



The Principle of Singularity: A Retrospective Study of How and Why the Legislation Process behind Sweden's Education Act came to Prohibit Joint Leadership for Principals

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Peer-reviewed article; received 25 May 2018; accepted 28 August 2018

Abstract

This paper provides insight into the legislative process behind the current Education Act of Sweden. The aim is to shed light on how and why it came to prohibit joint leadership for principals. Joint leadership is a sub-form of shared leadership between managers characterised by complete formal authority, hierarchic equality and merged work tasks. The sharing of a principal's position is, in previous research, identified as potentially favourable for principals and schools as it decreases principals' often heavy workload. Five retrospective interviews were done with people involved in the legislative process. The analysis points out both distrust in the governing line and uninformed notions of leadership among legislators as explanations behind the prohibition. In the legislative work, joint leadership was at most a marginal issue. Thus the legal prohibition was an unintended side-effect, yet completely in line with traditional and uninformed notions of leadership. The principle of singularity ruled and joint leadership was extinguished for principals without considering whether this favoured or harmed the overarching aims of the Education Act: increased pedagogical responsibility and leadership with a focus on the students' learning, results and democratic upbringing.

Keywords: education act; principal; school unit; shared leadership

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Introduction

When Sweden's current Education Act (2010:800) became operative in 2011, the collaborative form of joint leadership² was extinguished for principals. Could this be the result of deliberate consideration among legislators or was it a consequence of unreflective notions? The act explicitly states the principle of singularity in that there must be a person with the title of principal in each so-called school unit and that this principal must be one person. The reason behind this paper is that the law stands in sharp contrast to the identified benefits of joint leadership between managers, including school principals (e.g., Brooking, Collins, Court, & O'Neill, 2003; Court, 1998; Döös, Wilhelmson, Madestam, & Örnberg, 2017a; Rosengren & Bondas, 2010; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006). The identified problems concerning principals' working conditions (SOU, 2015:22), together with research-based knowledge about shared leadership between managers, point to an increase in the relevance of collective ways of organising the position of principal (Döös et al., 2017a). By means of a retrospective interview study this paper aims to shed light on how and why the legislative process came to prohibit joint leadership for principals; thus, focusing leadership and organising for education. The paper points out both distrust in the governing line and uninformed notions of shared leadership among legislators. Two research questions are used to uncover the reasons behind the prohibition: How is the work process behind the 2010 Education Act described? Which aspects emerge as significant in understanding how and why prohibition came into existence? The first question was chosen as the extent of the work process emerged as important for not paying attention to alternative forms of leadership. The second question was chosen to identify both explicit and implicit reasons. The paper does not advocate any specific solution or model but seeks to grasp why one useful way of organising is no longer legal.

Background

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a wave of decentralisation in Swedish public management. Power and responsibility were formally transferred from the government to the municipalities (Feltenius, 2011; Strandberg, 2015). This change took place in many parts of the Western world (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). One change in Sweden was that the schools became a municipal responsibility, meaning that the municipality became the responsible organiser for the schools and their employees (Jarl, 2012; Prop., 1990/91:18). Twenty years after this municipalisation, the Swedish parliament passed a new Education Act (2010:800) with fairly extensive state regulation of Swedish schools that partially recentralised the school system (Örnberg, 2016). Of relevance for this paper, is that the act, among other things, details the responsibilities of school principals, introduces the concept of the *school unit* and stipulates that each school unit shall have only one principal. These changes to the law removed the legal opportunities for joint principalship in

² The research-based concept for a sub-form of shared leadership in managerial positions, characterised by complete formal authority, hierarchic equality and merged work tasks (Döös, 2015).

Sweden (Örnberg, 2016). The Education Act establishes that each principal³ makes decisions about his or her unit's inner organisation and is responsible for allocating resources within the unit according to the children's and students' abilities and needs (2 Chapt. 10 §).

Responsibility for schools in Sweden is divided between several actors: the state, the organiser⁴ and the principal in a governing line (SOU, 2015:22). The municipal organiser is a political committee and its local administration manages the operative control of the municipal schools. Schools are publically financed. School budgets depend on the number of students choosing and attending the school. Apart from the requirement of only one principal per school unit, the state gives organisers and principals autonomous power over their schools, resulting in a diversity of organisational models and leadership forms (Döös et al., 2017a).

