



**HUOM! TÄMÄ ON RINNAKKAISTALLENNE.**

Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

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## **Enacting the common script: management ideas at Finnish universities of applied sciences**

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the work of mid-level management at Finnish universities of applied sciences. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 line managers, this study investigates how the standardised management ideas of rational management and employee empowerment affect the sensemaking processes of middle-managers at these institutions. The findings indicate that the work of middle managers is characterised by the consistent pursuit of rationality, strenuous efforts to provide individualised attention to every staff member and the promotion of cooperation. This study concludes that the global management script has firmly shaped the work of middle management at Finnish universities of applied sciences, as demonstrated by their commitment to strong managerial practices and distributive leadership.

### **Keywords**

Middle management, universities of applied sciences, managerialism, distributive leadership, sensemaking

## **Introduction**

Standardised models of management and governance are spreading more rapidly than in the past. Shared ideas about management and organisations define what “competent” managers do in “normal” organisations. Ideas travel from one country to another and create similar management structures in public and private organizations. Managers respond to these global ideas by acting according to the standardised management script. The standardised script emphasises rational management, employee empowerment and recognition of organisations as legitimate entities. (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Meyer, 1996, 2002; Meyer et al., 2006; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002.)

Highly rational ideas spread more widely, and rational management models are viewed as more legitimate when they are widely used and understood. The globalised management script defines managers as rational agents who attempt to control uncertainties in their external and internal environments. The success of the organization depends on the rational actions of their competent managers. At the same time, however, demands for the fair and equal treatment of people have intensified and become standard throughout the world. Modern organisations are expected to empower their employees by encouraging dynamic participation in organisational affairs. (Meyer, 1996; Meyer et al., 2006.)

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have also adopted shared models of standardised management (de Boer et al., 2007; Krücken and Meier, 2006; Krücken, 2011). The need for of rational and efficient management in higher education institutions is well documented in the literature discussing the influence of managerialism/new public management on HEIs. The evolvement of corporate-like practices in management hierarchy and accountability as well as the documentation of a growing divide between “managed academics” and “manager-academics” are highlighted in the literature (Amaral et al. 2003; Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007; Deem et al., 2007; Ferlie et al., 2008; Kolsaker, 2008; Salminen, 2003; Winter, 2009).

Managerialism and collegialism are often regarded as opposites in the study of management roles at modern HEIs (Carvalho and Santiago, 2010; Clegg and McAuley, 2005; Qualter and Willis, 2012; Pechar, 2010; Santiago and Carvalho, 2012). Collegialism, or “shared governance”, is an academic decision-making tradition that is based on consensus and equality among participants. Studies on the effects on managerialism accentuate the dualism of managerialism and collegialism and reveal surprisingly similar patterns occurring in different contexts. These studies demonstrate that although managerialism has strongly influenced the actions of senior management, academic middle managers appear to resist the most extreme forms of managerialism. Middle managers want to protect their units from the infusion of managerialist practices and honour the values of autonomy and collegiality (Carvalho and Santiago, 2010;

Deem et al., 2007; Huisman and Currie, 2004; Kehm and Lanzendorf, 2007; Kolsaker, 2008; Qualter and Willis, 2012; Pechar, 2010; Santiago and Carvalho, 2012; Verhoven, 2010).

While the merits of collegialism in the governance of modern universities has been debated (e.g., Ramsden, 1998: 23; Birnbaum, 2004), it is also acknowledged that some HEIs do not have a history of collegialism. Shattock (2003: 88-99), for example, argued that the practice of collegial decision making never crossed the binary line of pre- and post-1992 British universities. However, the idea of employee empowerment is also present outside of the traditional university sector. It takes there different forms and intensifies the discussion on “shared” or “distributed” leadership accentuating the “post-heroic” management ideas (Fletcher, 2004).

In a study by Bolden (2011), the definitions of distributive leadership were reviewed and found to be vague and overlapping. Bolden concluded that in the definitions of distributive leadership the following qualities are pervasive: 1) leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals, 2) there is openness in the boundaries of leadership and 3) varieties of expertise are distributed across many individuals rather than merely a select few. Distributed leadership, as a means of introducing new school development practices and transforming the role of school principals, has received significant attention in the research on school leadership (e.g., Hargreaves and Flink, 2008; Harris, 2004). Distributive leadership has recently

attracted the interest of researchers in higher education as well (Zepke, 2007; Bolden et al., 2008, 2009; Burke, 2010; Gosling et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012). Although far from a consensus on whether the concept of distributive leadership offers novel approaches for the examination of academic leadership, the discussion is indicative of the dissemination of management ideas that emphasise employee empowerment in a different manner than in collegialism.

