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Leadership beyond hierarchies, toward public value: exploring, explaining and enhancing leadership in public sector networks

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General discussion and conclusion

This dissertation explored the question: *How does leadership enhance collaboration in public sector networks, and how can it be developed?* This question is highly relevant, as public sector networks—characterized by horizontal relationships between autonomous organizations—are increasingly used to address complex societal problems. Despite their growing importance, the leadership needed to foster effective collaboration in these settings remains both theoretically underdeveloped and empirically underexplored.

This dissertation responded to limitations in leadership literature, which typically focused on hierarchical, intra-organizational settings, despite the growing importance of horizontal partnerships between autonomous organizations. As a result, leadership in networks has remained insufficiently understood, under-theorized, and weakly supported in practice. This dissertation extended network management literature by shifting attention from designated formal roles—such as network managers or brokers—to the broader, shared leadership capacity distributed across network members. It also strengthened collaborative governance literature by operationalizing leadership behavior and linking it empirically to collaborative processes. Finally, this dissertation introduced a new approach to leadership development, using the network as the central context of a leadership intervention.

Drawing on four interrelated studies, the dissertation explored how leadership manifests in public sector networks, what organizational and contextual factors shapes it, how it influences collaboration, and how it could be supported through intervention. Together, these studies offered a comprehensive, theoretically and empirically grounded framework for understanding and developing leadership in public sector networks.

This chapter first presents the key findings and conclusions of Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Section 6.1. Section 6.2 offers a critical reflection on these findings, elaborating on their implications for the study of leadership in networks. The limitations of this research and recommendations for future studies are discussed in Section 6.3. Finally, Section 6.4 outlines the practical implications of this study.

6.1 Main findings

This dissertation used Yukl's organization-focused definition of leadership as its starting point, in which leadership is defined as "*the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it, as well as the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives*" (Yukl, 2012). Within network contexts, this process requires balancing organizational goals with shared network objectives (Lemaire 2020).

The definition employed in this study emphasizes the processual and behavioral nature of leadership, making it particularly suited to networked settings. Unlike individual organizations, which are characterized by hierarchical structures, formal leadership positions, and structured tools to motivate employees, networks consist of horizontal relationships between equal partners (O'Toole Jr. 1997; Klijn and Skelcher 2007). Consequently, network settings do not inherently include predefined formal leadership positions, allowing multiple actors to influence one another through leadership behaviors.

6.1.1 Current academic landscape on leadership in networks: conceptually divided

In the current body of literature, leadership in networks is understood in different ways depending on the underlying assumptions about who leads, toward what purpose, and in which context. Table 6.1 below presents a simplified typology that distinguishes between networking and network management theory, leadership theory and collaborative governance theory.

Table 6.1 Typology of branches of literature involved in network leadership research

| Branch of literature | Leadership focus | Goal | Context | (Main) missing element |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|---|
| Networking | Boundary spanners and brokers | Organizational goals | Organizational | Collective goals |
| Network management | Network manager | Network goals | Network | Recognition of shared/ distributed leadership |
| Leadership | Individual and collective | Organizational goals | Organizational | Application to network context |
| Network governance | Roles/functions | Shared network goals | Network | Behavioral lens |

Each of these literatures emphasizes different aspects of leadership. Networking theory tends to focus on the strategic behavior of a single actor, often termed a boundary spanner or broker, who represents an organization and pursues organizational goals through building connections (Van Meerkirk and Edelenbos 2018; Meier and O'Toole 2005). Similarly, network management theory views leadership as a strategic coordination function, often still located in a central figure such as the network manager, but oriented toward enabling the network as a whole to achieve shared goals (Agranoff and McGuire,

2001). The subject of study here is the network itself, with leadership positioned as a boundary-crossing and facilitating activity. By contrast, leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as the influence of a range of actors: individual leaders or collective forms such as shared or distributed leadership (Denis et al., 2012). Yet, this branch of literature has mainly focused on the context of formal organizations and their goals. Lastly, network governance theory often recognizes leadership implicitly—through roles such as sponsor, catalyst, or steward (Ansell and Gash, 2008)—but tends to treat it as a contextual or enabling factor rather than as a central object of study. Moreover, leadership is usually not studied as behavior, but as function or role, often linked to legitimacy and capacity-building in collaborative settings.