The work involved in producing a new school law was lengthy; it was interrupted during one government but was taken up again after a change of governments in 2006. Work went on during two main periods of time and in different forms: a parliamentary inquiry and an internal departmental working group (see table 1).

Table 1. An overview of the formal steps in the work process behind the Education Act

The legislative process 1999–2011	
<p>Social Democrat minority government - 2006</p>	<p>In 1999 the School Law Committee (also called the Parliamentary Inquiry) was appointed, which produced the official report entitled: <i>School Law for Quality and Equality</i> SOU 2002:121, which was sent out for consultation and for consideration by the Council for Legislation; work ends as there was not enough support in Parliament.</p>
<p>Non-Socialist majority government (an Alliance of four parties) 2006 -</p>	<p>In 2006 an internal working group was appointed, which presents the Department's proposal: <i>The New School Law – for Knowledge, Choice and Security</i> Ds. 2009:25, which was sent out for consultation and for consideration by the Council of Legislation, and was turned into the government bill: Prop. 2009/10:165, and to the government's proposal, which Parliament accepted, leading finally to: The Education Act of 2010:800, which came into force on July 1st 2011.</p>

³ The same law applies in all essentials to preschools and preschool principals.

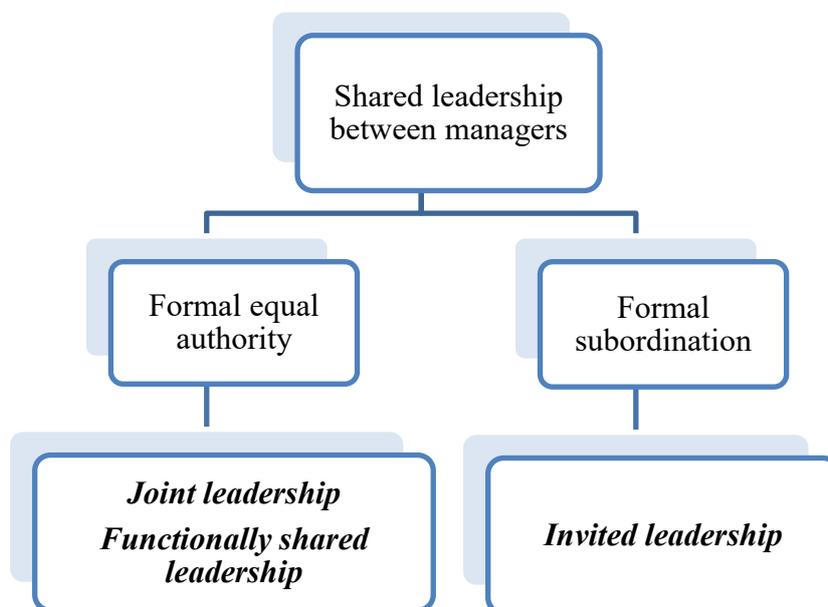
⁴ Huvudman in Swedish.

Theoretical introduction to shared leadership between managers

Collective leadership is an umbrella term for shared responsibility in an organisation and consists of two distinct but connected subsets: distributed leadership with responsibility and power being spread, to those not in management positions (Jones, 2014; Liljenberg, 2018; Spillane, 2005), and shared leadership between managers (Döös, 2015; Eckman, 2018). The latter belongs to the research stream “pooling leadership capacities at the top to direct others” (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012, p. 213). The collective nature of leadership is increasingly in focus in the research literature (Bolden, 2011; Gronn, 2015) and shared leadership between managers is part of this trend, in school settings too (Döös et al., 2017a; Eckman, 2018). Formal authority-sharing by two people is described as a way of decreasing principals’ often overwhelming burden of work (e.g., Court, 2003; Döös et al., 2017a). The isolation that can be felt by principals (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011) is contrasted with the sense of reassurance and collective responsibility in leadership shared between principals: “coprincipals value not being alone at the top” (Eckman, 2007, p. 26).

Shared leadership here implies close cooperation in which the managers involved have and/or take shared responsibility for an organisational unit (Döös, Wilhelmson, & Backström, 2013; Döös et al., 2017a). Based on work organisation theory (e.g., Bratton, 2010) such shared leadership has been conceptualised in relation to formal organisational hierarchy (de Voogt & Hommes, 2007; Döös, 2015; Wilhelmson, 2006) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research-based concepts for forms of shared leadership between managers within a unit.



