop our theoretical lens by focusing on institutional logic and leadership. Reforms and institutional changes often lead to a change in the balance of institutional logics since implementing reforms affects the mix of the co-existing logics (Thornton et al., 2012). In child welfare research, institutional logics are often applied in studies about ownership structures and treatment ideas (Lundström et al., 2020) and are not related to leadership in such professional organisation.

Leadership in the child welfare services

Existing research on child welfare management mainly focuses on professional child welfare issues related to working with children and families. Management research

that addresses employee issues, organisation, financial management, and long-term and strategic planning exists only to a small extent (Falconer & Shardlow, 2018; Moe & Gotvassli, 2022; Nyathi, 2018; Olsvik, 2021; Shanks et al., 2015)

We find different leadership approaches in the management literature (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Traditionally, the CWM has been concerned with professional leadership based on a professional background rooted in professional knowledge and perspectives (Olsvik, 2021). Professional leadership is defined as a relational leadership approach that is aimed at activating professional knowledge and norms and developing strong professional communities (Møller & Grøn, 2021). Professional judgement is an important part of professional leadership, and professional knowledge of child welfare is considered a key qualification (Olsvik & Saus, 2022). Professional leadership in child welfare often takes place in collaboration between the manager and the staff, and the purpose is to qualify professional judgement and ensure informed and professionally founded priorities (Olsvik, 2021). Through their leadership, CWMs try to achieve a common understanding of what professional quality entails and apply it in practice. The leadership tasks in professional management are often associated with day-to-day management, professional guidance and the immediate organisation of the work (Klausen, 2001).

Tham and Strömberg (2020) investigated how CWMs in Sweden perceive and respond to the content and demands of their professional leadership following reforms. They found that the organisation seems to be pushing managers towards leadership characterised by bureaucratic control and authority, one in which quantitative measuring, monitoring and control processes are expected. The managers who participated in their study spent most of their time managing day-to-day realities and did not perform strategic work or long-term planning.

Child welfare leadership is often described as demanding, emotionally charged, and unpredictable, with frequent shifts in focus (McFadden et al., 2014; Moe & Gotvassli, 2016; Moe & Valstad, 2014; Tham & Strömberg, 2020; Toresen, 2014). Leadership contains a powerful emotional aspect and deals with the implementation and follow-up of state and organisational instructions and guidelines (Colby Peters, 2018). In this way, CWMs are subject to conflicting pressures from differing normative requirements (Sullivan, 2016). This means that different institutional logics are at play and the managers must deal with these in a complex setting.

Practice in the context of co-existing institutional logics

Institutional logics are powerful because they manifest in CWMs' everyday leadership work since logics communicates values, expectations, material practices and symbolic constructions that guide the practice and the decisions individuals make in an organisation (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logics are powerful because they are interpreted and reconciled in everyday work experience (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Smets et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logic also provides standards for assessment.

Through a process of socialisation, the individual learns to relate to a specific logic (Furnari, 2020), which characterises the individual's thinking about what the right practices are in different situations. Managers who are exposed to co-existing institutional logics must interpret them and act according to the expectations of these different

institutional logics (Lindberg, 2014). How managers choose to relate to different and often competing logics will vary among organisations and contexts (Pache & Santos, 2013).

Managing professional work and professional service organisations has been a focus in institutional logics research, for example, concerning hospitals (Berg et al., 2017; Pettersen & Solstad, 2014), labour and welfare administration (Fossestøl et al., 2015), faith-based hospitals and religious organisations (Sirris, 2019) and mergers within the school and health care systems (Olsen & Solstad, 2020). We studied the child welfare services where we focused on managerial logic and professional logic. Professional logic is characterised by values developed through education and practice in a profession (Berg et al., 2017; Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Freidson, 2001; Goodrick & Reay, 2011), while managerial logic is characterised by the bureaucratic control of work by managers (Gadolin, 2018). This indicates that managers in child welfare services must act both in a world where the standards are set by managerial logic and a world where professional norms and values are at the centre. Llewellyn (2001) pointed out that professional public managers talk about budget and administrative issues with higher levels in the organisation and about professional matters lower down with the employees in the organisation.

