

LEADERSHIP and PRACTICES: An ethnographic study of supervisory work in a Finnish logistics centre

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Setting the stage

- We researched the supervisory work in a logistics centre of a large Finnish brewery in 2008 and 2012.
 - Data collection consisted primarily of shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007) and interviewing.
 - Our initial interest in the content of supervisory work turned to supervisory leadership when we noticed and were told of the distinctive leadership change in the centre
 - In 2008 supervisors were associated with problems. They visited the shop-floor to 'put out fires' and otherwise worked in the office. The relationship with workers was reserved and meetings were one-sided monologues.
 - 2012 relationships were neutral or even positive. Supervisors visited the shop-floor systematically. Discussion contents with workers were more varied than previously.
 - We set to solve the mystery (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007) of what had caused the perceived change in supervisory leadership.
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Theoretical underpinnings

- Leadership-as-practice
 - Relatively new approach to leadership (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Denis et al., 2010; Endrissat & von Arx, 2013))
 - Practice theory (e.g. Nicolini, 2013)
 - Practices are the basic building blocks of social phenomena; “human action and social order emerge, and attain meaning and intelligibility, from social practices”. (Schatzki, 1996)
 - Practices consist of **actions**, which carry specific **meanings** and constitute certain ways of “**being-in-the world**” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 49-58) for the participants
 - Specific enactments of practices provide participants with perceived “moments” (Ladkin, 2010) of leadership
 - The accumulation of these moments constitutes the experienced leadership between supervisors and workers
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Visit 1

An anchoring practice (Swidler, 2001)

Supervisors' practices	Ways of being-in-the-world	Meanings
Putting out fires	Supervisors: active, commanding; Workers: passive, submissive	Supervisors attached to problems
Using the IT systems	Supervisors: far away; otherwise engaged; Workers: detached	Supervisors separated from the workers
Monthly meetings	Supervisors: active, speaking; Workers: passive, listening	Supervisors are initiators
Leadership	Supervisor present: authoritative ; supervisor away: laissez-faire	

Visit 2

Supervisors' practices	Ways of being-in-the-world	Meanings
Shift starting meeting	Supervisors: active, managing; Workers: listening, possibility for activeness	Collaborative work with an authoritative underpinning
Rounds on the shop-floor	Supervisors: making themselves available; Workers: actively engaging	Collaboration, working together
Putting out fires	Supervisors: active, commanding; Workers: passive, submissive	Neutral part of the work
Using the IT systems	Supervisors: far away; otherwise engaged; Workers: detached	Neutral part of the work
Meetings	Supervisors: managing; Workers: actively participating	Places for conversation
Leadership	Collaborative	

Discussion

1. We have discussed how “ordinary” work practices create leadership (experienced through leadership moments)
 2. Supervisory work practices carry certain meanings and enable certain ways of “being-in-the-world”, which induce distinctive leadership modes
 3. Differing practice networks constitute different leadership constructions
 4. We show how the network of supervisory work practices in the past held the leader distant and later brought him closer to his followers, resulting in changing perceptions of leadership between the parties.
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