Joint leadership (Wilhelmson, 2006) is characterised by complete formal authority, hierarchic equality and merged work tasks. The sharing managers work on the principle that their managerial activities are in common and they alternate in taking on tasks. Before

the current Education Act came into force, two principals for one and the same school could each have the formal authority and thereby also take responsibility on the basis of their formal equality (Wilhelmson & Döös, 2018). *Functionally shared leadership* (Döös, 2015) also implies formal hierarchic equality, but those who share leadership carry out the work within different main functions of the activity (e.g., Bratton, 2010). The managers have mutual responsibility for the activities in general, but their mandates are separate. *Invited leadership* (de Voogt & Hommes, 2007) implies a formal hierarchy between those who share responsibility; it is the person who has formal authority who invites the other person to take shared responsibility in practice.

Benefits and downsides

Successfully sharing managers in all forms highlight three qualities that form the internal bedrock of sharing: trust, lack of pretention and common values (Döös, 2015; Döös et al., 2017a). Common values constitute a foundation for the building of mutual trust and concern the goal and vision for the activity as well as how to lead and treat human beings, two equally important aspects. Sharing managers often point out the advantage of having different competencies and being different persons, and that close communication is necessary.

Various aspects of principals' shared leadership have been empirically investigated over the last three decades, mainly focusing on a variety of potential benefits such as sustainable working conditions for the principals (Döös et al., 2017a; Eckman & Kelber, 2010), recruitment advantages (Brooking et al., 2003; Eckman, 2007) and democracy (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006; Wilhelmson & Döös, 2016).

Literature searches show that little is published about the downsides. Yet Eckman (2006) points to difficulties in sharing power, in communicating, defining responsibilities, developing trust and presenting a unified front. Court (2003) gives an example where a partnership failed, partly due to the rule that there should only be a single person in the position, but mainly because of a heavy workload and the difficulties of cooperating within the co-principal partnership. In general, when sharing managers run into serious difficulties, there is either a problem in the internal bedrock or a context that does not recognise and provide the necessary conditions for this collective way of organising managerial positions (Döös et al., 2013).

Method

The study is based on five qualitative interviews with people involved in the legislative process behind the current Education Act.

Choice and relevance of informants

The informants were strategically selected from knowledge of people involved in the process of drafting the Education Act and were complemented with snowball selection (Aspers, 2011). All five informants had central positions in the process of developing the Education Act. Three were non-party civil servants with long experience of public administration in Sweden. Two were politicians affiliated to two conservative parties. The informants emphasised that they took part in the work for a considerable period of time.

Data collection and analysis

A group of three researchers representing education science, political science and law, conducted the interviews during 2015–2016. An interview guide was used, and the researchers took responsibility for different sections; while one carried out the interview, the other two only listened. Each interview lasted an hour. The interviews were transcribed.

The interview material was mainly analysed by the first author, who was not present during the interviews, and was later discussed and refined with the group of interviewers. The analysis was a stepwise process that first used open reading of transcriptions. This served as an orientation and notes were made in the margins. In the next step, these notes were used to identify preliminary themes. Next all occurring quotes from the informants related to each theme were collected. Work on these reply collections focused on a) the work process which in itself emerged as important for understanding the prohibition, and b) understanding how and why prohibition came into existence. This formed the thematic aspects accounted for in the findings. The findings have been presented at a conference, and peer discussions have been held at two research seminars.

Specific quotes were chosen to substantiate the findings. All informants are cited (2–6 times). Participating individuals are kept anonymous; in the presentation of the findings, each quote is followed only by an anonymous letter representing the informants (A–E).

Data quality

The question of data quality needs to be raised in a study built on what informants say long after what is being studied took place, in this case, five years or more. This retrospective factor had both pros and cons for the possibility to grasp what took place and why. The fact that the interviews were conducted so long after the drafting of the act might entail problems concerning the study's trustworthiness (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). It is inevitable that the informants to some extent did not remember fully what happened, and also remembered incorrectly. However, the fact that four informants were deeply involved in the work for a long period indicates that their memories are relatively strong. One held a manager position, which gave overview but less closeness to the work. Some had prepared themselves for their interview by consulting documents and brought with them various documents; they were eager to present correct information. The reports

from the informants are mutually consistent, which contributes to trustworthiness. The retrospective distance also proved to have the advantage that the informants talked relatively frankly and the information was, therefore, probably richer than had the interviews been conducted close to the passing of the act.

