Applying Distributed Leadership in Micro and Small Enterprises of Kosovo

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Abstract: - Discussions about distributed leadership and its effectiveness have been at the center of recent leadership studies. This article aims to present the perceptions of micro and small enterprises staff in Kosovo, regarding the practice of distributed leadership, the challenges of this application and the conditions that permit the improvement of enterprises leadership. In Kosovo micro and small enterprises make up the majority of companies operating in the market and serve as the main source of employment for the Kosovo population. Thus, examining the leadership issues of these ventures would serve above all to their effectiveness and success. The ideas of econometric models about the levels of distributed leadership and the challenges of the application of the distributed leadership helped to explain some features of the leadership in micro and small MSE-s in Kosovo context. The instrument created has been delivered to 37 micro and small enterprises in Kosovo. 294 entrepreneurs and enterprises staff filled the questionnaire.

The study revealed that according to the respondent's perceptions distributed leadership is practiced in their enterprise at a superficial level, according to the 3 levels presented by empirical research. There exists a "neutral" perception about the challenges faced by the enterprise while applying distributed leadership, which shows that the respondents do not have a clear idea about the challenges that their enterprise has to face while applying distributed leadership. Nevertheless, they listed "the lack of the shared responsibility amongst the staff", as one challenge that their enterprise faces mostly, while applying the distributed leadership. According to the respondents, it is important to encourage staff to participate in the decision making, ensure well-built relations among entrepreneurs and the staff and create strong collegial relationships among staff. This could contribute to the success of the MSE-s

Key-Words: distributed, leadership, micro, small , enterprises, Kosovo, challenges.

1 Introduction

Distributed leadership studies have been conducted mostly in the field of education and have examined school contexts, however, it seems that distributed leadership can be applied to enterprises of different sizes.

This paper examines the application of the distributed leadership to micro and small enterprises (MSE-s) in Kosovo. Particularly the article aims to

present the perceptions of micro and small enterprises staff in Kosovo, regarding the practice of distributed leadership, the challenges of this application and the conditions that permit the improvement of enterprises leadership. In Kosovo micro and small enterprises make up the majority of companies operating in the market and serve as the main source of employment for the Kosovo population. Thus, examining the leadership issues of these ventures would serve above all to their effectiveness and success.

2 The Distributed Leadership, Challenges of Application and Conditions for Improvement

Discussions about the concept of leadership and studies on leadership also are numerous. In its work "The new work of educational leaders", [1], states that leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal in the organization.

Despite the wide range of leadership typologies, the two main types of leadership discussed in the recent academic literature are the traditional leadership and the distributed leadership. Traditional leadership is about vertical top-down management, while distributed leadership is a more democratic one. It is known as shared leadership, participatory leadership, or democratic leadership, [2]. According to Harris, [3], distributed leadership is a form of leadership when the influence is made on an organization, and decisions are taken by several persons, rather than managed by one person.

According to Elmore, [4], when distributed leadership is implemented in an organization, it enables an increase of employees' trust that the company works honestly and this affects the increase of the company's possibility for progress. The author stressed that distributed leadership gives importance to the communication and the collaboration between members of the company and to the learning from each other.

According to Harris, [5], there are different strategic levels of leadership development. The first level is *superficial*, which is related to the creation of a team, and the division of tasks between their members; the second level of the distributed leadership, the *subterranean* level when sharing the leadership is considered as a working norm and the third level of the distributed leadership, *deep* distributed leadership, where the leadership becomes the culture of the organization.

Regarding the challenges that an enterprise faces while applying the distributed leadership Harris, [6], listed: (a) the distance, (b) the culture (the top down model of leadership), (c) the enterprise structure.

Summarizing the findings of some authors, including Harris's ideas, Dambrauskienė. [7], shows the characteristics of distributed leadership, as following: (a) the community members' participation in the organization's performance, (b) communication and collaboration, (c) teaching/learning from each other, (d) support for the initiative, (e) involvement in decision making, and (f) the distribution of power and activity among other employees of the organization. These features can be also considered as conditions that permit the improvement of the MSE-s leadership and transform it into a distributive leadership.

As North, [8], concludes, in an organization, where the distributed leadership is applied, it is likely to be a more effective development of new ideas and knowledge, a faster change in people's worldview and transition from a situation to common in that culturally desired and also structural changes. As in educational institutions, distributed leadership is seen as very effective in the field of small and medium enterprises (SME-s) management as well, [9]. Some specifics that make small and medium enterprises, including micro enterprises as well, as suitable for the implementation of the distributed leadership are: the management of the firm is independent and usually the managers are the owner of the enterprise; capital is usually owned by an individual or a small group of individuals, the region of extension is mainly small; the size of the enterprise is small too, greater flexibility, faster decision making, simple organizational structure, the orientation toward the innovation especially for small enterprises.