Each of these theoretical strands offers valuable insights into leadership in the context of networks, yet none provides a complete conceptual account. Networking theory contributes an understanding of how individuals engage in network relations, but its predominant focus on organizational self-interest limits attention to collective network goals. Network management theory, while helpful in identifying coordination strategies, falls short in capturing the dynamic, emergent, and distributed nature of leadership as it unfolds across actors. Leadership theory, for its part, offers a rich behavioral lens, but is largely grounded in intra-organizational settings and lacks sensitivity to the structural and relational complexities of networks. Finally, collaborative governance theory has deepened our understanding of network functioning and institutional design, but often treats leadership as a functional role or enabling condition rather than as an observable, enacted behavior. Together, these limitations highlight the need for an integrative approach that brings together behavioral, relational, and contextual dimensions of leadership in networks.

6.1.2 Conceptualization of leadership: behaviors, distribution and direction matter

To examine how leadership manifests in networks, Chapter 2 provided a conceptual framework based on a literature review and a multiple case study of three networks in the Netherlands. This framework shows how leadership in networks takes shape through four behavioral orientations—task-, relations-, change-, and externally oriented leadership—and how these behaviors can vary in direction (toward one's own organization, other network members, or external stakeholders) and distribution across actors. In its design, this conceptual framework builds on Yukl's taxonomy of leadership behaviors (2012) and demonstrates how this taxonomy is applicable to the context of networks. It also builds on contemporary approaches to leadership that highlight leadership as a shared or

distributed process in which multiple actors participate (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Importantly, the findings of Chapter 2 indicate notable differences in leadership configurations across networks with distinct structural and functional characteristics, leading to theoretical propositions regarding the role of network properties—such as governance form, legal basis, function, and diversity—in shaping leadership processes. In doing so, this study reinforces previous calls to incorporate contextual factors in leadership research (Schmidt and Groeneveld, 2021; Stoker, Garretsen and Soudis, 2019; Van der Hoek, Beerkens and Groeneveld, 2021).

6.1.3 Antecedents of leadership: organization-level factors

Building on the findings of the previous study, which indicated that contextual factors may influence leadership in networks, Chapter 3 examined how organization-level factors shape network leadership through an in-depth single-case study. Interviews with network participants at both strategic and tactical levels identified nine organizational factors that either enable or constrain individuals in demonstrating leadership within network settings. Consequently, the leadership behaviors exhibited by individual network members contribute to varying degrees of leadership concentration and differing levels of commitment to collective or organizational goals within networks. These findings connect earlier studies on the inherent characteristics of public sector management (Rainey, 2009; Boyne, 2002) with insights from boundary spanning research (Van Meerkirk and Edelenbos, 2018), and indicate that network leadership is not only shaped within the network itself, but also by the organizational setting from which participants operate. The study suggests that organizations play a role in enhancing or reducing leadership engagement in networks by the way they structure incentives, expectations, and resources in their own organization. This dual embeddedness of leadership—within the network and the home organization—has important implications for leadership development. It suggests that supporting leadership in public sector networks requires targeted attention to both levels. Within organizations, this means creating conditions that enable staff to act beyond institutional boundaries: aligning incentives with the network, clarifying expectations, and legitimizing boundary-spanning roles. In the network, it requires network participants to put effort into building trust, developing a shared view of the common goal orientation, and organizing operational capacity.