As a part of a larger study (Vuori, 2011), this paper explores the work of middle management at Finnish universities of sciences (UASs). This study aims to answer the following research question: how do the ideas of rational management and employee empowerment affect the sensemaking processes of academic middle managers at Finnish universities of applied sciences? Taking into consideration the discussion on managerialism and distributive leadership in higher education the term “rational management” here builds on the concepts of rational system theories whereas the concept of “employee empowerment” refers on ideas from the human relations school of thought. This paper will add to the research examining the work of middle-level manager-academics in modern HEIs, as numerous authors (e.g., Bastedo, 2012; De Boer et al., 2010) have called for more empirical studies on this topic.

## **Context**

Today's academic middle managers are strategic actors whose work is comparable to middle managers in any other organisation. However, the nature of higher education organisation (Orton & Weick, 1990; Weick, 1976) poses special challenges for middle managers because of the loosely coupled links between plans and actions, research and teaching, or different academic units, for example. The competence of an academic middle manager is increasingly dependent on managerial and leadership skills rather than research or teaching qualifications. In contrast to earlier practices, manager-academics are often appointed to their positions rather than being elected (De Boer et al., 2010; Meek et al., 2010).

The definition of middle management in an HEI is dependent on both national and institutional contexts. In practice, the overall size of an institution has a significant effect on the role of a manager. Therefore, the job responsibilities and scope of authority of middle managers, such as deans, can differ greatly between small and large HEIs. Meek et al. (2010) refer to middle management to distinguish the rank between institutional chief executive officers at the top of an HEI and the other types of academic managers at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. The term is most frequently used when referring to deans, heads of departments and research directors. Although programme or course directors and coordinators are viewed as assuming an increasingly important strategic role in modern HEIs (Ladyshevsky and Vilkinas, 2012;

Milburn, 2010), these positions are not typically considered middle management because they do not have a supervisory role with the teaching staff.

In this study, the term “academic middle management” refers to a position in a Finnish UAS in which the holder has supervisory authority over the UAS lecturers. The titles of these managers vary. At some UASs, the managers of UAS teaching staff are called programme directors, whereas while other UASs prefer titles such as programme head, department head or department manager.

Krücken and Meier (2006) suggested that universities that have been open to the surrounding environments are more likely to incorporate new institutional elements and to “enact the common script of turning the university into an organisational actor” compared with institutions that are not open to the surrounding environments. Moreover, Burke (2010) argues that higher education institutions without a history of collegialism are more likely to adopt managerialism than traditional universities. The UASs in Finland represent the type of HEIs that are open to their environment and have close relationships with regional employers. The internal management structure of these institutions is characterised by a top-down approach (Aarrevaara and Dobson, 2012). These institutions have no history of shared governance. Lampinen (2003:11) argued that UASs are more tightly coupled than Finnish universities, and in this sense, more similar to other organisations than traditional universities.



The Finnish UASs were established during an experimental stage in the early 1990s by merging existing post-secondary colleges. With 124,595 students, the 25 UASs that operate under the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011) serve 46% of Finnish bachelor's- and master's-level students. In addition to providing degrees, Finnish UASs conduct applied research. The owners of UASs are municipalities, federations of municipalities, limited liability companies or foundations, and the UASs are self-governed

### **Studies on middle-level academic managers**

The competence requirements for middle managers are extensive. Bryman (2007) reviewed empirical studies on the competences of department heads in 1985-2005 and concluded that department heads should 1) have a sense of direction and vision, 2) mobilise the department toward this direction and vision, 3) be considerate, 4) treat academics with fairness and integrity, 5) be trustworthy and have personal integrity, 6) facilitate participation in key decisions by encouraging open communication, 7) communicate the future direction of the department, 8) act as a role model and demonstrate credibility, 9) create a positive work atmosphere in the department, 10) advance the department's cause with respect to constituencies, 11) provide feedback on performance, 12) provide resources and adjust workloads to

stimulate scholarship and research, and 13) make academic appointments that enhance the department's reputation.