Individuals relate and respond to institutional logics in different ways; they may be novices, they may be familiar with a specific logic, or they may be identified with a given logic (Pache & Santos, 2013). A novice has little or no knowledge or information about this logic. CWMs are familiar with a given logic if they have available knowledge about it but have not built strong ties to it. A CWM who identifies with a given logic feels emotionally and ideologically committed to it (Pache & Santos, 2013), and the logic strongly affects their identity and behaviour.

Individuals can respond in several ways when facing co-existing or competing institutional logics. CWMs may respond with ignorance, compliance, defiance, compartmentalisation, or a combination of these (Pache & Santos, 2013). Ignorance refers to managers' lack of reaction to a given institutional logic and its demands. When the manager fully adopts the values, norms and practices prescribed by a given logic, it is referred to as compliance. Defiance refers to when the managers explicitly reject the values, norms and practices prescribed by a given logic. Compartmentalisation refers to a manager's attempt to segment their compliance with competing logics purposefully. Combination is when the manager attempts to blend some of the values, norms, and practices prescribed by the competing logics. Ignorance, compliance, and defiance consider only one of the logics the managers respond to, and compartmentalisation and combination consider two or more logics (Olsen & Solstad, 2020). Andersson and Liff (2018, p. 71) describe co-option as another response: "Co-optation means that an actor adopts a strategic element from another logic that retains the most important elements of its own logic". This means that an individual absorbs essential strategic elements from one logic to avoid instability (Selznick, 1949), and this element becomes an important element of its own logic.

How leadership is practised can be described as a link between context and the individual. Research has shown that individuals have considerable agency in how they relate to an institutional logic (e.g. Alvehus & Andersson, 2018; Andersson & Liff, 2018; Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Reay et al., 2017), and individuals can use this agency to choose among different logics to achieve the desired outcomes (Gadolin, 2018).

We have witnessed the implementation of managerial reforms in the child welfare sector, with a focus on bureaucratic control, such as administrative and budgetary

responsibilities that CWMs are expected to handle (Djupvik et al., 2019; Elofsson et al., 2016; Noordegraaf, 2020; Shanks et al., 2015). These changes have significant consequences for the work situation since the new focus challenges the professional thinking developed over time by managers in the sector. Changing practices because of reforms, indicates that experienced managers are given new work tasks. In such a situation, it is essential to understand how CWM practices leadership.

Research setting

The child welfare service in Norway is part of a publicly organised care system, which includes transferring responsibilities and tasks from the state level to the municipalities (Misund, 2023; Røsvik et al., 2021). There has been increasing criticism of child welfare services in Norway, including the weaknesses in leadership, structure, and competence (BLD, 2017; Riksrevisjonen, 2020; Statens Helsetilsyn, 2012). The criticism has led to an ongoing reform, adopted in 2017, which entails an increased focus on management and further expansion of the municipalities' professional and financial responsibility (Prop. 73 L, 2016-2017). Despite the criticism, little research has been published explicitly on child welfare management (Moe & Gotvassli, 2022). Various initiatives have been taken to increase research in this field, such as a special issue on leadership in child welfare services in Norges Barnevern (no. 4/2022).

The context in which leadership takes place sets different frameworks and conditions for leadership. This includes the organisation's size, and which services are provided (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). The municipal child welfare services in Norway vary in size and organisation, ranging from under five employees for the smallest to over 100 employees for the most extensive services (Statistics Norway, 2020). The services are also organised differently. We, therefore, find both different management structures and different delegations of tasks in municipal child welfare services.

Norway's child welfare service is complex and organised into state and municipal components, in which the most essential child welfare functions are the municipality's responsibility. Although most of the tasks are the municipalities' responsibility, the state child welfare service provides guidelines on what the municipality child welfare services should prioritise, formulating criteria regarding the service quality as well as expectations for CWMs' leadership (Bufdir, 2020). The municipalities have limited leeway to decide on professional priorities. To a large extent, the CWMs must follow the guidelines established by the national authorities. The objective is that everyone should receive the same offering, irrespective of where they live. This challenges municipal child welfare services and contributes towards making the leadership of child welfare complex and intricate (Gotvassli & Moe, 2019).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews and document analyses.