6.1.4 Effects of leadership on the collaborative process

Another key gap in the literature concerned the effects of leadership on collaborative processes in networks. To address this, Chapter 4 explored leadership as an independent

variable and its influence on three key elements of the collaborative process: operational capacity, member relations, and (common) goal orientation. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined survey data with semi-structured interviews, the study finds that leadership is positively associated with the collaborative process. Specifically, relations-oriented leadership is shown to be positively associated with member relations within networks. The study also found that leadership behaviors are interrelated, which highlights the need for additional hypothesis testing. The main contribution of this study is that it provides insights into the relationships between leadership and network collaboration.

6.1.5 Developing leadership in networks

Having established the manifestation, antecedents, and effects of leadership in networks, Chapter 5 explored the development of an intervention designed to support participants in cultivating leadership within their respective networks. In doing so, this study contributes to recent developments in leadership development theory (Day et al., 2021; Ospina et al., 2020), which argue for a broader, process-based view of leadership development in collective settings – rather than focusing on the development of individual ‘high potentials.’ Employing Design Science as its methodological framework, the study designed and tested an intervention through focus groups, a survey, and group interviews. Following from the analysis, the tool enables network participants to specify how they perceive the collaboration and which leadership behaviors they believe are being demonstrated or are lacking.

6.1.6 General conclusion

Together, these four studies show that leadership as enacted through task-, relations-, change-, and externally oriented behaviors enhances collaboration in public sector networks. Leadership contributes to a common goal orientation, operational capacity, and improved member relations – the basis for joint network collaboration. For networks to reach their leadership potential, it is important that organizations pay attention to the ways in which they encourage or hinder network collaboration by their own employees. Moreover, this dissertation demonstrates that leadership in networks can be developed through structured reflection, recognition, awareness and understanding of leadership in networks. The intervention developed through this dissertation helps to make leadership processes visible and discussable among network members.

Figure 6.1 visualizes these main findings in a comprehensive framework. This comprehensive framework illustrates and defines leadership in networks as a recursive process in which

multiple actors use behaviors to influence each other, their own organizations and the external environment in order to attain both organizational and collective (network) goals. In this environment, network members are confined by both their organizational context and the structural characteristics of the network. Within this context, leadership emerges through behaviors used by network members. This process can either be more concentrated, in which certain network members exhibit more leadership behavior than others, or more shared among network members. These leadership behaviors interact with dimensions of the collaborative process – member relations, operational capacity and a common goal orientation – in an iterative and recursive process. The intervention developed in Chapter 5 demonstrated that network leadership can be developed through enhancing network members’ knowledge of the functioning of networks, reflections on the current quality of the collaborative process, as well as recognition of the role of leadership and awareness of each members’ contribution to leadership in the network.