However, the competency approach in leadership research has recently lost much of its former attraction (Bryman, 2007). Recent research on higher education middle managers has 1) accentuated the managerialism/collegialism discourse as discussed above, 2) analysed the managerial identity work (Floyd, 2012; Floyd and Dimmock, 2011; Haake, 2009) or 3) focused on the analysis of cognitive schemes that managers apply in their jobs (Lieff and Albert, 2010; Sypawka et al. 2010). These different approaches accentuate that middle managers need multiple perspectives and frames of reference to be able to make sense of the middle management position in a higher education organisation.

### **Sensemaking**

Sensemaking is the process of social construction that occurs when discrepant cues interrupt individuals' ongoing activity, and involves the retrospective development of plausible meanings that rationalize what people are doing (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Central to the development of plausible meanings is the bracketing of cues from the environment, and the interpretation of those cues based on salient frames.

Sensemaking is thus about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on.

This paper suggests that Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking might offer valuable insights into understanding how the simultaneous pressures towards managerialism and collegialism/distributive leadership lead to managerial actions in higher education organisations. A sensemaking process is an effort by an individual or a group to combine beliefs and actions. A sensemaking process is triggered by a failure to take things for granted when one notices that the experienced state of affairs is not what was expected. (Weick, 1995.) Triggered by everyday actions of their followers or own superiors, managers encounter these situations constantly. Due to the loosely-coupled nature of higher education organisations, higher education managers have plenty of opportunities for encountering situations where they cannot continue taking things for granted. These situations trigger their sensemaking processes.

Expectations are based on categories of mind. Without these categories each experience would be unique, and each action would need to be invented. Categories make it possible to see what is happening and predict what will happen. Categories also make people to discard information and edit everything they see. (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Managers' expectations are not only based on their previous experiences both as employees and managers, the training and education they have for management and leadership and organisational culture, but also on myths, peer pressure, accidents and

hearsay (Weick, 1995). In higher education, the disciplinary background has also been shown to influence on the expectations of leadership (Kekäle, 2001).

Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) recommend reworking one's categories in order to become aware how they affect the expectations. With the concept "mindfulness" they refer to

...the combination of ongoing scrutiny of existing expectations, continuous refinement and differentiation of expectations that make sense of unprecedented events, a more nuanced appreciation of context and ways to deal with it, and identification of new dimensions of context that improve foresight and current functioning. (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001: 42.)

Sensemaking processes can be either belief- or action-driven. A belief-driven sensemaking process takes place if the belief is clearer than the action. In that case, sensemaking takes place through arguing or expecting. If, however, actions are clearer than beliefs, then sensemaking takes the form of committing or manipulating. (Weick, 1995.) Weick argues that beliefs and actions are intertwined. "To believe is to initiate actions capable of lending substance to the belief" (Weick, 1995:133–134.) Birnbaum (1988:212-213) shares this view, as he concludes that acting is thinking "...thinking is as much a product of action as it is a cause; it is by examining the outcome of one's behavior that the thinking that interprets reality occurs".

According to Weick, sensemaking is a key to understand what is happening in organisations. Sensemaking “is a micro-mechanism that produces macro-change over time” (Weick et al., 2005: 419). The individual-level change has potential to be organizational-level change because sensemaking is always social. In order to engage culture, a manager may encourage sharing experiences through joint discussions (Weick, 1995). Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) study strategic level change in a higher education organization was seen to occur through sequential sensemaking and sensegiving efforts of the president also involving top management and other organizational constituencies. The concept of sensemaking in Gioia and Chittipeddi’s vocabulary refers to organizational understanding processes whereas the concept of sensegiving refers to those processes, which try to influence other parties’ ways of making sense. The joint meaning construction in the university which Gioia and Chittipeddi studied was accelerated by many of the university president’s symbolic actions, e.g. speeches, memos, appointments and timing but the most symbolic and powerful element in the management of change was a strong vision as a guiding image for change.