The process behind the 2010 Education Act

This first findings section provides a contextual understanding of the work involved in creating the act and shows the extent of the work; this is important for understanding how the formal equal authority of joint leadership came to be prohibited by law.

Many years of work

The concrete preparation of the 2010 Education Act continued for more than ten years. However, the informants' reports go further back to the municipalisation of schools in 1989–91 and also include the five years' work after the law had been introduced. The realisation that the law needed to be totally remade contributed to this work which, compared to other legislative work, took unusually long time. The reasons for the total remake were that Swedish schools were not equally good and that the earlier law was a patchwork that needed to be modernised. It turned out that the emphasis on *one* leader's responsibility did not emerge in the work on the 2010 act. This was already proposed in the steering principles introduced in connection with the municipalisation. A few years later a clarification was made, and the term *principal* was introduced around 1994–95. However, these formulations were never clear enough to hinder joint leadership between principals. After the present act had come into force, work continued for five years, reviewing what for various reasons had not turned out so well in the act.

In practice this was what had not turned out so well in the school law, or what we had not had time to deal with or, as the lawyers said: 'We didn't have time to look at that, we just took the content from the old school law and moved it to the new one.' (B)

In all, there is a 25-year period of importance for understanding how prohibition of joint leadership came into existence.

Change of government and forms of work

The work was carried out under different governments using different work forms. The first big step towards a new law was taken by a Social Democrat minority government governing with the support of the Green Party. A broad parliamentary committee was appointed with proportionate numbers of members from different political parties together with representatives of employers and union organisations.

At that time, there was still the idea that politicians would be represented more or less proportionately, so there were four Social Democrats and others in proportion accordingly. It was a giant committee. (A)

The school law committee's proposal was sent out for consultation, but after that, work stopped because the government saw no chance of getting enough support for the law in Parliament. Immediately after the change of government in 2006, when four non-socialist parties in alliance formed a majority government, work recommenced. An internal departmental working group was appointed, a much quicker way of producing a law. It was communicated that its work was largely based on the school law committee's proposal, which legitimised not appointing a new inquiry. Finally, the law was passed by Parliament and came into force. It is evident that there was a political show for the electoral gallery.

It was seen as a flop that the previous government, the Social Democrats, had not managed to present a proposal on this issue. Of course, the opposition had attacked the government about this, saying, 'Why don't you present a proposal?' So when they came to power, they simply had to. (B)

A cathedral-building project involving close cooperation between officials and politicians

The law was described as a cathedral-building project, a giant project, and the work needed to complete it was unusually extensive. The official replies to the proposal were also extensive, 500 in number. "An incredible number of regulations were to go into the text" (E). The magnitude and the extensive work in itself resulted in that the room for what was considered less central was greatly reduced. The closer they got to the goal, the less inclined they were to question and problematise. It was a matter of reaching the goal where the law could be presented for a decision in Parliament. This indicates that the extent of the work was an obstacle to dealing with what were seen as details and side-tracks. The possibility for principals to share formal authority on equal terms was too insignificant to be noticed. Furthermore, the work was carried out in an unusual way with respect to both the highly frequent meetings and the closeness between officials and politics. The politics involved was not openly communicated, "from outside it was the civil servants who produced the proposal." (D).

The Minister was very committed to this, we had, in principle, weekly meetings to check developments during a period of a couple of years. As the work was so incredibly extensive [...] we had to tick off point after point. (B)

The why of the prohibition of joint principalship

This second findings section details the five aspects that emerge as significant when understanding why the prohibition of joint principalship came into existence: distrust, intentions openly put forward, the late invention of the school unit concept, delegation as a solution to increased workloads, and notions of leadership. In all, the five aspects show

what was considered important to achieve as well as the uninformed notions of leadership that implicitly coloured the process.

Distrust

The changes to the law that were of importance for this study were primarily motivated by the state's distrust of the municipalities' ability to run schools. The law was preceded by a discussion about principals increasingly becoming administrative managers instead of being pedagogical leaders working out in the schools' activities. It was regarded important to reverse this trend, and there was support from all the parties in Parliament for the state to take increased responsibility for such matters as equality and supervision. The municipal committees went too far in questions that ought to be the responsibility of the profession.

