



Strategic support for managers by management supervision

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to strengthen the role of management supervision in the competence of management and its support. Competence in organizations consists of the human, social and structural dimensions. It involves controlling explicit and tacit knowledge, know-how and experiences. Competence-based management requires the ability to manage, as well as the skills to consider, build, evaluate, support and leverage competence in an organization. The competence and well-being of a manager needs to be supported.

Design/methodology/approach – The study represented in this article is a qualitative comparison and the new knowledge of experienced material has been evaluated. It is done during two periods and based on interviews with public and private managers in social and health services ($n = 22$ and $n = 12$). The data have been analysed through the use of content analysis inspired by the theory and the data.

Findings – Management supervision includes dialogue and reflective thinking as features of competence-based management and its development. It is a strategic method of support for management and at the same time is a part of a manager's welfare. Management supervision as one support system clarifies strategic competence-based management, gives support to leadership know-how and helps a manager to feel better at work.

Originality/value – Because strategic competence based management in social and health care organizations is a very demanding and multidimensional function, it needs a lot of support. Management supervision is a strategic method of support for management and at the same time is a part of a manager's welfare. The significance of this method should be emphasized more in the management of social and health services.

Keywords Management skills, Leadership, Health services, Finland

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Management always includes a complicated mechanism of human and social interactions, which requires competence in the mastery of human relationships and conflicts as well as problem solving. The strategies in managerial competence are aimed in the future and need to take different kinds of development operations into use. The future of social and health services brings with it requirements to add, maintain and exploit competences, and to manage human practices, because the demands of society and working life will increase all the time. Competence-based management represents, in addition to knowledge management, the taking care of skills and know-how and developing them in consideration of an organization's goals (Sanchez and Heene, 1997).

Competence-based management in an organization requires choosing, establishing, exploiting and ensuring the core competences (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). It is necessary to become acutely aware of the need of competence-based management, the development of managerial competence, and the need of support in management. What

This article is based on a doctoral thesis done in Finland in 2006.



kinds of roles connect management supervision to managerial competence and its support? The purpose of this article is to invoke a discussion about the necessity of management supervision in the management context which leads to competence, not only in the management of social and health service organizations, but in all kinds of management and leadership. To consider this subject and to justify the central results, the prospective prejudices against management supervision that managers tend to acquire should be eliminated. Management supervision should be seen as a preventive function of burnout and it should also contribute to the well-being of a manager.

This manuscript is based on a doctoral thesis in social and health management published in 2006 at the University of Vaasa in Finland. The aim of this article is to focus mainly on one important area of the doctoral thesis, namely management supervision. Connected with the above, it is necessary to bring out the justified facts of developing and supporting managerial competence.

Theoretical starting points for the study

In Finland, social and health services are practiced using the welfare model, which is based on strong legal regulations, the egalitarianism of citizens to have basic services, municipal implementation, and funding based on nearly complete taxation. Conflicts in productivity and availability, growth in cost, the current explicit labor shortage of competence based employees, and changing social and health factors in human life and environment constitutes very threatening pictures for the future of social and health services. At the same time, the threatening pictures strengthen the challenges for managerial competence and development. Especially in social and health services, the requirements of managerial competence is always based on wide comprehensiveness, which is connected to the observation of a strong work ethic, the requirements of customers, the human nature of the basic task, the large volume of the staff carrying out the functions, and using know-how. The responsibility of effectiveness, profitability and impressiveness in function is significant, and it requires an understanding of financial administration, and staying up to date in all developments in the field.

Competence is a combination of skills which an individual can use to complete the given task. In this quickly changing world, competence is the foundation of durable success and forward-looking possibilities. Competence is based on knowledge, know-how and attitudes, which are combined with cultural identity, shared visions, organizational structure, and management processes. (Durand, 2000). It can also be defined as a capability to act. New competence, which is tied to the changing requirements of the environment, is born in interaction with an individual and his/her working area. An organization tries to achieve the goals by building, exploiting and maintaining competence. Competence also refers to the willingness of an organization to maintain and coordinate organizational assets and capabilities to achieve the goals. To build up capabilities is a process in which the organization is able to qualitatively change resources and facilities and to observe new readiness by coordinating and organizing them in a new way (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Sanchez and Heene, 1997; Sanchez, 2001; Sanchez and Heene, 2004).