### **Data collection and analysis methods**

The data were collected by interviewing 15 manager-academics who worked as line managers of UAS lecturers in 10 different UASs in 2008. The number of lecturers in their units ranged from six to 50. Nine of the interviewees were male, and six were female. As the titles of the line managers varied greatly, for the purposes of this paper, the interviewees are called UAS managers, in contrast with UAS senior management, who are called directors, unless appointed as president or vice president. The translated interview segments are referred to with the abbreviations M1-M15. The interviewees represented the three largest fields of study at the Finnish UASs: 1) technology, communication and traffic; 2) social services, health and sports; and 3) social sciences, business and administration. The interviewed managers represented UASs located in

urban and rural environments as well as various UAS sizes. Because of the brief history of the UAS history, many of the interviewed managers represent the first generation of academic middle managers who were selected from the teaching staff when the UASs restructured their organisation and added a new layer between the senior management and teaching staff.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, with an average duration of 64 minutes. The interview protocol was based on three larger sensemaking themes: 1) How do the middle managers make sense of their roles in the organization? 2) How do the middle managers make sense of change? 3) How do the middle managers make sense of leadership? Interview questions related to job acquisition, job satisfaction, time management, middle management roles, future environmental changes, leadership training and development, leadership preferences, expectations and advice for new UAS managers (Vuori, 2011: 103-104).

To code the material to represent the ideas of rational management and employee empowerment, this study employed a codebook based on Bolman and Deal's (1991) model of the structural and human resource frames with minor modifications. The structural framework in Bolman and Deal's approach incorporates the ideas of rationalist system theories and places the organisation within a hierarchical system. The functioning of an organisation is based on the predetermined chain of command, clear rules, and established procedures and processes. Key leadership tasks in this structural

framework include obtaining results, planning and decision making (Bolman and Deal 2008: 47-60). The coding categories and the number of codings related to the structural framework are shown in Table 1.

The human resource framework reflects the ideas of organisational theorists in the human resource school of thought. Leaders who use the human resource framework encourage staff to participate in decision making. In addition, such leaders attempt to meet the needs of employees and help them to reach their goals. The foundation of human resource framework-oriented thinking is the idea that organisational and human needs should be aligned to achieve results. A leader focuses on interpersonal skills, motivating others and placing the interests of his or her organisation first (Bolman and Deal 2008; 47, 121-138). The human resource related coding categories and the number of references are shown in Table 1.

The unit of coding in this study was any segment of the interview that referred to either a thought or an action related to the structural or human resource framework. In order to get more insight into the relationship between the beliefs and actions in the sensemaking processes of managers, the coding separated between a framework-related action and thought, by asking a hypothetical question: did the interview segment include a behaviour that could be verified by someone? If not, the segment was coded as a frame-related thought. A unit of coding could consist of several words, one sentence or a longer paragraph.

**Table 1 Coding categories and frequency (Vuori, 2011: 179-182)**

<b>Main coding category</b>	<b>Managers (n) in main coding category</b>	<b>Coding subcategory</b>	<b>References (n) in the subcategory</b>
<b>Structural frame related actions</b>	15	Reorganising	9
		Implementing or clarifying policies and procedures	22
		Developing new information, budgeting, or control systems	4
		Adding new structural units	2
		Planning processes	13
<b>Structural frame related thoughts</b>	15	Clarity or lack of clarity about goals, roles or expectations	51
		Coordination and control	52
		Issues around policies and procedures	36
		References to analysis and planning	54
<b>Human resource related actions</b>	15	Processes of participation and involvement	46
		Training	5
		Empowerment, organisations development, and quality-of work life programs	18
<b>Human resource-related thoughts</b>	15	Discussions of individuals' feelings, needs, preferences, or abilities	39
		References to the importance of participation, listening, open communications, involvement in decision-making, morale	119
		Discussion on interpersonal relationships	49



### **The ideas of rational management**

This study indicates that if UAS managers perceive that their organisation is rational in its operations, then they may want to further strengthen the connections between sub-systems through their own actions. However, if some sub-systems are perceived to be loosely coupled and irrational, then middle managers may attempt to thwart this irrationality by attempting to strengthen the connections.

A rational mind-set encourages UAS managers to participate in organisational activities that result in no surprises for senior management, teaching staff or students. Obedience to the expectations of senior management guarantees a limited arena of freedom within a manager's own department.

But on the other hand, we are given independence for our operations. This is good as long as we keep the strategies in mind and act accordingly. *M14*

The key activity for a rationally inclined UAS manager is planning. Planning, either alone or with members of the department, also offers an opportunity for a UAS manager to exert influence or even to promote change at the organisational level. Planning can

also be personally rewarding for UAS managers because it offers an opportunity to transcend the daily operational affairs and view their organisations more broadly.