Even if it was not openly stated, there was a feeling that the municipalities had not really taken their responsibility for schools in full, and the efforts they had made in many municipalities were, sort of, a bit erroneous and a bit peripheral. There was very little about results, about the pupils' learning. So, of course, that is a way of circumventing the municipalities. (B)

Also, it was pointed out that there were large upper secondary schools organised in such a way that it was difficult to know who was responsible. A flora of terminology had grown up for the person or persons responsible for a certain school. The distrust of the way the municipalities had managed schools meant that an important starting point when working on the new law—not stated openly—was to circumvent the municipalities by increasing direct state control and governance. Thereby, the influence of the local political boards and authorities would be reduced.

Intentions openly put forward

The legislative work aimed at getting the principals to focus on being pedagogical leaders close to the students and the parents. To meet the abovementioned distrust, there followed the desire to clarify how schools are led. The way chosen, using clarity as the motive, was to give more direct authority to the principals.

The aim was to pinpoint the principal to have a person that was to be held responsible. So here we wanted to have a clearer governing line from the state down to the principal and to know what the principal's powers were. The idea was to have clarity and a demand for responsibility, and that the principal should be a pedagogical leader. (E)

Thus the opinion was that the principal needed to be identified as responsible and be given a clearer and direct mandate by the law. Considerable parts of this had to do with the students' legal rights and that these are based on a clear understanding of who makes the decisions concerning support and disciplinary measures for a particular student. One expression that recurs in the interviews about the need for clarity is “one student—one principal”.

One unclear point identified was that in various control documents it was stated that the school was responsible. It was said that this could be understood to mean that no one felt affected by a certain regulation. Now, the aim was to clearly identify a particular official in accordance with what was called *the addressee theory*.

We called this the addressee theory—that we needed to be very clear about the addressee of a regulation, that it was immediately obvious who it hits, so to say. Who is responsible for following this regulation. Then we had to include the regulation that this person should be called the *principal*, so that the addressee principle would work. (A)

One informant emphasises in particular that the introduction of the principle of one single person's responsibility, came as early as 1990 or 1991. For a long time, it had been taken for granted that there should be *one* responsible person, but that this had not been clearly expressed. The absolute prohibition, which made joint leadership impossible, came with the new law.

We did not have a clear regulation until the new law came into force, about if there could be one or more principals at the same school. (A)

It was an established issue; it was not a surprise for anybody. (C)

Late invention of the *school unit* concept

Important for understanding the consequences for principals' shared formal authority was the late invention of the school unit concept. The concept was introduced for the organisational unit that the single principal was responsible for. The aim was to achieve clarity. That its inclusion in the law was not properly thought through was made clear by the informants. It is described as an unintentional consequence of directly pointing to the principal as responsible, and of the large number of issues that had to be included in the law. The concept was introduced during the internal working group's work at the strong request of the Minister concerned.

It came about because we needed to connect a number of other rules to something. (A)

We needed to define what a school was. So instead we defined *school unit* because school can be so many different things. It is easier to create a legal term from unit. (D)

That the school unit concept would be of decisive importance for how the function of principal should be organised in a certain school was not recognised in the legislative work.

No close analysis was made of the way the concept of school unit would function in conjunction with the new regulations for principals. (C)

Afterwards, the school unit concept created a number of problems, and it was discussed whether it needed to be revised in the review work on the law. The Swedish National Agency of Education and the Schools Inspectorate expressed the wish that it should not be touched.

Delegation as the solution to increased workloads

The new law meant that the number of tasks specified for the principal increased. That this meant a considerable escalation of the principal's workload was realised during the legislative process. The importance of the principal's workload not becoming too heavy that it would be impossible for her or him to cope was emphasised. Therefore, it was made possible to delegate authority for most tasks that were addressed directly to the principal. Thus, delegation was the chosen solution to prevent work overload. However, delegation in itself puts the intended clarity at risk since the person who delegates is still responsible for seeing that the work is done properly.

Let's say that there are 100 specific decisions for which the principal is responsible. Then there are at most ten, where it is forbidden to delegate. So the very great majority can be delegated. [...] When the possibility to delegate was given, a good deal of clarity was lost. It is obvious that it is much clearer if it is always just the one person. (A)

Notions of leadership

There was strong confidence in the legislative work that clarity lies in the fact that one single person has responsibility. The notions of leadership reflected in the interviews are built on a conventional and non-problematised capability of the singular leader. This shows in statements about clarity and confidence in the capable principal.