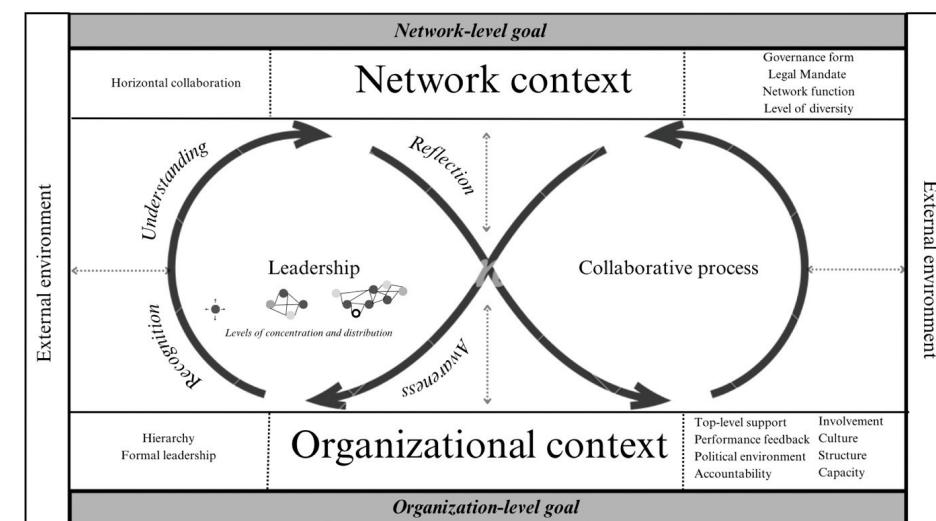


Figure 6.1: Comprehensive framework of leadership in public sector networks

In sum, this dissertation responded directly to the core academic puzzle by bridging and advancing four strands of literature. First, it extended leadership theory into the underexplored context of interorganizational networks, where leadership emerges as a more concentrated or more distributed, behavioral process. It advanced network management theory by shifting attention from individual actors to leadership by multiple network members, for the benefit of the network as a whole. It enriched collaborative governance theory by offering a behavioral framework to study leadership empirically, beyond

abstract roles or structures. Finally, it contributed to leadership development theory by demonstrating how leadership can be developed within networks, through a reflective, practice-based intervention. Taken together, these contributions provide a comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of how leadership enhances collaboration in public sector networks—and how it can be supported in both theory and practice.

6.2 Discussion

This dissertation offers several insights for understanding and researching leadership in public sector networks. To reflect on the broader implications of these findings, the discussion is organized around three themes: (1) conceptualizing leadership in public sector networks, (2) the relationship between leadership and context, and (3) the development of leadership in networks.

6.2.1 Conceptualizing leadership in public sector networks

This dissertation contributes to a broader, behavioral, and context-sensitive understanding of leadership in public sector networks—responding to the four gaps identified in the introductory chapter. Specifically, the findings contribute to four theoretical branches: leadership, network management, collaborative governance, and leadership development theory.

Firstly, this dissertation builds on *leadership theory* by using modern approaches to leadership theory that suggest that leadership is best understood as a behavioral process rather than a role or individual trait (Yukl, 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Denis et al., 2012; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). By empirically applying a four-part taxonomy of leadership behaviors—task-, relations-, change-, and externally oriented—the research has illustrated how leadership manifests in public sector networks. This behavioral lens proved analytically productive because it allows researchers to study leadership where formal authority is absent, while also highlighting how influence is enacted through behavior. To leadership research, the conceptual framework in Chapter 1 provides leadership scholars a framework for identifying and comparing leadership across network settings. The findings also prompt a refinement of Yukl's (2012) leadership taxonomy. While the framework was analytically useful, the concept of “external orientation” requires adjustment in network settings. In these settings, leadership flows in multiple directions: inward toward one's organization, across network actors, and outward toward external stakeholders. A more nuanced

understanding of directionality would therefore benefit leadership theory in networked contexts.

At the same time, the findings nuance idealized portrayals of networks as purely horizontal. While the structure of networks allows for collaboration, leadership can still concentrate in particular actors—such as network coordinators or initiators—who are seen as legitimate sources of direction. This echoes earlier work in *network management literature* (Provan and Kenis, 2008; Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos, 2010; McGuire and Silvia, 2009; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997), which highlights the role of coordination mechanisms and managerial influence. This study adds a behavioral dimension to those structural insights: even in settings with a less hierarchical basis, actors can still interpret leadership through the lens of formal roles. On the other hand, however, the behavioral lens allowed us to understand the crucial role members have without formal roles, as Chapter 2 indicated opportunities for relations- and change-oriented leadership for members without a formal leadership role.

To *collaborative governance literature*, this dissertation has shown the value of a behavioral perspective on leadership in the context of networks. However, an interesting remark can be made about the observability of leadership behavior. Throughout the individual studies, respondents found it hard to observe, articulate, and reflect on leadership behavior. Respondents often did not recognize their own leadership behaviors, which points to a broader issue: leadership in collaborative governance is enacted but not always perceived or noticed. This may result in unrecognized and underutilized leadership potential. Structured moments of reflection—as facilitated by the intervention in Chapter 5—helped network members surface, name, and evaluate leadership dynamics, making these processes more explicit and actionable.

