

Networked leadership in Educational Collaborative Networks

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Abstract

Educational Collaborative Networks (ECNs) aim to achieve educational goals at the community level and base their actions on collaborative partnering between schools and community organizations. These approaches are an emergent and innovative leadership and policy strategy being used increasingly across the globe, given the interconnected and pervasive nature of issues facing education. The enthusiasm and promise of such community-based initiatives are accompanied by concerns related to its leadership. This paper describes the insights of networked leadership as a driver, which facilitates ECN outcome achievement. This article examines the experience of leaders involved in the current leadership of 18 high-performing ECNs in Barcelona (Spain). The results stress that networked leadership may become a key driver of change in educational contexts, capable of building a collaborative culture to optimize the educational performance in every specific community.

Keywords

Leadership, trust, collaboration, networks, educational change

Introduction

Educational change and improvement is a complex and challenging task that often involves multiple stakeholders and competing demands. In response to this complexity, many reform approaches have used a more “reductionist” approach, focusing efforts solely at the school level. However, this approach, although at times effective, does not consider the interdependencies that exist between schools, districts, and the larger communities in which they reside (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2010; Renée and McAlister, 2011; Miller et al., 2012). Therefore, using a “systems perspective” that acknowledges the importance of both coordinating and leveraging multiple interdependent agencies connected to the academic enterprise may yield improved outcomes (Lieberman et al., 2010).

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In certain locales, the lack of resources has resulted in schools and community agencies collaborating to more efficiently and effectively meet common educational challenges (Carpenter et al., 2010; Tough, 2008). The implementation of community-based initiatives that provide full and extended educational and social services in low-income communities represents an emergent strategy that holds promise for addressing complex educational challenges (Miller et al., 2012; Cummings et al., 2011; Tough, 2008; Ubieto, 2009). This type of educational collaborative takes advantage of existing resources and channels them in a manner that holds promise for traditionally underserved populations.

In this paper, we use the term Educational Collaborative Networks (ECN) to describe these comprehensive approaches, such as the “Community Schools Initiative” in Scotland (2000), the “Extended Schools policy” in England (2008), or the “Promise neighborhoods policy” (2012) in the USA. Thus, ECNs aim to achieve educational goals at the community level, and base their action on collaborative efforts between schools and multiple agents, such as families, hospitals, community organizations, and neighborhoods. These programs are often grassroots initiatives that emerge from schools or other community agencies, and top-down programs designed by the public administration or private institutions.

The premise of an ECN is to build networks of formal (e.g., schools, hospitals, agencies, etc.) and informal (one-to-one social interactions) relationships between entities and people, thereby creating an interconnected approach to important and persistent educational issues such as academic underperformance, students’ transition from school to work, or childhood obesity. To reach their potential, literature shows that the leadership of an ECN becomes a key challenge for its success (Carpenter et al., 2010; Cummings et al., 2011; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Renée and McAlister, 2011; Shirley, 2009). Networked leadership is described in this work as the type of leadership developed in networked or highly interconnected contexts as ECNs, and is particularly focused on managing the diversity of skills and capacities of the collaborative, which can potentially lead to collaboration and inter-organizational innovation (Mandell and Steelman, 2003; Sammons et al., 2002). Moreover, understanding the conditions that support a successful networked leadership is equally critical in replicating this potentially powerful approach.

Although the research suggests the potential of networked leadership to make significant educational change and impact, we have few examples in the literature of the conditions that may need to be in place for these ECNs to be successful (Renée and McAlister, 2011). In highlighting these conditions and exploring others, we focus on an instructional case in Barcelona (Spain), which has a long tradition of community collaboration between educational entities.

Our study is guided by one overarching research question: What are the key leadership conditions necessary to enhance ECN outcomes? Our objective is to advance the concept of networked leadership in ECNs, as a means to comprehensively and collaboratively respond to educational challenges. The article is based on the qualitative content analysis of interviews, focus groups, and documents from experienced leaders of successful ECNs that operate in the city of Barcelona, Spain. The work focuses on several factors, including leaders’ perceptions regarding key tasks that facilitate and drive ECNs and the outcomes derived from active ECN leadership. This work is particularly timely because, in many parts of the world, these community collaborations have increased, partly as a result of limited public resources but also due to the recognition of the potential of ECNs in addressing pressing issues. Because these restrictions on public resources are likely to continue in both Europe and beyond, insights from Barcelona’s instructive case may be informative to community-based collaborative efforts in other contexts across the globe.