Strategy as a concept defines the will, goals and direction toward which an organization aspires. Strategic management requires systematic thinking, to be able to piece together interaction relations, and to see comprehensively. The main goal is to assure the vitality of the organization in the future (Porter, 1996; Kirjavainen and Laakso-Manninen, 2000; Hannus, 2004). Strategic competence-based management includes management processes in which the intangible and tangible assets shall be

coordinated according to the goals (Sanchez, 2004). The present situation, the environment and the estimations applicable to the future are always at the starting point of the strategic process; however the past also has its own cultural value. The process goes forward through the present strategy that is recognized and evaluated in the developing and evaluating of new strategies (Butler *et al.*, 1991). To start with, the strategy will always include the possibility for change. In transformations happening inside the organization and near its environment, the traditional abilities and experiences are not always enough to control new possibilities and threats. Therefore it is necessary to create a coherent strategy and use strategic thinking to build and develop operations (Ansoff, 1984).

According to Sveiby (1990) the competence capital of an organization consists of three common elements. The human capital is the shared knowledge and competence that is connected to working tasks, work motivation and ability, and commitment. The concept is better understood as human resources. This competence mainly includes the values, culture and business idea/ideology of an organization and it has a dynamic influence on the other capitals. The success of an organization is the consequence of human actions. In human capital, individual capacities make up one perspective. The social capital as a concept involves, beside human capital, a communal viewpoint which refers to the relations between human beings, customers, interest groups, management systems and norms. It is included in both the human and structural capitals and it can also be defined as a wider complex. When thinking about the societal consequences, trust and social capital are the key factors in communication, learning and innovations. The structural capital is the data which belongs to an organization and includes procedures, systems, technology, and organizational structure, for example.

According to Paunonen (1989), supervision happens in the interaction between a supervisor and a person or persons who are supervised. It is the act of discussing work questions and events. Its goal is to develop individual features and work, and the professional basis of value, knowledge and skills, from the starting point of the supervisee. Supervision is continuous, regular, voluntary, and based on a common agreement between the supervisor and supervisee and it takes place at a prearranged time. Management supervision is supervision at the management level, where questions connected to management to attain goals at work are discussed. It supports the solidity of the organization and aspires towards transformation and improvements.

Supervision can also be defined as a reflective process which will enable personal learning (i.e. it connects internal individual functions to external actions). Internal functions are feelings, visions, judging ability and activity, whereas external actions are sympathy, intuition, dwelling upon evaluation and objectivity. The reflective process, critical thinking and learning based experiences are all different approaches in supervision (Heron, 1999; Paunonen-Ilmonen, 2001; Barrett, 2002).

The role of supervision is not only to develop the supervisee's skills, understanding and completions, but, depending on the combination, its meaning is to strengthen the core of god action. Connected to this element, supervision also has educational, supporting and management points of view. The management viewpoint, or the so-called normative aspect, is required to strengthen the quality of human work. It does not indicate a deficiency in training or experiences, but it should provide the occasion to consider one's own work with somebody else, and to discuss inevitable human mistakes, blind spots and vulnerable areas, which are often caused by bruised feelings and biases (Hawkins and Shohet, 2000; Butterworth and Faugier, 1998; Ralph, 2005). Supervision combines competence-based management through experiences and the

reflective observation of behavior. A manager who, in a similar process of management supervision, has discussed his/her own abilities and development necessities as well as questions connected to leadership, is more equipped to gain insights into facilitating work and alternative solutions in different work situations.

Supervision operates as a dialogic management forum and it can specify a manager's own conceptions of management and the usual requirements of abilities. A sufficiently innovative, well-balanced, and motivated manager also communicates flexibility by managing competence. Methodically, supervision can be seen to act in the organization as a common strategy that tries to realize concrete goals and envision good competence based management and strategic mastery.