In sum, this theme contributes to leadership theory by expanding behavioral approaches to non-hierarchical settings; to network management by expanding its scope from network managers to all members; and to collaborative governance by surfacing the invisibility of leadership as a practical and conceptual challenge. In doing so, this dissertation also supports the call for better integration between leadership theory and network or collaborative governance theory. As Ospina (2016) argues, leadership in public networks is often shared, relational, and shaped by context, but these features are still underdeveloped in both fields. By showing how leadership depends on network structure, function, and

organizational context, this study helps to bring these fields closer together and contributes to a more connected and practical understanding of leadership in collaborative settings.

6.2.2 The relationship between leadership and context

This dissertation underscores that leadership in interorganizational networks is fundamentally shaped by context. Responding to longstanding concerns about the neglect of context in leadership research (Johns, 2006, 2024; Oc, 2018), this study shows that both network- and organization-level factors are essential for understanding how leadership emerges and unfolds in network settings.

Apparent in Chapter 2, this dissertation proposed that network-level factors such as governance form (e.g., NAO, lead organization, or self-regulated structures), legal status, member diversity, and network function interact with leadership dynamics. From Chapter 3, it has become clear that organization-level factors such as internal management features and public organization traits interact with leadership in networks. Other organizational contextual elements, such as involvement in network tasks, organizational culture, structural arrangements, and operational capacity, further condition the ability of actors to exert or respond to leadership.

Throughout the dissertation, it thus became clear that leadership in networks is closely connected to leadership within organizations. Network participants do not operate in a vacuum—they bring with them the constraints, expectations, and incentives of their home organizations. Often, organizational priorities dominate, making it difficult to fully commit to collective goals at the network level. The findings of Chapter 3 suggest that barriers within organizations can directly inhibit leadership engagement in networks. When employees are evaluated primarily on organizational KPIs, for instance, cross-boundary collaboration may seem like a secondary concern.

Conversely, this dissertation shows that organizations have considerable potential to foster leadership in networks, by creating enabling conditions and sending consistent signals that leadership behaviors beyond organizational boundaries are valued. This begins with alignment between internal and network goals and includes practical support, such as time, autonomy, and recognition for those active in interorganizational collaboration. These findings contribute to network and public management literature by showing how intra-organizational leadership conditions can shape network-level engagement.

6.2.3 The development of leadership in networks

As follows from Chapter 5, leadership development efforts have long primarily focused on internal organizational management, which is logical given traditional leadership paradigms. However, leadership training that extends beyond organizational boundaries into networks is scarce, and has only recently received attention (Grøn et al., 2024).

This dissertation contributes to *leadership development literature* by offering a context-specific intervention aimed at enhancing leadership awareness and capacity in networks. Drawing on Design Science (Johannesson and Perjons, 2014) the intervention provided participants with space to reflect on who leads, how leadership is distributed, and what kind of leadership the network needs.

This dissertation also contributes to the modest, yet growing literature on leadership development for interorganizational collaboration. While Grøn et al. (2024) demonstrate the value of leadership training for formal public managers in improving coordination across organizational boundaries, the intervention in Chapter 5 took a different approach. Rather than focusing solely on skill development among formal leaders, the intervention developed and tested in this study involved all members of the collaborative network. This approach aligned with recent scholarship emphasizing that leadership development must move beyond individualized competencies to foster relational leadership in collectives (Eva et al., 2021). Getha-Taylor and Morse (2013) similarly argue that leadership development for collaborative governance should emphasize reflective practice and involve all participants, not just formal leaders. By organizing a collective reflection process that engaged the full range of network participants, this approach emphasized the network as the unit of analysis, in which participants learn collectively. In doing so, this intervention closely matches recent leadership research, which emphasizes the relational and distributed nature of leadership (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012).

Together, the findings of this dissertation highlight that leadership in networks is context-dependent, behaviorally enacted, and unevenly distributed—requiring active support and structured reflection to flourish. They offer theoretical contributions to four literatures by providing a cross-cutting behavioral perspective and practical implications for supporting leadership in collaborative governance.