Interviews

The sample consisted of 20 municipal CWMs. The sample consisted of managers located throughout the country to preserve the variation in both size and geography in municipal

Table 1. Presentation of the selection of participants.

	Municipal child welfare managers
Gender	2 men
	18 women
Management experience	1–5 years: 10
	5–10 years: 5
	10–15 years: 2
	Over 15 years: 3
Municipality size	
Small municipalities (< 5000 inhabitants)	2
Medium-sized municipalities (5000- 19,900 inhabitants)	13
Large municipalities (> 20,000 inhabitants)	5

child welfare services. A total of 128 managers were contacted, either by letter or email. Those who wished to participate were included in the sample until the data material quantity was large enough, in line with Mason (2018) specification of the appropriate data saturation point. Table 1 presents the selection of managers.

The interviews were conducted during the period from July 2017 to June 2018. They followed a thematic interview guide where we focused on how child welfare services were developed during the child welfare reform. The topics were leadership role, understanding of leadership, leadership, and decisions, and influences on the leadership role. Twelve of the managers were interviewed over the phone. The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) approved the study and conducted following ethical guidelines.

Document analyses

Documents analysis can help us uncover meaning, develop understanding, and reveal insights relevant to the research topic (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation between interview and document analysis was an appropriate and effective choice in our study. Data drawn from documents were used to contextualise the data collected from the interviews.

The sample included seven documents. Only national papers were selected since guidelines and priorities within child welfare are designed at the national level. Apart from two papers on generic public management, the documents are from the last six years since the Norwegian Child Welfare Reform took on a central role in this period. Table 2 presents the documents included in the document analysis.

The documents selected for this analysis helped elucidate which institutional logic governs the requirements, guidelines, and expectations placed on municipal CWMs in Norway. Analysing documents providing guidelines for child welfare management helped us investigate which values and norms underlie policies and expectations. These constitute the basis for institutional logic.

Analysis strategy

We used thematic analysis to analyse the data. This coding process seeks to unearth a text's salient themes at different levels (Attride-Sterling, 2001, p. 387). The study contained information from all managers and documents on the same themes, which is the premise for theme-centered analyses (Nowell et al., 2017). In the coding process, we used deductive codes based on the research questions and inductive codes from

Table 2. Overview of documents included in the document analysis.

Type of documents	Number	Year	Norwegian Naming	English Translation
National child welfare documents	1	2016–2017	Prop.73L (2016-2017) Endringer i barnevernloven (barnevernsreform) (Prop. 73 L, 2016-2017)	Amendments to the Child Welfare Act (Child Welfare Reform)
	2	2017	Operativ ledelse i barnevernet (Bufdir, 2017)	Operational management in child welfare services
	3	2017	Mer kunnskap—bedre barnevern. Kompetansestrategi for det kommunale barnevernet 2018–2024 (BLD, 2017)	More knowledge—better child welfare. Competence Strategy for Municipal Child Welfare 2018–2024
	4	2019	Utredning av kompetansehevingstiltak i barnevernet (Bufdir, 2019b)	Assessment of competence-raising measures in the child welfare service
Evaluation reports	5	2019	Følgeevaluering av kompetansestrategien for det kommunale barnevernet 2018–2024 (Bufdir, 2019a)	Participatory evaluation of the competence strategy for municipal child welfare 2018–2024
National documents about public sector management	6	2014	God ledelse i staten (KMD, 2014)	Good public management
	7	2014	Program for bedre styring og ledelse i staten 2014–2017 (KMD, 2017)	Program for Better Governance and Management in the State 2014–2017

the data material (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach is recommended to avoid "overcoding" and to make the analyses more transparent (Overgaard & Bovin, 2014, p. 244). Both theme-based and person-centered matrices were used to display the patterns among the data.