Research material and methods

The aim of the study considered in this article is to define and analyze strategic competence-based management, which is a part of leadership. At the same time it aims to confirm the meaning of supervision in the development of a person's management abilities and the strengthening of well-being. The study tries to analyze the roles of competence based management, a manager's motivation and regeneration, and the supervision possibilities of management work. In addition, the aim of the research is to construct, through both the theoretical and empirical dimensions, a theoretical model of the mastery of strategic competence based management. Mastery as a concept of the research does not mean perfection in management competence, but it means an ability to understand different kinds of interactive senses. The material of the research consists of described learning, competence based management, and the supervision experiences of the managers of public and private organizations. The public research objects are selected municipal social and health care organizations and private commercial service organizations from the same areas. The duties of the organizations are to work with children and young persons, families, handicapped and elderly and remedial work persons who have chronic diseases. The argument of the selection started from the management of a special delicate job, from the special necessities of the competence in the future where is a threatening labor shortage, and from the pressure of societal transformations.

The research is qualitative and it was done during two periods (shown in the list below). During the first period a theoretical and empirical ground to model the mastery of strategic competence based management was investigated; during the second period the formed model was tested with new material. By testing the suitability and the functionality of the theoretical model, it was evaluated as an instrument of function in both social and health service organizations. The empirical part of the study was based on interviews with 34 managers who were chosen in 2002 ($n = 22$) and 2005 ($n = 12$). Common to all managers selected to the study is gained and experienced management supervision. Through this, questions about and confirmation of management support were sought, in the hopes of developing management skills through education and establishing common goals of supervision.

The periods of the research

(1) Period I

- *Research subject:* the public ($n = 11$) and private ($n = 11$) managers of social and health service organizations in western Finland. Experienced management supervision as a criterion.

- *Research material:* the interviews of managers ($n = 22$), from which gleaned material consists of manager's conceptions and experiences about competence-based management in their organizations and subjective management supervision. In addition, after the interview, a written task to rank eight roles of managers starting from the premise of own management style, evaluation scales 1-8.
- *Research targets:* the analysis of material with comparing attitude and the evaluation of management supervision that managers have experienced, as an aim to develop a theoretical model for the mastery of strategic competence-based management. With the principal themes the motivation in management, competence-based management and new transformation, management and supervision and the atmosphere in organization are defined. Quinn's model of managerial profiles is used to understand the role of competence-based management.
- *Time for interviews:* 19 June-18 December 2002.
- *Research justifications:* to exploit the present and forward innovations of competences in social and health services: work productivity, effectiveness, quality and welfare as points of view and the challenges to develop management abilities.

(2) Period II

- *Research subject:* the public ($n = 6$) and private ($n = 6$) managers of social and health service organizations in western Finland. Experienced management supervision as a criterion.
- *Research material:* the interviews of managers ($n = 12$) based on half-structured interview forms. The form developed using the background of the theoretical criteria and the findings of the first period: based on created theoretical model. In addition, after the interview, a written task to rank eight roles of managers starting from the premise of own management style, evaluation scales 1-8.
- *Research targets:* to test the created theoretical model using new material.
- *Time for interviews:* 23 February-31 March 2005
- *Research justifications:* to define the mastery of strategic competence-based management from theoretical and empirical viewpoints, and to exploit the created theoretical model as a vision of the future clarifying and developing managerial abilities.

The methodological combination of the study is a comparison of two cases/phenomena, one from the public and the other from the private sector. The basic philosophy of this method is to systematically study likenesses and differences (Salminen, 2000). Together with the comparison it was also necessary to use evaluation as a method. The purpose of the evaluation was aimed especially at defining the facts of management supervision. Because the study focused on a group at a certain level (managers of public and private service organizations) it was possible to use stakeholder evaluation, which is a multidimensional concept. In the study, the nature of this concept is connected to human viewpoints and it emphasizes individuality and social and institutional elements. According to Vartiainen (2003) the features of the interest group can change, but every group has at least one of the following features:

motivation, material or symbolic resources, special knowledge and competence, and power or authority position.