According to Cope, [10], in micro businesses, the entrepreneur is not yet a leader because he has to be involved in several roles, such as the role of salesman, the role of specialist in public relations, the role of accountant, manager, etc. As Kempser, [11], argues, when the business grows, the entrepreneur begins to position himself in the role of leader. Throughout the life cycle of a business, the leadership style in the business also changes, [12].

According to Ensley, [13], in the small business start-up phase, vertical leadership takes on a special importance, because it requires the entrepreneur to create the vision of the company and lead others, including employees to implement this vision. Throughout the business growth phase, it seems to

move from a phase when the entrepreneur is a "hero" and works alone, to a phase when the entrepreneur is engaged in the team, [14]

According to Mendy and Harrison (2021) the shared approach to leadership can help organizations, especially resource-constrained ones like SMEs, to resolve crisis situations similar to those created by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, [15] .

Having in mind the three main challenges of applying the distributed leadership, presented by Harris, [4], mentioned in the previous session of this paper: the distance, the culture and the organizational structure, it is expected that in micro and small companies, since the distance between employees, as well as between the entrepreneur and the employees is small, the possibility of applying distributed leadership is higher, so, this challenge is expected to be easily overcome .

According to Harris, [16], the traditional culture of top-down leadership is another challenge that needs to be overcome. In micro and small companies, this is expected to pose an important challenge, because usually in enterprises of this size the traditional culture of leadership is applied, [9].

Given that the structure of enterprises in micro and small companies is not based on the departmental division, it is very likely that the barrier created by the complex organizational structure in big enterprises will not be an important challenge in the case of micro and small companies, [15]

3 The Research Methodology and Model

With the aim of measuring the perceptions of entrepreneurs and the staff in an enterprise, in relation to: a. the implementation of distributed leadership in their enterprises; b. the challenges dealing with distributed leadership; c. the conditions that permit the improvement of the distributed leadership in their enterprises, an instrument created by Dampson, [12], have been used. In the article entitled "Distributed Leadership an Instrument for School Improvement: The Study of Public Senior High Schools in Ghana", Dampson, [11], measured the perceptions of the teachers and the leadership related to the distributed leadership of pre-university education. This instrument focuses on the three components mentioned above, for which it was intended to collect data for the present paper too.

The questionnaire based on the Dampson, [13] instrument, was also adapted to the ideas given by Harris, [17], regarding the 3 levels of implementation of distributed leadership, to the

challenges faced by the implementation of distributed leadership as well as to the ideas provided by Dambrauskienė, [16], which serve as conditions for improve the implementation of distributed leadership in the MSE in the Kosovo context.

In summary the construction of the research model is presented as follows. Three questions that drove the research are:

- Research question nr 1. How are presented the perceptions held by the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship staff regarding the use of distributed leadership in their entrepreneurship?

Research question nr 2: How are presented the challenges dealing with

implementation of distributed leadership in the MSE in the Kosovo context.

In summary the construction of the research model is presented as follows. Three questions that drove the research are:

- Research question nr 1. How are presented the perceptions held by the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship staff regarding the use of distributed leadership in their entrepreneurship?
- Research question nr 2: How are presented the challenges dealing with distributed leadership in micro and small businesses?
- Research question nr 3. How are presented the perceptions about the conditions that permit the improvement of the MSE-s leadership? -distributed leadership in micro and small businesses?
- Research question nr 3. How are presented the perceptions about the conditions that permit the improvement of the MSE-s leadership?
- The questionnaire was delivered to 37 micro and small enterprises in Kosovo and especially in Pristina, Peja and Prizren. The number of these enterprises' staff (population) was 1244, and, using a population portion of 50%, the margin of error 5% and the confidence level 95%, the sample calculated was 294 respondents. For more information see table 1.

Table 1. The sample calculation

Population size:	1244
Population portion:	50%
Margin of error	5%
Confidence level	95%
Z score	1.96 (+-)
Sample	294

The sample calculation the following formula has been used:

$$CI' = \bar{p} \pm z \times \sqrt{\frac{\bar{p}(1-\bar{p})}{n'} \times \frac{N-n'}{N-1}}$$

where
z is z score
p̄ is the population proportion
n and **n'** are sample size
N is the population size

4 Research Findings and Discussions

a. The respondent profiles

In this study 294 respondents from 37 micro and small enterprises in Kosovo. 153 respondents (52%) were male and 141 (48%) female. . For more information see table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent
	Male	153	52.0
	Female	141	48.0
	Total	**294**	**100%**

From 294 respondents, 29 (9.86%) are entrepreneurs while 265 (90.14 %) of the whole respondents were staff members or in many cases family members, who work together in the family business. . For more information see table 2.

Table 3. The respondents' position at the enterprise

Position at the enterprise		Frequency	Percent
	Entrepreneur	29	9.86
	Staff member	265	90.14
	Other	0	0.0
	Total	**295**	**100.0**

Regarding the age of the respondents, 164 (55.8%) were from the category 25-34 years old, 97 respondents (33%) were 35-44 years old and 33 (11.2%).. For more information see table 4.