Results and analyses

This section presents the results and analyses of the data. First, we offer the expectations set for CWMs' leadership in Norway because of the child welfare reform. The document analysis provided answers to what expectations are set for the CWMs' leadership. Second, we present how the CWMs' describe their leadership approach in a context of co-existing institutional logic.

Please note that the document number listed in Table 2 will appear when documents are referenced. When the managers are quoted, each manager is numbered.

Expectations for CWMs

The document analyses showed that leadership was defined in one of the documents (7). The same document (7) also established national guidelines for management in public administration. Leadership was defined as achieving results with and through others and was highlighted as an integrated function.

Child welfare leadership was described in one of the documents (2):

> Child welfare leadership is mainly about management in public administration. Managers must contribute to the administration effectively carrying out the tasks to be solved, and the child welfare service must be able to achieve the intended results responsibly. (p. 5)

Other documents (3, 4) referred to document 2 when describing child welfare leadership. In document 2 (p. 9), child welfare leadership was presented as one of six main tasks for

the leadership needed in child welfare services. The other tasks were professional leadership, personnel management, financial management, strategic leadership, and public management. The national authorities, therefore, expect the CWM to perform different types of leadership, all of which emphasise accountability, efficiency, prioritisation, evaluation, control, and quality assurance. They also require the CWM to identify with the organisation rather than the profession. This appears in the wording of the documents. The following quotes are examples of such formulations:

> The manager must be able to work strategically with long-term operational, adaptation, and development goals. It is necessary to have a coherent dialogue and flow of information towards politicians, governing bodies, partners, and external actors (Document 2, p. 10).

> The manager must be in continuous budget dialogue with the municipal management and the state child welfare service and ensure transparent and justified prioritization of resources (document 2, p. 10).

In two of the documents (2, 3), we found expectations and guidelines for leadership in child welfare. The documents stated that the CWM should promote cross-level and sectoral interaction, achieve results and quality, develop and implement local goals and strategies and contribute to a learning organisation. The CWM must ensure reasonable procedures and routines for handling child welfare cases. This involves the application of law and an understanding of essential principles in the Child Welfare Act. The manager is also expected to ensure effective measures, safe and secure services, user involvement, coordination and continuity in the service offer, good resource utilisation, and accessible and equal service. In addition, the manager must be able to recruit the right personnel, conduct personnel planning, and handle personnel matters. Finally, it is emphasised in the documents that resource and financial management are essential qualifications.

In summary, the national expectations (in documents) for leadership in child welfare are characterised by demands for accountability, bureaucratic control, and efficiency. It is pointed out that leadership must be practiced in a context where the traditions and social mission of child welfare must be considered.

CWMs' descriptions of their leadership practice

In presenting the findings, where the statements of the CWMs are coincident, these will be referred to as the views of the CWMs. When there are differences, these are described. The CWMs defined leadership as solving day-to-day tasks and focusing on professional work. One of the CWMs said it like this:

> I will solve the daily functions in child welfare and ensure we do a good job. (CWM 10)

The CWMs stated leadership is about being present and accessible by giving employees professional support and guidance. Leadership is also about providing resources and clear boundaries. When the CWMs discussed what they emphasised in their leadership, they highlighted the professional norms and values. This was consistent for all the managers interviewed. One noted:

> My identity is as a professional leader. That's what I like about my job as a child welfare manager. I wouldn't say I like budget work and repeated checks and reports. It will somehow never end. (CWM 7)

The idea of professional practice emerged clearly in the interviews, and experienced child welfare work was highlighted by all the managers as being the most important. The managers were involved in daily tasks, and some often operated as caseworkers. One of the managers characterised herself as a gatekeeper to prevent bad decisions anchored in professional practice. It emerged in the interviews that the managers did the tasks that was required, but that tasks such as reporting, budgeting, internal management and accounting were not selected. These took time and attention from what the managers described as child welfare tasks. The CWMs also described a situation of many expectations that affected their leadership. One of the managers put it this way:

> I experience a compound pressure between expectations from employees, team leaders, superiors, and local authorities. But on a day-to-day basis, I develop internal control systems and good working methods within my resources. I am constantly aware of significant documentation requirements, and I also experience tremendous pressure to meet deadlines. (CWM 33)

The CWMs emphasised that they were managers where child welfare assessments were central. One CWMs stated: "Leadership is being a manager for the profession" (CWM 18). The CWMs said that they prioritised being role models and creating confident professional employees by building their trust and giving them responsibility. They noted that much time is spent supervising employees on professional matters. All CWMs highlighted professional work as central to their everyday leadership. One of the managers noted:

> I spend a lot of time managing day-to-day work, such as giving advice on professional matters, reading journals on child welfare cases, and discussing and making decisions in these cases. (CWM 9)

The CWMs emphasised using discretion as an essential part of decision-making and in adapting measures for children and their families. They highlighted decision-making as a process that often takes place collectively with employees. They underlined the value of collaboration with other services, even though they pointed out the challenges in such partnerships. In the interviews, the CWMs did not emphasise strategy work and development, but they stated that they did provide professional development. Only two of 20 managers highlighted strategy work when describing their leadership practice.

> The relationship between operation and development is the main challenge. It is challenging to have time for development. Day-to-day tasks take up all my time. (CWM 17)

> I support my employees so that they are confident at work and grow as professionals. I facilitate professional development (CWM 2).

In summary, the CWMs explained how they met the expectations by emphasising leadership rooted in professional values and norms. Leadership tasks such as reporting, planning, organising, accounting, supervision, control, and collaboration with other services are done from a professional viewpoint.

Discussion

This study explored how leadership in child welfare is practiced in a context with co-existing institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012), where

the managerial logic is strengthened through reforms. In this section, we first discuss how CWMs relate to and respond to changes in the balance of institutional logic because of reforms. Second, we nuance how professional managers respond to a strengthened managerial logic.

The national documents present expectations of how the leadership of the CWM must act because of the initiated reform. Leadership requirements are often presented as normative requirements (Petersen et al., 2019), and we can understand the national expectations of what leadership the CWM should perform as an ideal. There were many expectations for leadership tasks in the documents. This renders child welfare leadership as having the quality of "all-inclusiveness' (Blom, 2016) with a vague and all-embracing definition (Blom & Alvesson, 2015).

The national expectations and normative requirements for child welfare leadership are based on a managerial logic. Managerial logic emphasises bureaucratic control (Gadolin, 2018) like accountability, efficiency, resource management, management by objectives, hierarchy, and organisational identity (Berg et al., 2017). The national authorities expect CWMs to be a two-way window (Llewellyn, 2001), where the managers should be a link between professional work and managerial work. This is in line with how CWMs perceive themselves. They identify with the professional logic even though they practice tasks within the managerial logic. The CWM respond to the professional logic with compliance and to the managerial logic with co-optation. The aspects of the managerial logic managers adopt are so similar to their professional practices that they implement it without realising it. This can be understood as an expression of professional logic, with leadership practices woven into professional norms and cultural values. But, managers in the public sector are often subject to contradictory expectations and can only fulfil these expectations to a limited extent (Klausen, 2019).

Without well-functioning child welfare leadership, the national authorities have introduced substitutes for leadership (Jermier & Kerr, 1997), such as rules and procedures and more excellent controls and follow-up as well as manuals and checklists. Structure and standardisation are emphasised more (Tham & Strömberg, 2020). This is in line with managerial logic and reduces the leader's professional autonomy and ability to use discretion (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Jacobsen, 2019). The CWMs we interviewed emphasised professional judgement in the exercise of professional management (Olsvik & Saus, 2022), and they also pointed out their child welfare expertise.