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The procedure was based on logical argumentation and interpretations where the data was broken down first, then conceptualized and put together again in a logical combination. The aspiration was to simplify the verbal data and to sweeten the integral knowledge of the theoretical concepts. In analyzing the content the meanings of the text were sought. The content analysis issued from the theory, where the categorization of the analysis is based on the theory used in the research. This works together with the content analysis issued from the data, when the testing of the theoretical model was formed. The data comprised from testing was analyzed again by using the content analysis. The aim was to understand the research material from its starting points.

The significance of management supervision of managers was evaluated by way of an analysis framework, where structural, human and social viewpoints functioned as the basic criteria. The structural viewpoint includes procedures and systems of supervision connecting to the evaluation of a manager's opinions. This is remarkable when management supervision and the education of managers is planned and organized. The human viewpoint includes manager's competence, motivation, advancement, management, leadership, decision-making processes, and welfare. The interaction is connected with the social viewpoint and is formed of feedback, personnel relationships, and the functioning and well-being of an organization. Using those elements as measures, the possibilities of management supervision to act as a method of management development is more finely focused.

Central findings of the research

Management supervision is a development of an individual's own work. Its advantage is carried out through an evaluation of working methods and meetings, crystallizing issues, long-range planning, and limiting one's own work. To assess everyday working practices, to look after policies, and to interpret other human behaviour, broadens management work and directs one to better leadership and professional growth. According to the first period of the study ($n = 22$) the managers of social and health care organizations experienced supervision as a method to develop and support their own work, to prevent burnout and especially to strengthen their welfare (see Butterworth and Faugier, 1998; Ralph, 2005). Management supervision gives support especially to management; it keeps the roles and the abilities of the manager to lead in an organization well-balanced (see Ollila and Niskanen, 2003; Ollila, 2004). It gives a possibility to confidentially work out pressures rising from the work, to consider difficult events and things, and to understand the manager in his/her lonely work.

According to Table I a manager feels better and is able to act more effectively, also in conflicting and demanding work situations, when he or she successfully uses management supervision. On the other hand, if a manager has not acquired supervision or cannot exploit it, he/she will get tired more easily and look for the support and possibilities to unburden in the loneliness of management. The high role of supervision will strengthen the manager's resources and give support to his/her competence especially in the area of personnel management, when the feeling at work is lowest. When a manager's well-being is high, the effect of supervision is always positive and it gives additional support, not a harmful effect.

Management supervision should, however, meet its own criteria so that it will succeed as a method. It should always have a clear structure which makes possible a

		The role of supervision	
		High	Low
Manager's feeling	High	A manager is motivated to leadership, to increase and maintain interaction, to give feedback and to develop human resources. His/her own duty and role have been clarified and he/she experiences support. With strengthened resources he/she has a feeling to have better management abilities	A manager is motivated to management and personnel developing. He/she feels however sometimes ambivalence in contradictory situations regarding human resources, whose clarification requires problem-solving abilities. He/she needs support especially for leadership and delicate interactive situations
	Low	Manager's motivation to management increases through strengthening resources and new insights. A manager experiences perceptions in leadership. He/she needs a lot of special support and releasing possibilities at work to ensure own competence and well-being of whole work community	Manager's motivation and competence will be questioned. In management required personal support may be lacking him/her nearly totally. Especially the facts of human resources may be felt difficult and the ability to control stress will be fallen in default of inadequate resources and abilities. For a manager the loneliness of work feels hard and he/she will be threatened by burnout

Table I.
The effect of
management supervision
role to a manager's
well-being

safe and trustworthy atmosphere. There has to be unity from the beginning to the end with information, standardized goals and evaluations. Its goal-oriented and planned function is of vital importance, because these will help a person to commit to supervision. The supervisor should be skilful and professional and have a very comprehensive personality who has education in supervision, a good knowledge of human nature, an objective frame of reference, and excellent communication skills.

Eleven managers ($n = 22$) emphasized the acquaintance of the supervisor with management, both academic and experiential, through education. However, only the theoretical knowledge about management in organizations is not enough: there has to be a genuine attitude to the reality of management. The supervisor should have knowledge or an understanding of the substance area of the supervisee, at least the figures joined, for instance, in the communal field, but he/she does not need to be an expert in the supervisee's work. The competence and the frame of reference of the supervisor have their own meaning, in the same way as the defining of shared agreements and goals. It is also necessary to evaluate how the goals of supervision will come true and succeed, and that the method should achieve the demanded purposes. Will the possibilities of management supervision become aware of them and can these be exploited sufficiently? The quoted answer of one manager tells us that: "I think managers use basically too little supervision ... I could not at least manage (do management work) or I should not have managed (done), if I should not have had supervision".