6.3 Research limitations and avenues for future research

This dissertation set out to explore leadership within interorganizational networks, a subject that, as outlined in the introduction, presents several methodological and practical challenges. These challenges relate both to the complexity of conceptualizing and measuring leadership and to the specific characteristics of networks, such as unclear membership boundaries and high degrees of difference among participants (Kerrissey, Satterstrom and Edmondson 2020; Voets, Koliba and Keast 2019; Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Throughout the dissertation, these challenges have been addressed through a multi-method research design, aimed at ensuring robustness in data collection and analysis.

Even with thoughtful research design, a few challenges remained. First of all, a fundamental question when empirically studying a network turned out to be determining where an organization ends and the network begins. This study primarily focused on formal, institutionally recognized networks, as they were easier to identify and observe. However, this focus may limit the theoretical and empirical generalizability of the findings. Informal or ad hoc collaborations—such as temporary working groups or loosely coordinated task forces—may involve different leadership dynamics that are less visible or more fluid than those captured in this study. Future research should explicitly examine informal network settings to assess whether the leadership behaviors and patterns identified here also emerge in less formalized collaborations. This would not only strengthen the empirical basis for a behavioral understanding of leadership in networks but also help refine theory to account for variation in formalization, visibility, and actor engagement across different types of collaborative arrangements.

A second challenge concerned the issue of comparability across network cases. Each network studied in this dissertation differed in terms of governance form, size, purpose and composition. This variability made it difficult to draw cross-case conclusions—particularly in relation to how leadership behaviors manifest in different network configurations. While the diversity of cases enriched the empirical depth of this research, it also limited the extent to which findings could be generalized across network types. This was especially relevant in relation to the findings in Chapters 2 and 4, which aimed to identify leadership behaviors and link them to the quality of the collaborative process.

Another related difficulty was the time-intensive nature of network mapping. Because networks often lack fixed boundaries and formalized membership, it was challenging to

identify relevant actors and trace patterns of interaction. These two issues—comparability and resource intensity—highlight a broader challenge for the field: the difficulty of producing cumulative knowledge in network research based on individual studies.

To address this, this dissertation advocates for increased collaboration among scholars studying leadership in networks. By pooling empirical data, sharing network cases, and coordinating measurement strategies, researchers can build more robust comparative datasets and jointly develop shared frameworks for analyzing leadership across diverse network types. This recommendation echoes the call by Kerrissey, Satterstrom, and Edmondson (2020), who argue—in the context of studying dynamic team configurations—that collaborative research efforts are essential to account for the fluid, complex nature of cross-boundary work. In a similar vein, such collaboration can enhance methodological consistency, support theoretical refinement, and enable more systematic comparison across network settings.

Establishing the effects of leadership within networks also proved to be a complex methodological challenge. A central issue was the question of causality: does leadership influence the quality of collaboration, or do well-functioning collaborative processes enable the emergence of effective leadership? This dissertation did not aim to definitively resolve this “chicken-and-egg” dilemma, but rather to take empirical steps toward disentangling this relationship.

In particular, Chapter 4 addressed this issue most explicitly by examining associations between four types of leadership behavior and three key dimensions of collaborative processes—operational capacity, member relations, and goal orientation—using a mixed-methods design. While this design allowed for triangulation and richer interpretation, it did not support causal inference in a strict sense. Rather, it generated initial empirical insights into how leadership behaviors relate to collaboration quality, laying the groundwork for future longitudinal or experimental designs.

The leadership intervention presented in Chapter 5 was not designed to establish causal relationships, but rather to facilitate reflection among network participants on their collaborative dynamics and leadership patterns. While this tool can deepen understanding of participants’ perceptions and behaviors, it complicates rather than clarifies causal inference, as it actively intervenes in the system being observed. Nonetheless, future research could build on this intervention by applying it in multiple cases over time, allowing

for comparisons across settings or pre-post analyses. Such designs could eventually help clarify how leadership practices evolve in relation to collaboration outcomes.