Clarity is that it is one person, that's it. (C)

A capable principal makes sure, of course, to have a capable administrative officer to look after the administration, finances, caretakers, school kitchen, lunchrooms and that sort of work, so that he or she can focus on what is important. (B)

The interviews reveal a clear mistrust of leaders being able to share formal authority on equal footing. An opinion was put forward that delegation of authority does not in practice differ much from joint leadership.

That [joint leadership], I believe, is guaranteed to lead to conflict, so I think it's bad. (B)

You can have a management group, so actually, de facto, it's just the titles that differ from being able to work closely together. (E)

None of the informants can remember that in the legislative work there was any criticism of the principals who had more fellowship or collaboration in their leadership function; on the other hand, this was not a question that was discussed.

The presumption was that there was only one principal. I cannot recollect that there were even any discussions about there being two principals in some schools. I don't believe that anyone thought it would be necessary to say that there had to be one principal. (A)

How shared leadership between managers is defined by the informants varies significantly. Research that clarifies the conditions for and the forms of shared leadership was not used; each person seemed to use his or her own understanding of the phenomenon.

Discussion

This paper provides insight into the legislative process behind the current Education Act (2010:800) in Sweden and aims to shed light on how and why the legislative process came to prohibit joint leadership for principals. The sharing of a principal's position by two people who share formal authority on equal footing is, in previous research, identified as favourable for principals and schools as it decreases principals' often heavy workload. Also, being two at the top of a school's organisation means extended possibilities to take part in and influence ongoing everyday work interactions. Joint leadership has been suggested as a model for democratic collaboration with the potential to get spread to other collaborative situations (Wilhelmson & Döös, 2016). If so, a distributed leadership, to others than the school leaders, can be the result. With regard to principals' importance for student learning and school outcomes (Böhlmark, Grönqvist, & Vlachos, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012), we wanted to know the motives behind the act, as it removed the opportunity for the principal's position to be organised with equal formal authority between two.

As shown, many years of investigatory work preceded the law, which was described as a gigantic project, as big as building a cathedral. On the one hand, the legal prohibition of joint principalship is identified here as an unintended side-effect of this extensive work. On the other hand, it was completely in line with uninformed notions of leadership which had a decisive impact on legislators' ideas about what was possible, clear and legally correct.

Distrust in the governing line

A distrust in the governing line had a decisive impact on how the new law came to prohibit joint leadership for principals. This distrust, characterised as a strong underlying motive, led to legal solutions that circumvented the municipal level by addressing a number of rules directly to the principal. This lack of trust may be interpreted as an insufficient interplay between the different levels in the school system's governing line, a problem within the Swedish school system investigated in scientific studies (Nihlfors & Johansson, 2014; SOU, 2015:22). Concern about differences in school quality and student equality lay behind the state's distrust of the municipalities as expressed in this study.

That the law was motivated by the state's distrust of the municipalities' ability to run schools was, during the legislative process, referred to as a desire to clarify how schools

are led. The degree of national governance was increased by reducing the influence of the local municipal organisers. From this followed the need to focus on one person, the principal, which was motivated by the addressee theory. However, the intended clarity in terms of responsibility was again reduced; the introduced rule allowing the principal to delegate, and the late invention of the school unit concept, created new difficulties in achieving intended clarity.

Uninformed notions of leadership

The prohibition of joint leadership fits well into the new public management (NPM) norm of managerialism, which idealises strong and clear leadership (Madestam, 2017; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). On the one hand, it is quite understandable that trust in the singular, capable principal left its mark and that shared leadership did not attract attention; especially so within the already gigantic work underlying the law.

On the other hand, the reason that alternative forms of leadership were not identified as potential options during the legislative process reflects uninformed notions of leadership. This is an expression of the fact that shared leadership between managers is an immature phenomenon in society; there is a lack of social agreement about what it is (Döös, Backström, Melin, & Wilhelmson, 2012; Yankelovich, 1991). Knowledge provided by research has not been taken aboard on a broad front and have therefore not strongly affected society. The term social imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) may be used as a way to describe that the view of leadership of the people involved in the legislative process is carried in images and stories. Whereas theory is used by a minority (Taylor, 2004), for instance, researchers in a certain field, social imaginaries refer to a “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (p. 23). These stand out as rooted in the traditional trust in the singular leader as strong, competent and clear (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). In other words, the public narrative (Somers, 1994) of the heroic leader and the individual capable manager.