According to the second period of the study ($n = 12$) management supervision has a very large importance to management competence as well as competence based management. The importance of management competence is in evidence as the strengthening of the competence of overall management. Especially the fields of personnel management, functional management and steering, teamwork and interaction will benefit from management supervision. The manager receives concrete ways of work mastery, ideas and viewpoints for his/her own management. He/She can reflect upon opinions with the supervisor or other people in the group and plan and reflect upon decisions or ideas. It is possible to find personal blind areas by reflecting upon opinions and weaknesses in one's own competence and discuss them confidentially (see Hawkins and Shohet, 2000). Learning to understand and accept personal competence poverties will clarify a manager's own thinking and makes it more possible for insights to be born. Competence will develop through reflection and self-knowledge, and the strength to manage will increase. Supervision offers the time and place to apply oneself to important personal themes, and at the same time it works as a manager's "way to relax". Considering different events will also strengthen the meaning to question facts and bring the facilities to focus upon essential elements in management and competence exploitation in organizations.

The significance of management supervision as a personal experience of the interviewed managers was based strongly on supporting themselves, on their own thoughts as a manager, and well-being at work. There are a lot of things with which the manager must be alone. Support for these things is often a clearly professional motivation to orient towards in management. The feeling is to maintain and strengthen their own resources and well-being by releasing burden elements at work and at the same time by preventing burnout. The loneliness in management and the common mental picture of a manager's endless untiring being is a genuine burden. Regardless, a manager's duties, in spite of the challenges, may exceed the personal resources.

Conclusions and summary

From the viewpoint of strategic competence-based management, managing includes the human, social and structural dimensions. It requires abilities, facilities, skills and a certain attitude towards management work. The dimensions found in the managers' value worlds; strategic thinking and goals are connected to the insight of what strategic competence based management means conceptually, and what it means in practice in social and health service organizations.

Management capabilities require strong motivation, a definition of personal values in relation to organizational values, taking a stand on development and evolution, experiencing challenges in management, and the know how to act in problem situations. In leadership, a manager's ideological consistency, equity and exemplariness are emphasized. Management issued from a strategy gives direction, recognizes remarkable facts, encourages, and creates possibilities. It is important in strategic competence based management to observe comprehensive interaction, as open communication as possible, and a confidential atmosphere. In management work, competence is a combination of abilities and the development of management masteries starts by implementing feedback and evaluation systems and by reflecting upon the feedback. These factors connect the function clearly with strategic action.

In this study management supervision is defined as a methodical support of management, whose goal is to clarify a manager's basic tasks and with it to reduce work overload, and to add to the manager's well-being and welfare. When the

impressiveness of supervision is researched scientifically, it is necessary to resort to the experiences of those who have had supervision, because all experiences are valuable reality. To understand the relationship between management and supervision requires experiential reflection and a clear definition of both concepts.

Management supervision works as a forum where questions and events connecting to management can be discussed as a reflective process. In this study the meaning of its role is a method of bringing new dimensions in combination with strategic competence based management. Assessing and leveraging the experiences give the possibility to learn and gain insight about new things. The goal of management supervision is, in addition to developing skills, understanding and abilities, to strengthen the whole management by supporting and increasing the manager's welfare. When abilities develop and undergo a transformation, the quality of management gets better, which then contributes positively to the atmosphere of the work community and through it strengthens the productivity of personal work and the quality of services. Management supervision is an instrument and a strategic method; its use can increase a manager's professional competence. Its significance is especially explicit in the area of leadership. From the viewpoint of leadership, management supervision should be exploited more intensively in education agendas which are targeted towards superior or management work and traditional management in-service training. By increasing the abilities to manage people, one can probably contribute positively to the atmosphere of work communities and whole organizations, and through this to welfare. With stronger abilities, management competence increases and at the same time increases competence-based management.