Leading Educational Collaborative Networks

Educational Collaborative Networks

We understand ECNs as formal and long-term community partnerships with the specific objective to achieve educational goals, basing its action on collaboration through joint strategic planning (Díaz-Gibson and Cívís, 2011). Scholars from different disciplines have examined this collaborative practice with different foci, including *organizational networks* focusing on public management (Milward and Provan, 2006); *governance networks* analyzing democratic decision-making (Kickert et al., 1997); *collaborative networks* examining the underlying collaborative processes (Mandell and Keast, 2009); and *community organizing* (Shirley, 2009) based on a comprehensive community perspective. However, the common thread in each of these descriptors is the comprehensive community perspective in addressing a pressing public issue. Thus, these extended practices address significant social problems and share a core focus on a networked approach, public-private collaboration, and the engagement of multiple and interdisciplinary agents, such as families, schools, hospitals, community organizations, and neighborhoods, working together with a shared focus.

However, we distinguish ECNs from other types of collaborative networks. The institutions involved in an ECN understand that they share an educational challenge and understand they can increase their impact through collaboration. The idea of networks in support of educational improvement, although still in its infancy, is gaining momentum in education (Daly, 2010; Muijs et al., 2010). Although certain experts have advanced in the comprehension of ECN experiences (Ainscow, 2012; Carpenter et al., 2010; Cummings et al., 2011; Hadfield and Jopling, 2006; Klijn et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2010; Ubieto, 2009; West, 2010), there is an existing dearth of knowledge regarding inter-organizational relationships between school and community agencies to achieve common objectives and the support of improved outcomes.

ECNs attempt to leverage diverse networks in addressing pressing social-educational problems, and thus go beyond traditional school boundaries in terms of “educational community.” These collaboratives are mainly formed in low-income communities with a specific purpose that would likely be difficult for organizations to achieve in isolation (Díaz-Gibson and Cívís, 2011; Muijs et al., 2010; Renée and McAlister, 2011). ECNs attempt to achieve common understanding coupled with complex solutions through the enhancement of coordination through building trusting and mutually accountable relationships based on distributed leadership (Liljenberg, 2015; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Renée and McAlister, 2011; Shirley, 2009).

In recent decades, we have observed the rapid international emergence of ECN programs (Miller et al., 2012), which report an impact on the following: student outcomes in distressed communities (Carpenter et al., 2010; Gold et al., 2002; Renée and McAllister, 2011; Tough, 2008); creating opportunities for learning and knowledge and increasing innovative capacities (Muijs et al., 2010; Sorensen and Torfing, 2009); optimizing educational resources in the community (Carpenter et al., 2010; Díaz-Gibson et al., 2010; Ubieto, 2009).

Scholars suggest that the diversity of knowledge, skills, and capacities that each agency provides is an important organizational asset, particularly when coupled with collaborative efforts to empower community action (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007; Kamensky et al., 2004). The successful leadership and management of an ECN generate the conditions necessary to draw on diversity of capacities that enhances collaboration, which potentially leads to inter-organizational innovation and better outcomes (Mandell and Steelman, 2003). Empirical studies indicate that the innovative capacity of strategic planning processes depends on the inclusion of social and political actors who

are characterized by a high degree of diversity, and linked through networks characterized by dense relationships (Daly, 2010, 2012; Dente et al., 2005).

The significance of networked leadership

The literature notes the large differences between leading schools or traditional organizations and the management of ECN programs. Networked leadership is considered to be a different type of nonhierarchical leadership, where information and expertise substitutes for an authority structure through a self-organizing process, held together by mutual obligation that develops over time by reaching consensus-based decisions (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Spillane and Orlina, 2005). Spillane et al. (2004) argues that distributed, shared, democratic, and networked leadership denote that the work of school leadership involves multiple leaders, while others argue that leadership is an organizational, as distinct from an individual, quality. The research suggests a growing need to manage community collaborative performance under such different concepts as interdepartmental actions, networks, alliances, joint ventures, co-actions, and partnerships (Miller et al., 2012).

Although ECNs can provide insight into inter-organizational collaboration between schools and community organizations, the literature also reports concerns regarding the leadership and effectiveness of these initiatives (Carpenter et al., 2010; Gold et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2012; Renée and McAllister, 2011; Sorensen and Torfing, 2009). ECNs possess an inherent diversity that begins with the nature of organizations' members and their actions through different educational emphasis, sectors, or levels of public administration. At the same time, each network member retains its own values, internal policy functioning, and decision-making processes, which may not always be aligned with external partners. Thus, the individual members have "internal" (intra-organization) interdependencies, which reinforce existing norms and values, while at the same time creating external (with other organizations) ties and interdependencies, which may not align. It is this potential lack of congruence and perspective that presents important challenges and requires leadership and management for success.