Lastly, finding respondents who could reflect on leadership over extended periods proved challenging, as network compositions frequently change due to staff turnover, project cycles, or shifting priorities (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Mandell and Keast, 2008). This dissertation captured networks largely at a single moment in time, which limited the ability to assess long-term dynamics or causally trace how leadership develops in relation to collaboration outcomes.

Nevertheless, the empirical chapters did seek to incorporate a reflection on the time dimension where possible. In the interviews, respondents were invited to reflect not only on their current experiences but also on changes over time—in leadership practices and network dynamics. Furthermore, the intervention study presented in Chapter 5 introduced a limited longitudinal dimension, as participants engaged with the tool over multiple sessions and were prompted to consider how leadership and collaboration evolved throughout the time between both sessions.

Still, these elements cannot substitute for fully longitudinal research designs, which remain scarce in the literature but are essential for understanding the developmental nature of leadership in networks (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino, 2016; Ospina et al., 2020). Future studies should therefore adopt designs that follow networks over time, through multiple data collection waves or embedded ethnographies, to explore how leadership unfolds in response to contextual change, crises, or growth.

Finally, data collection was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue was especially salient in the first three studies, yet no longer prevalent in the fourth study. The reliance on online communication limited opportunities to observe leadership in physical settings, which may have influenced the findings. On the other hand, the increase of online collaboration opens up a new research agenda explicating the role of leadership in network collaboration in online and hybrid contexts.

6.4 Practical implications

To finalize this dissertation, I offer several recommendations for organizations and practitioners seeking to foster leadership in networked governance contexts.

First, it is essential to make leadership in networks explicit. Too often, leadership remains an implicit or invisible force in collaborative settings. Organizations and networks should create space to reflect with network participants on the presence—or absence—of leadership in their collaboration. This includes discussing how leadership is distributed across actors, who exhibits or should exhibit leadership, and what types of leadership behaviors (Task-, relations, change- and externally oriented) the network requires to function effectively. The serious game discussed in Chapter 5, is explicitly designed to help network members open up about these matters, thereby stimulating network members to collectively reflect on the subject of leadership and its effects on inter-organizational collaborative process.

Second, organizations should invest in raising awareness about the mutual interdependence between organizations and the networks in which they operate. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, organizational structures, norms, and practices can either constrain or enable leadership within networks. This underscores the need for public organizations to recognize that leadership in networks is not isolated from internal-organizational dynamics, but is influenced by them. One way to foster this awareness is through leadership development initiatives that explicitly address the unique challenges of leadership in networked environments. Currently, many leadership programs remain oriented toward traditional hierarchical contexts and do not equip public professionals for the relational, boundary-crossing, and often informal leadership required in interorganizational settings. And if they do, they predominantly focus on how networks can be steered towards organizational goals. Including network leadership in the curriculum can help close this gap and help network members harmonize organizational and network goals.

Third, it is important to broaden access to leadership development beyond formal leaders. In networks, leadership is often enacted by those without positional authority. Therefore, organizations should encourage all employees—regardless of their role or title—to explore and strengthen their leadership capacities. This inclusive approach aligns with the distributed nature of leadership in networks and recognizes the leadership potential present across professional boundaries. Chapter 1, which presents a conceptual model in which leadership behaviors, distributions and directions are provided, offers practitioners a helpful tool in identifying leadership in their network and how they could contribute to it.

Finally, practitioners should invest time – for instance through the intervention developed in this study - in identifying and applying specific leadership behaviors that enhance

collaboration in their networks. This includes task-oriented behaviors that provide direction and clarity, relationship-oriented behaviors that build trust and cohesion, change-oriented behaviors that stimulate innovation, and externally oriented behaviors that connect the network to its broader environment. Understanding which of these behaviors are most needed—and by whom—can help improve the network's collective performance and its ability to create public value.

Together, these recommendations emphasize that leadership in networks is not a given, but a capacity that must be made visible, developed intentionally, and shared broadly both within organizations as well as within networks themselves.

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