The meaning of management supervision of competence-based management is visible as a manager's developing ability to observe the competence of other people in an organization. The development is based on insights into maintaining professionalism, finding core facts and exploiting special human competence. Gaining insight means to observe those facts which contribute to a human's competence, managing and actions at work. These are not only facts connected with professional skills, but also with personal life, environment and atmosphere. At platforms listening to different opinions and thoughts, making room for them, giving support and encouraging self-expression are evidence of developing competence-based management and widening visions. In management what is needed are the tools of the trade and methods by which the competence of other people will brought forward. The importance of supervision is in evidence as an ability to enlarge and clarify contradictions and to dispose of problems through learning. Gaining knowledge and direction in different problem situations will also develop a manager's competence. Management supervision has the supportive and restorative meaning for competence, to which it will give confidence in the adequacy of one's own skills and the success of decision-making and one's own actions. As a possibility to release it also leads to the control of emotions.

Support for management competence

In social and health service organizations giving and getting support requires a manager's strong attitude to ensure support, to use different systematic systems as well as an interactive atmosphere. Because management as a position means to be alone and as a task it consists of many demanding and responsible fields, it needs to have its own support systems. In human, social, and structural dimension this means comprehensive support in management competence, competence exploiting

atmosphere, and action. The theoretical model made on the grounds of the study of the mastery of strategic competence-based management strongly connects management supervision with the support of management competence.

The model gives a possibility to consider strategic competence-based management as a mastery, in which the following fields are emphasized as strong elements in Figure 1:

- Human, social and structural dimensions as a collective way of thinking.
- Management competence that is made up of abilities, knowledge, skills, experiences, motivation and exemplariness.
- Action that comes true as developing, maintaining and exploiting strategic ways of action and feedback systems.
- Atmosphere that can be characterized as open, flexible and encouraging and which goes ahead by way of different dialogic and reflective forums. Customer orientation and communality connect it to fulfilling the basic task.
- Support that is required by the ensemble for optimal success. Management supervision acts as management support.
- Functional interaction between all complexes.

Management needs its own forum that makes possible the confidential treatment of various facts according to the work, and in this way gives support and strengthens a manager's well-being. The understanding of supervision utility and impressiveness to his/her own work makes the manager's perspective wider, allowing him/her to observe and to act flexibly in different kinds of work community situations and to influence interactive matters in a constructive way.

Management supervision as one support system of management clarifies strategic competence-based management, gives support for management competence, and helps well being. It operates as a strategic method of management competence and strategic competence-based management on the grounds of strong orderliness and structure. Internally, it also strengthens the realized management evaluation and inspires development. The significance of management supervision, especially in the

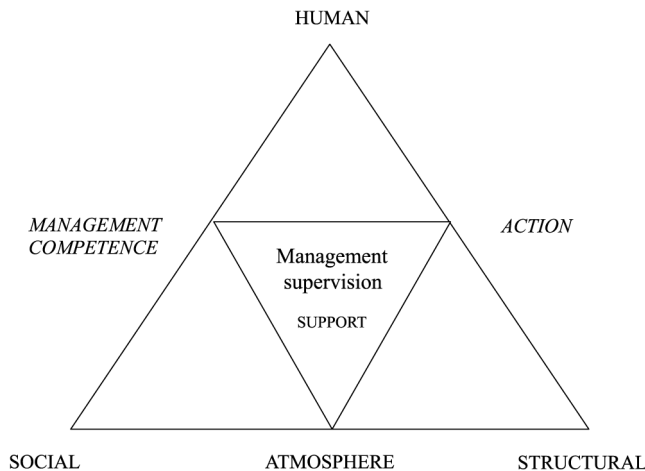


Figure 1.
The theoretical model of the mastery of strategic competence-based management

management of social and health service organizations, has to be emphasized not only on the grounds of its multifaceted task, but also in managing the other fields pointed out, human relations will need the viewpoint of supervision. Through a dialogic and reflective methodology, management supervision acts as an exemplary construction in management. Management and leadership in social and health service fields are multidimensional, challenging and demanding and they require the comprehensive developing of management competence, action and atmosphere in organizations, and support, especially in the future.

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