

Managing healthcare services

From an industrial society in the machine age to a knowledge-based society in the system age...

Rapid changes in recent decades, both in technical development and in the overall social conditions in our society, have led to dramatic challenges regarding successful leadership and the development of organisations. The consequences of the development of information technology include: increased interconnectedness, transparency, empowerment of individuals, speed of transactions, and decreased cost of information. These trends require organisations to combine efficiency with flexibility and innovation.

Rapid knowledge development and increased customer demands within all sectors of society have made it necessary to decentralise and give greater individual freedom to co-workers. This has led to leaders having to abandon micro management as a leadership philosophy. What is quickly disappearing today is the image of leaders as architects and framers of a system's structure, who also handle all aspects of that system, and create a reality for employees. Instead, the most important strategic leadership tasks have become the formulation of a clear vision and the communication of that vision to co-workers as a direction in which the organisation should be aimed. To guide and stimulate people in ongoing processes and functions becomes an all-important leadership undertaking.

New visions of knowledge

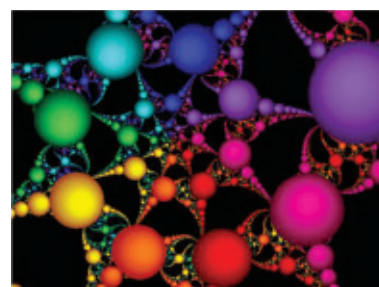
In spite of all the energy focused on developing visions and goals, it seems as if the gap between what we want to achieve and what really happens is increasing. Leaders find it difficult when they discover new methods and models, and still operate within the old frame of

knowledge to a great degree. Traditional management arsenals contain many means of management and control, but few that can help support and stimulate. Today we stand in the midst of a change, where old established ideas are being challenged and gradually replaced with new ones: 'from an industrial society to knowledge-based society' or 'from the machine age to the systems age'.

The rational knowledge on which industrialism and natural science are built, and the management philosophies that have developed during this era, are today being challenged by new ways of looking at science and knowledge. These new ideas lead to a need to develop new forms of leadership and learning within the organisations. The challenge is to lead open, complex and rapidly changing organisations more like systems. A complex system can be defined as a set of interdependent agents forming an integrated whole, where an agent may be a person or an organisation.

Leading healthcare operations

In recent years the debate surrounding healthcare operations has been robust. In Sweden, we currently see a rapid explosion of knowledge both in healthcare and among patients and customers. It is a question of the transparency that the internet makes possible. Also there are demands for influence over the care process, demands for service with access and choice and for transparency about results. So far it has been difficult to accomplish the necessary changes regarding customer influence and satisfaction, security, the ability to transform new knowledge fast enough and the



ability to produce more value with limited resources.

It has been recognised that a powerful renewal and increased development of leadership competence within the healthcare area is needed, so that the results demanded by society today and in the future can be achieved. At the same time the question of which leaders can successfully handle these complex systems has become important to illuminate.

A study of successful leaders

Two Swedish county councils that are establishing a new work culture appointed us to conduct a study, looking at successful individuals and how they think and act in their role as leaders of primary healthcare as well as institutional care organisations. The purpose of the study was to further understand how to identify and develop new leadership abilities.

For a number of years these two county councils have conducted some very aggressive development work. Both are now entering a new phase where it is important to create deeper knowledge of the cultural aspects and the leadership style that has been developed within the healthcare operations. To find strategies for the future, it is important to understand how leaders who accomplished their goals think and act.

To clarify these questions, a study has been undertaken where both

organisations chose a total of 11 operational managers who are doing 'a good job', meaning that they are demonstrating good leadership according to balanced means of measurement.

The managers can be described as 'clinicians', meaning they also work with patients within their vocation, for example as a doctor, nurse or with some other professional background in healthcare. At first sight this group of people may seem to be very different from each other. However, when going through the assessment material and during the interviews, a number of strong mutual characteristics have emerged behind all of seemingly different surface traits.

Mutual characteristics of successful clinical healthcare leaders:

- Likes to work with people, both as a leader and clinically;
- Has extraordinary energy – borderline impatience;
- Maintains focus on the operation, not administration;
- Is unafraid and with civil courage;
- Trusts in others;
- Delegates and prioritises, keeping an overview.

The in-depth assessment of the 11 leaders has given a clear picture of a set of common personal traits that seem to be decisive factors for those considered successful in their environments. You can read the full study at www.mementor.se.

Mementor – about us

Mementor is a family owned consultancy firm with focus on management support for improvements of complex organisations. Our mission is to contribute to the development of society through delivering support for improvement in organisations and services. We have a deep understanding of the challenges for complex organisations, combined with extensive knowledge and experience of leading change.

Our capabilities include performing analysis; managing processes of learning and improvement in organisations; and supporting leaders in these kinds of processes. Our knowledge base is within leadership, organisational development and process improvement – all which we believe are important components in managing complex organisations. We believe that traditional management methods – influenced by Taylorism with a focus on mass production of products – are not enough in today's knowledge and information society.

Margareta Palmberg, MPH, is the owner of Mementor and works as senior consultant with a focus on leadership issues. She has a robust and long background in healthcare management such as Director of Improvement at the Federation of Swedish County Councils and CEO of Astrid Lindgren's Children's Hospital at Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm.

Klara Palmberg, PhD, has a strong background in process and quality management with experiences that combine management consultancy and research. As a consultant she is an experienced facilitator and project leader responsible for delivering results within complex organisations. She holds an MSc in Industrial Engineering and Management and a Doctorial degree in Quality Technology and Management (find the thesis 'Beyond Process Management' on www.mementor.se). When needed, we work in a network of very skilled researchers and consultants with complementary competences.

What we do

We are advisors with a deep understanding for the public sector and its challenges, with a broad knowledge and experience of organisational improvement, both in theory and practice. Mementor works in the intersection of interdisciplinary research and application, in network with others, to find, develop and spread vigorous ideas, knowledge and skills for improvement.

To create conditions where individuals and organisations improve and create desired results we offer a set of approaches:

- **Shared visions** – that are built in interplay between actors, where it takes time for reflections and common arenas for discussion and conclusion;
- **Shared learning** – to work in teams is necessary to solve complex issues. We have methods to support development towards desired results;
- **Mental models** – individuals who learn and develop personally and as a group, supported by theories and knowledge, influence each other, and thereby the whole organisation's frames of reference;
- **Systems thinking** – it is in the interplay between the parts that results are achieved in complex systems. To be able to lead and act in these systems we need to train new skills, both as leaders and employees;
- **Individual insight and development** – it is the individuals who create results. We work with approaches such as individual support through mentoring, coaching and career development to create the possibilities for individual improvements.

Please use the website below to find articles and descriptions of projects.

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