M10: Well the basic structure needs to be in order. If basic structures start to collapse, there is no need for further leadership efforts. It must be so. It is like an iron structure for one's own work.

Interviewer: What do you mean here with the basic structures?

M10: Well, a well-planned operational year. The tasks of the lecturers need to be confirmed in order to see that everything is accomplished. A certain level of job satisfaction will thus be achieved and the students can be sure that this institution can be trusted. You can start building your leadership on the basis of this.

I want to have influence. If I see that some processes are poor, then I want to have influence over them. And I want to know how this organisation works. The grassroots employees here do not have any idea of budgets and such. *M13*

It typical for me personally that there is one sock looking for a pair in my closet, my wife is a nervous wreck. I feel no need to organize such matters. But at a certain stage of the leadership career, somehow learning from one's own experience I somehow realized that I must work in a more systematic way. If you are not systematic in your own work, you never get people to behave according to the expectations. *M4*

For a rational mind, planning is also a means of addressing the abilities of departmental teaching staff. These abilities can be analysed and used systematically. If a carefully conducted analysis indicates that new or different abilities are required, then a rationally inclined middle manager can attempt to meet these needs through the systematic development of skills and recruitment.

It should be promoted in a positive spirit that all the time every faculty member needs to develop her/his own competences and own courses. One should not actually remain where one is, which is what lecturers very easily tend to do, at least many. *M7*

Rationally inclined managers ask for performance targets that enable them to create a stronger link between their own activities and the UAS system. A lack of such targets creates confusion in the rational mind-set.

If we do not have any goals regarding the meaning of internationalisation, then it is difficult to work towards such goals. Clear goals are the driving force behind this job and behind the work of the teaching staff. *M2*

A smoothly functioning operational system helps UAS managers and other members of the institutions to use the organisational chain of command. In a rational system, all members of an organisation are expected to know the scope of authority for certain

positions. A UAS manager must be an example and must respect the chain of command in his or her actions within the organisational hierarchy.

You cannot get everything, and you cannot communicate all of the ideas that you believe in. If the top management decides to go another way or if the board decides to go another way, then that is the way it is done. End of discussion. *MI*

If a lecturer doesn't get a promise from me, s/he will go to the next level. But neither our unit director nor the UAS rector will go along. I think it is very positive, they always ask for my recommendation. I know that in the past someone went to see the rector requesting a permission to go here and there. Because I have responsibility for the budget, I must naturally know what happens. It would not be right if another person decided on something that would affect the budget. *MI*

Although the UAS managers accept the rules of the organisational hierarchy, the interviews indicate that the members of teaching staff do not necessarily demonstrate the same acceptance. The autonomy of a lecturer is a challenge for the smooth use of the organisational chain of command.

I dare say that lecturers are not the easiest to lead, and being in a position to be led and to be a subordinate has sometimes turned out to be quite challenging because independence is strongly expected of lecturers when it comes to teaching and development. If a manager then interferes with their working methods or with something that has not been accomplished, quite a defensive reaction will follow. *M5*

The rational mind-set directs managers to challenge the irrationality of certain operations. The UAS managers who were interviewed reported their attempts to build better information, evaluation and planning systems. The interviews also indicated that UAS managers must apply procedures and rules that are not wholly rational from their perspective. The rules guiding the work allocation of lecturers, which should guarantee the fair treatment of all staff, could be viewed as actually promoting inequality in a UAS. UAS lecturers are required to work 1,600 hours in an academic year, and the allocation of these hours is conducted by the UAS manager using a set of rules that was created by organisational members above the middle-manager rank.