Based on the findings of this study, the legislative process can be seen as an expression of unreflective and uninformed notions of leadership. This is in contrast to deliberate consideration based on scientific grounds. Also, in the Proposition (2016/17:171) for a new Local Government Act, the government comments on certain objections to having *one* Chief Executive Officer in each municipality. The objections submitted for consideration meant that the bill went too far in steering in detail and in removing the possibility for municipalities to decide their organisation. The government argued that this is a necessary restriction of their freedom of organising:

Is there only one employee who has the leading position among the employees, this eliminates any possible uncertainties. (Prop., 2016/17:171, p. 196, our translation)

It is disturbing and worrying to note that the same arguments as those expressed in our interviews recur, constantly without scientific support. Furthermore, it should be expected

that as the Education Act prescribes that education is to rest on scientific grounds and reliable experience, it would itself live up to the same criterion.

Principals continue to be organised in shared leadership forms

Shared leadership between managers is not a miracle cure for problems; as with singular leadership, it is a matter of how it is carried out and under what conditions. The problem in the school context is that one opportunity was lost since the principal position may no longer be organised with the formal authority of joint leadership. The potential of joint leadership has disappeared (Wilhelmson & Döös, 2018).

The division of one large school into several school units as a result of the present law has been shown to cause problems (Döös, Wilhelmson, Madestam, & Örnberg, 2017b). It appears to be difficult to deal with the boundary between school units so that divided schools can become a whole. Research in the Swedish context shows that shared leadership in other forms than joint leadership continues to exist in schools (Döös et al., 2017a, 2017b). Sharing forms are being developed such as functionally shared leadership and vertically invited leadership for one school unit, as well as horizontally invited leadership between principals, who thereby cooperate across school unit borders (Döös et al., 2017b). A number of municipal organisers are testing various collective leadership solutions. This is done to reduce the principals' workload and enable them to focus on acting as pedagogical leaders.

We see a need within the framework of the present law for continuing research on experiences of shared leadership between managers in various organisational forms. Also, we suggest research that investigates juridically how the present law might be changed to facilitate equal formal authority. Two principals on a par with each other can be responsible together for the whole but still divide up the tasks according to competence and interest. Thereby they will get legitimacy in the eyes of both external and internal interests as far as the school as a whole is concerned; the workload is reduced, and they can freely take turns and help each other. At the same time, each of the cooperating principals can have personal responsibility, so that the requirement of one student—one principal is maintained.

Conclusions

Distrust in the governing line was a strong contributory factor to the way the law developed. The fact that the prohibition of joint principalship came into effect may be reduced to a consequence of the length, forms of work, extent and political prestige of the legislative process. However, above these circumstantial explanations stands the ruling public narrative of the heroic leader and the individual, capable manager; in the cathedral-building project, there was no intent to question traditional ideas about leadership or investigate alternatives.

The important lines of argument concerned lack of trust in the way the municipalities organised their schools. Direct state control by going via the principal as the appointed responsible authority was, therefore, the chosen solution. This, together with the late invention of the school unit concept, also had unforeseen consequences for the organising of the principal's position. In the legislative work, joint leadership was at most a marginal issue. The principle of singularity ruled, and a ban on joint leadership was the consequence—without considering whether this favoured the overarching aims of the law: increased pedagogical responsibility and leadership with a focus on the students' learning, results and democratic upbringing.

Legal openings still exist for principals' shared leadership in other forms than the formal equal authority of joint leadership (see e.g., Örnberg, 2016). As the idea of a *super individual* carrying the full weight of responsibility for operating and developing a school remains, we find it important to shed light on the ideas and values governing how schools should be organised. The law states the singularity principle, while leadership in the research literature is increasingly described as collective. In line with Bolden, Jones, Davis, and Gentle (2015), we urge an open and critical examination of dominant ideas concerning organisation and leadership. Society has changed, and it is about time we seriously question Fayol's (2008) hundred-year-old rule: only one manager per employee. He regarded it as an indispensable principle that, if violated, "harms authority, impairs discipline, disturbs order and threatens stability" (p. 46–47, our translation). We believe that, based on their local circumstances and needs, organisers and schools must be trusted to choose their leadership model—singular or shared, divided or united. As Nihlfors and Johansson (2014) state, responsibility for the results of a school may rest on the principal as an individual official, but to achieve results the principal needs to "take and *be able to take* responsibility and have authority" (p. 234, our italics). It is unfortunate that the present school law limits the possibilities for principals to share responsibility—especially as this issue was not seriously considered and investigated in the legislative process.

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