How CWMs relate to and respond to the different logic influences the leadership role they choose to play. Our analyses showed that CWMs identify with professional logic (Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Freidson, 2001; Goodrick & Reay, 2011) and are deeply committed to it. Professional thinking permeates everything they do. In the interviews, the CWMs described their leadership in line with the professional logic associated with daily management, professional guidance, and the immediate organisation of work, what we can call day-to-day management (Klausen, 2019). Most managers had many years of experience as managers and were familiar (Pache & Santos, 2013) with managerial logic. Thus, CWMs understand the demands of managerial logic. In the interviews, they emphasised how managerial logic conflicts with professional logic regarding leadership practice in terms of priorities, efficiency, and management control. It seems that they relate to managerial logic and do what this logic requires for their work tasks, in line with what Andersson and Liff (2018) call co-optation. However, they did not identify (Pache &

Santos, 2013) with the managerial logic or feel emotionally committed to its norms and values.

The CWMs underlined that they spend most of their time on daily tasks such as checking, reporting, and accounting. Still, the managers are highly dedicated to professional logic. This may be because these CWMs strongly identified with their child welfare profession (Olsvik, 2021) and because they had specialised expertise in a demarcated area (Turba et al., 2019). It can be understood as professionalism as a matter of "(self)controlled content" where professional self-control is executed inside professional domains (Noordegraaf, 2016). CWM was protecting these domains against outside forces by orienting towards professional logic. In this way, their professional logic was strengthened, and they were confident in how they practised leadership.

The CWMs stressed that they have difficulty making time for and seeing the value of strategic and innovative work. They stated that they perceive themselves as professionals and colleagues first and managers second (Klausen, 2001). This aligns with studies on leadership and professional belonging in social work (Colby Peters, 2018; Olsvik, 2021).

The analysis showed that the CWMs' identification with professional logic keeps them focused on ensuring the prevalence of this logic. They maintain high compliance (Pache & Santos, 2013) with professional logic. Because they are familiar (Pache & Santos, 2013) with how managerial logic operates, they can demonstrate some compliance with managerial logic when necessary. This way of leadership corresponds with Pache and Santos (2013), and Andersson and Liff (2018) responses to institutional logic. This means that even though there are expectations of more managerial tasks toward efficiency, professional managers still manage these tasks from a professional perspective.

It is rare to expect that the leadership practice corresponds to the leadership ideal presented by the authorities, and it is a prominent element in the municipalities' work and the state's management policy. Conversely, how CWMs practice their leadership and what logic they identify with can contribute to whether strategies and solutions are implemented. For CWMs, it is necessary to collaborate across professional boundaries and sectors in municipalities. They must also relate to the national level. Expectations are expressed for CWMs to implement national strategies in their service. Identifying too strongly with the professional logic and letting it permeate the leadership can contribute to new systems and solutions not being implemented. Managerial logic presupposes that the manager identifies with the organisation, not the profession (Klausen, 2019).

Since institutional logic communicates values, expectations, material practices, and symbolic constructions that guide the practice and the decisions individuals make (Thornton et al., 2012), the CWM governs which leadership tasks they prefer and how they choose to solve them. Our data has shown that the CWMs' have a strong relation with professional logic rather than managerial logic, even though the child welfare reform express expectation of the leadership role related to efficiency. Institutional logics is powerful because they are interpreted and reconciled in everyday work experience (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Smets et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2012).

Conclusion

This article explores how leadership unfolds in child welfare services in a context with co-existing institutional logic.

We contribute to the child welfare management literature by providing insights and knowledge about how CWMs relate to and respond to different institutional logic because of reforms. The CWMs exercise leadership and practice norms and values from professional logic. They let professional logic be decisive for managerial assessments. They relate to the managerial logic that governs national expectations, but mostly only when necessary. There is a gap between the local context, where the professional work takes place, and the national context, where expectations appear in guidelines, instructions, and goals.

A limitation is that we have only examined how CWMs describe a situation with co-existing logic where the managerial logic is strengthened through reforms. Our data provide insight into how CWMs experience a situation where the managerial logic is reinforced through reforms. We recommend further research, as a survey, into how employees also experience leadership in a time of reform.

A practical implication of this study is to provide insights and knowledge for policy-makers and other actors in close contact with child welfare services about how CWMs relate and respond to co-existing institutional logic because of reforms. The findings can contribute to understanding the complexity of the child welfare context when proposing the necessary tools for increasing the quality of leadership in child welfare and in service in general.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributors

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