It seems that year after year, senior managers decide how much time is allocated for course preparation. They decide on a half an hour for each contact lesson, sometimes even more. But everyone knows that amount is not sufficient if a lecturer is serious about doing his work, tutoring students, taking care of assignments, planning assignments, trying to improve every year, marking papers and arranging examinations. Half an hour is

not enough. I know that it is enough for some lecturers whose plan involves minimal preparation. But it is not enough to guarantee good teaching in all subjects. *M7*

I am not at all sure, if it is very rational to decide faculty working hours by dividing them into a certain amount of teaching and a certain amount of planning. Lecturers' work is not structured like that any more. I believe that the degree of freedom should be greater. *M9*

Based on these data, it can be argued that rational management models are legitimate in the minds of Finnish UAS middle managers. UAS managers assume the role of a rational agent who attempts to control uncertainties in the environment. Mastery of that role is expected, and the skills that are required for success are analysis and planning. UAS managers request performance targets because these targets are viewed as making work more efficient in both public and private sector organisations. Although the rules and actions of senior management may occasionally be perceived as irrational, UAS managers, as a part of the organisational chain of command, have no choice but to work according to these rules and actions and to demand the same from the teaching staff in their units. To ensure survival, it is necessary to play the game and attempt to generate better (i.e., more rational) analysis and plans because rational plans are legitimate and respected in the UAS environment and may affect change at both the departmental and organisational levels.

### **Ideas of employee empowerment**

In addition to exemplifying the ideas of rational management explained above, all of the interviewed UAS managers believed that employee empowerment was part of their leadership role. From this perspective, the work of a UAS manager could be characterised as a consistent effort to provide individualised support to lecturers and actively promote cooperative work in their units. A UAS manager attempts to tighten any loose couplings both between her/himself and the teaching staff as well as between the individual lecturers in the unit (Savonmäki, 2008).

The UAS managers perceived that the UASs cannot fulfil their strategic aims without engaging in a deep dialogue with the teaching staff. In the interviews, the UAS managers emphasised the need to treat each member of the teaching staff individually. Therefore, the UAS managers attempted to develop customised communication styles. The managers reported their attempts to provide feedback in a manner that was both suitable and appropriately paced for each member of the teaching staff.

Each member of the teaching staff—if he/she wishes—should view me a leader whose door is open and who cares for everyone. *M13*

If you know faculty well, as I do, you know how they will react to things. *M8*

I have learnt to lead the discussion so that lecturers come up with the developmental suggestions of their own. One only needs to have the willingness and time to listen. *M2*

One of the necessary communication skills for a UAS middle manager involves knowing when to wait for a lecturer to ask for assistance and when to initiate a discussion.

However, with the lecturers and experts, the guidance and information sharing as well as the extent to which a superior interferes constitutes a line drawn in the sand. To what extent can you be present and supporting without interfering with the work of that person, and to what extent can you give enough information without looking down on him/her? An adult is capable of seeking information. It is so challenging to find the right line with everyone and to know when he/she will start to feel that you are interfering. *M2*

According to the interviewees, UAS managers avoid giving orders because they do not believe that orders are effective with teaching staff. More dialogic forms of communication are preferred. Dialogue can lead to behaviour changes, at least occasionally, if it accelerates critical reflection of lecturers' prior assumptions. Moreover, UAS managers believe that constant dialogue is necessary to take care of the well-being of the teaching staff and to be aware of possible burnout symptoms.



Forcing leads nowhere. I have tried it. It might have looked good on paper, but in practise it did not work. *M9*

In addition to time, talent and willingness, such communication requires appropriate conditions. Some of the units of the UAS managers were so large that conducting annual performance appraisals required several weeks out of every year. The physical placement of staff in different locations also caused obstacles.

If there is only one me and there are 20 people, then I would have to write on a piece of paper every time I spoke with a person. If I think that it has been many weeks since I have seen a particular person, then I make a conscious effort to see him/her. I would then need paper and pencil to keep in touch with everyone and share time with everybody. Otherwise, I might not see someone, for example, for one month. How could I be a leader if I did not see someone for a month? What would I have to offer—nothing! It would not be true leadership if you did not meet for a month. *M2*

The UAS managers emphasised that the tradition of lecturers working alone must be replaced by more collaborative working methods because the tasks of UASs, even at the department level, are so complex that no one can survive without support. The UAS managers acknowledged that their middle-management role is particularly suitable for promoting collaboration both as a mode of thinking and as a mode of working. The many obstacles and challenges in promoting collaboration within

a UAS may even strengthen the leadership identity of these managers and provide a sense of purpose for their work. Moreover, UAS managers appear to derive personal enjoyment from group work.