Table 4. The respondents' age

Age of the respondents	Frequency	Percent
25-34 years old	164	55.8
35-44 years old	97	33.0
45-54 years old	33	11.2
Total	**295**	**100.0**

Regarding the years of the experience within the enterprise 11 respondents (3.7%) had less than 1 year of experience, 97 respondents (33%) had 1-4 years of experience, 76 (25.9%) had 5-9 years of experience, 66 respondents or (22.4%) had 10-14 years and 44 respondents (15 %) had from 10-14 years of experience. For more information see table 5.

Table 5. Years of experience within the entrepreneurship

Years of experience		Frequency	Percent
	Less than 1 year	11	3.7
	1-4 years	97	33.0
	5-9 years	76	25.9
	10-14 years	66	22.4
	15-19 years	44	15.00

According to research question nr 1. How are presented the perceptions held by the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship staff regarding the use of distributed leadership in their entrepreneurship? According to the respondents' perceptions, distributed leadership is applied in the businesses where they work. The mean of the means for the 5 items of the variable is 3.64 (that corresponds to the level "agree") and the item that has the higher mean (3.81) is "Distributed leadership is practiced in our enterprise". However, it seems that in the explored enterprises, according to the respondents' response there exists a distributed leadership in a superficial level, according to Harris (2008).

Ariana Xhemajli, Mimoza Luta, Emin Neziraj

Table 6. Perceptions about the application of distributed leadership in the enterprise

Perceptions on distributed Leadership	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Distributed leadership is practiced in our enterprise	0	0.0	0	0.0	76	25.9	196	66.7	22	7.5	3.81
Entrepreneurs and staff take decisions	11	3.7	32	10.9	75	25.5	154	52.4	22	7.5	3.48
Colleagues recognize others capabilities in taking leadership roles	0	0.0	21	7.1	86	29.3	143	48.6	44	15.0	3.71
The leadership structure of the enterprise allows the practice of distributed leadership	0	0.0	11	3.7	54	18.4	218	74.1	11	3.7	3.77
Colleagues willingly take on additional responsibilities	22	7.5	21	7.1	75	25.5	154	52.4	22	7.5	3.45
Mean of means											3.64

According to Research question nr 2. How are presented the challenges dealing with distributed leadership in micro and small businesses?

According to the respondents, there exist a neutral perception about the challenges faced by the enterprise while applying the distributed leadership (the mean of the means for the 8 challenges listed in the questionnaire is 3.42, corresponding to the category "neutral"), which shows that the respondents do not have a clear idea about the challenges that their enterprise has to face when applying distributed leadership. Nevertheless, they listed "the lack of the shared responsibility amongst the staff" (mean 3.59) as one challenge of their enterprise, while applying the distributed leadership. See more the table 8

Table 8. Perceptions about the conditions that permit the improvement of the micro and small enterprise leadership

Conditions of improvement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Strong collegial relationship among staff	0	0.0	10	22	7.5	3.4	142	48.3	120	40.8	4.22
Encouraging staff to participate in the decision making	0	0.0	11	3.7	21	7.1	131	44.6	131	44.6	4.29
Encouraging teamwork and shared responsibility	0	0.0	11	3.7	21	7.1	197	67.0	65	22.1	4.07
Ensure well-built relation among entrepreneur and the staff	0	0.0	0	0.0	43	14.6	142	48.3	109	37.1	4.22

Ariana Xhemajli, Mimoza Luta, Emin Neziraj

Creating favorable condition to facilitate team leadership and collective responsibility	0	0.0	0	0.0	32	10.9	197	67.0	65	22.1	4.11
Encouraging the involvement of the staff in decision making	0	0.0	11	3.7	21	7.1	185	62.9	77	26.2	4.11
Oversee leadership structure to smooth the progress	0	0.0	11	3.7	54	18.4	130	44.2	99	33.7	4.07
Mean of means											**4.15**

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that according to the respondents' perceptions distributed leadership is practiced in their enterprise at a superficial level, referring to the Harris model of 3 levels of distributed leadership. There exists a "neutral" perception about the challenges faced by the enterprise while applying distributed leadership (the mean of the means for the 8 challenges listed in the questionnaire is 3.42), which shows that the respondents do not have a clear idea about the challenges that their enterprise has to face while apply distributed leadership. Nevertheless, they listed "the lack of the shared responsibility amongst the staff" (mean 3.59, level "agree") as one challenge that their enterprise faces mostly, while applying the distributed leadership.

With the aim to improve the applying of the distributed leadership in the MSE-s and to bring it in higher levels (using Harris language), according to the entrepreneurs and staff perceptions, it is important to encourage staff to participate in the decision making (mean 4.29), ensure well-built relation among entrepreneur and the staff (mean 4.22) and create strong collegial relationship among staff (mean 4.22).

Considering these findings, it is important to raise the awareness of the entrepreneurs and the staff, through training and coaching, to the importance of the distributed leadership application, instead of the traditional one in their enterprises. This would contribute to increasing the effectiveness and success of the MSE-s in the Kosovo context.

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