

1. Proposer

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2. Statement of Topic

Educational leaders' information seeking behavior and problem solving – an explorative study.

3. Significance and Relevance of the Topic

In the last decade an increasing interest in the role of leadership in higher education has been seen (e.g. Bryman, 2007). Universities and other Higher Education (HE) institutions are increasingly being held responsible for the development and quality of their degree programs and teaching, which calls for professional leadership and management. Despite increased political attention, the role of local academic leaders is ill defined and -supported. According to more recent studies (e.g. Harboe, 2015; Kallenberg, 2007; Mårtensson and Roxå, 2016) local-level leaders are struggling with how to understand and exercise the leadership role, including how to balance between a bureaucratic sphere of influence (administrative context) and a professional educational sphere of influence (educational context). *Academic leader* is here referring to the educational leader or head of studies, who has a managerial/leadership function and acts on delegation from a head of department. S(he) is engaged in management and coordination of teachers and teams within and across disciplines and programmes. Further, s(he) is heavily involved in design, development and quality assurance of all educational affairs related to local programs and teaching. To balance between the needs of the formal organisation and the local teaching and learning culture, the educational leader should also be able to navigate between the many interested parties including students, teachers, administration and management at various hierarchical levels with distinctive, yet also conflicting interests. As pointed out by Mårtensson and Roxå (2016), educational leaders are in need of carefully designed support of their leadership role, e.g. to create personal networks, reflect upon leadership and followership, to exchange experiences and to develop a more complex understanding of leadership. In addition, we argue that more research and support is needed to help educational leaders make reflected decisions concerning their information use and behavior. Information sources are not neutral, but may influence educational leaders' approach to leadership and concept of quality as well. To explore what type of information and knowledge educational leaders use to solve problems and qualify their practice, a survey study was carried out in fall 2015 among sixty-six educational leaders at a large university in Denmark. Figure 1 shows the three dimensions of interest in this study including the claimed dynamics between information, leadership and quality of educational leaders' practice.

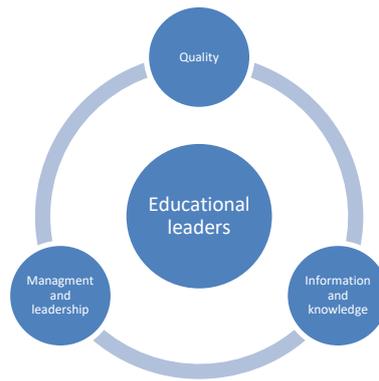


Figure 1: **Three dimensions framing educational leadership**

4. Content

The poster presents the explorative study including an introduction, the underlying methodology and the results with the aim of discussing:

- How type of information may influence or relate to educational leaders' approach to leadership
- How type of information for decision making may influence or relate to the learning culture and approach at the university
- How information and knowledge sharing may qualify educational leadership and development
- How perceptions of educational leadership and preferences for information may influence educational leaders' experience of legitimacy to lead

Figure 2 shows the analytical model developed and employed to demonstrate correspondence between three approaches to information/knowledge for problem solving/decision making and approaches to educational leadership.



Figure 2: **An analytical model – three approaches to information seeking (Experience – Ad-hoc; Experience – Systematic; Research – Systematic) and corresponding approaches to leadership**

The outcome of the poster presentation will contribute to a paper on educational leaders' information seeking behavior and problem solving.

5. Abstract

This poster presents the results of an explorative survey study carried out in fall 2015 of sixty-six educational leaders and their use of information sources for problem solving and educational development. Preferences for specific information sources representing different perspectives of quality in education may influence educational leaders' approach to educational leadership. As demonstrated in the poster it seems that the preferred approach to information seeking and problem solving could be associated with specific approaches to educational leadership, hence different notions of quality: 1) informal, 2) bureaucratic or 3) knowledge based. It is stated that information, leadership and quality are interrelated and influential factors in educational development and practice. Consequently, more research is needed to inform and develop academic leadership in higher education as well as helping educational leaders make reflected decisions concerning information use for the benefit of educational development.

References

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