We have a module-based curriculum in which all courses will be integrated through shared assignments and so forth. Little by little, we try to break the old way of working. In my degree programme, this is possible because the lecturers are committed, but elsewhere, this is not necessarily true. Some won't change. They believe that things were fine before and that we should continue as we always did. *MI4*

By promoting new collaborative practices, the UAS managers not only invite lecturers to participate in joint planning but also use their different skills for the benefit of their unit and the entire organisation. Such efforts, which could be interpreted as working towards the ideals of distributive leadership, also positively contribute to the leadership identity of UAS managers (Gosling et al., 2009).

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Based on this study, it can be argued that the ideas of rational management and employee empowerment have arrived at Finnish UASs and that these ideas are abundantly displayed in the work of their academic middle managers. The findings of

this research indicate that although they are not necessarily conscious of their participation in the global diffusion of the standardised script of modern organisations, UAS managers demonstrate the ideas of rational management and employee empowerment in their everyday leadership behaviour. What may appear to be a micro-level sensemaking attempts of a single manager-academic in a particular higher education organisation may actually be a sign of the local adaptation of the uniform global script.

As a qualitative study offering an in-depth description of the work of UAS managers at Finnish UASs, this study contributes not only to the literature on the work of manager-academics in modern HEIs but also provides new information regarding the use of the standardised management script outside of the traditional university context, where the work of middle managers has received little attention with the exception of Verhoven (2010), Floyd (2012), and Floyd and Dimmock (2011). In addition to a suggestion for further empirical leadership research to be conducted in UASs, which have no history of collegialism, it is proposed that more conceptual elaboration is needed with respect to the discussion of suitable leadership paradigms. Both researchers and practitioners need clear language with which to discuss the leadership that is occurring outside of traditional universities. Approaches that are used in business management or school leadership frequently fail to consider the special characteristics of higher education organisations, which, despite the missing tradition of collegialism,

affect the everyday life of academics at HEIs (Vuori, 2011,: 42-55). In this study, the managerialism/collegialism debate was replaced by referencing the standardised script of management (Meyer, 1996; Meyer et al., 2006) and was operationalised through the systematic use of the coding book developed by Bolman and Deal (1991), who referenced the rationalist and human relation schools of thought. This conceptual multiplicity could be seen either as an advantage or limitation of the study. Although the concept of distributive leadership may offer a lucrative area of research in the future, there is currently an excessive number of definitions of the concept (for discussion, see Bolden, 2011).

Another limitation of this study, similar to that of any qualitative study with only 15 interviewees, is its generalisability. However, this study found no disciplinary differences in the adaptation of globalised management across the three educational fields that were represented. In addition, there appeared to be no differences between male and female managers or among UASs of different sizes and in different locations.

Contrary to the stream of the empirical research that has focused on the managerialist/collegial dualism (Carvalho and Santiago, 2010; Deem et al., 2007; Huisman and Currie, 2004; Kehm and Lanzendorf, 2007; Kolsaker, 2008, Qualter and Willis, 2012; Pechar, 2010; Santiago and Carvalho, 2012), this study did not find that the middle managers attempted to protect their units from the interventions of the

managerialist script. The UAS managers in this study perceived the rational and managerialist practices as valid, and they expected lecturers to behave accordingly. As the quotations pertaining to performance targets showed, this style was adopted from private sector practices.

It can be inferred that an academic middle manager at a Finnish UAS wants to be a rational agent attempting to skilfully control the internal and external environments in which he/she has authority. In addition, the manager is eagerly attempting to empower department members by promoting collaboration and ensuring that each member of the teaching staff is treated as a valued individual. It can be argued that the ability to achieve the dual goal of both rational management and employee empowerment is a primary job requirement for middle-level manager-academics at Finnish UASs. This study also emphasises that the middle managers of UASs benefit from a competence that Trowler (2010), who examined the results of studies accentuating the managerialist/collegial dualism, termed multilingualism to refer to the ability to converse flexibly in different managerial discourses. The abilities of the teaching staff can be discussed with fellow managers as a set of competencies that can be analysed and managed, but when meeting face to face, the members of teaching staff are treated as valued fellow co-workers whose motivation and cooperation is needed to create the best possible unit or organisation. Both types of discourse are valid and necessary. Moreover, by polishing their skills as both rational agents and keen

promoters of employee empowerment, UAS middle managers maximise their own opportunities to exert influence and promote change in UASs in a manner that is welcomed by both senior management and teaching staff.

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