Networked leadership becomes a social phenomenon that is stretched across individuals and groups (Spillane and Orlina, 2005). This powerful interaction of internal and external connections also has rich support in the social network literature, which suggests the importance of creating a "network" of ties through which resources may flow in support of goals (Daly, 2012; Morrison and Arthur, 2013). Moreover, the network literature would also indicate that a dense constellation of relationships surrounding an educational organization, as may be reflective of a successful ECN, may provide additional supports and better facilitate efforts at change, given the robust nature of dense connections (Cross and Parker, 2004; Díaz-Gibson and Cívís, 2011). In addition, these dense relationships also support the development of the complexity of the entire network, potentially resulting in desirable outcomes (Daly, 2010). However, this configuration also potentially establishes specific tensions, such as efficiency versus inclusiveness and unity versus diversity, which may influence ECN outcomes (Saz-Carranza and Ospina, 2010).

Managing and leading these tensions while maintaining a focus on the overall goals of the ECN is challenging. In this regard, coordinating collaboration in a formal networked project such as an ECN does not solely involve changing organizational priorities or formal organizational charts, but also facilitates deep cultural changes in philosophies and practices as well as relational ties (Eggers and Singh, 2009; Sorensen and Torfing, 2011; Townsend, 2015; Ubieta, 2009).

There is currently a lack of research regarding how leadership in organizational contexts and climates can influence network outcomes in educational contexts (Coburn et al., 2010). Hence, it

becomes important to determine the specific strategies needed to lead and manage comprehensive issues across organizations to enhance educational and community outcomes (Chapman et al., 2010; Daly, 2010; Miller et al., 2012). Therefore, given the promise of ECNs and the lack of knowledge in the space, particularly from an international perspective, we need to better understand the in-depth issues and conditions that need to be managed and understand how these complex relationships can result in significant educational challenges.

Networked leadership and cultural change

Scholars stress the need of specific networked leadership to facilitate interaction, coordination, and collaboration among members, maintain sustainability and drive program effectiveness. Furthermore, to manage members' diversity and establish a common project based on members' volunteer commitment to the goals, a democratic governance design with equal and shared decision-making power and a collaborative working culture may be required (Hatcher, 2014; Hjern, 1992; Kickert et al., 1997; Milward and Provan, 2006; Morrison and Arthur, 2013; Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). In this sense, leading the alignment of a school in a coherent strategy with the efforts of other local players – employers, community groups, universities, and public services – depends on the existing trust between professionals and the currency of knowledge exchange; therefore, it requires cultural change (Ainscow, 2012; Cummings et al., 2011).

Literature on public management shows certain relational strategies that specifically drive collaborative interactions. The *management of networks* concerns the management of the entire process to achieve program objectives and includes relational tasks such as the management of accountability, legitimacy, conflict, governance structure, and commitment (Milward and Provan, 2006). Other relational strategies noted are the activation of links between members, the arrangement and facilitation of interactions, and conflict mediation (Kickert et al., 1997). Scholars suggest that networked leadership is required to successfully address the unity–diversity tension and is based on three strategic activities: bridging between member differences, framing a common culture, and capacitating members to lead actions (Saz-Carranza and Ospina, 2010).

At the same time, the research shows that certain cultural issues such as professional silos or paternalistic norms may constrain the collaborative performance and, in turn, program effectiveness in ECNs. Therefore, the idea of siloed-thinking in functional operations becomes a challenge for professionals because of the deep cultural change suggested by approaching significant problems through networked collaboratives (Cummings et al., 2011; Eggers and Singh, 2009; Sorensen and Torfing, 2011; Ubieta, 2009; Díaz-Gibson et al., 2010). Schein (2004) suggests that cultures are about the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. In this sense, Ainscow et al. (2014) note that changing the norms that exist within a school district is difficult to achieve, particularly within a context that is faced with so many competing pressures and where practitioners tend to work alone in addressing the problems they face.

Thus, cultural change becomes a central issue in networked leadership's literature. In this sense, Carpenter et al. (2010) conclude that effective leadership in the Extended Schools program in England needed to develop clarity on the ECN purpose to breakdown collaborative barriers. In particular, it seems to be important that before collaborative efforts, schools and their partners develop an understanding of where their interests coincide, and where they can all benefit by working together.

Hutchings et al. (2012) show five networked leadership factors that contributed to frame a common culture in “The City Challenge Program” in England: (1) promote collaborative working opportunities between schools and, in particular, schools with similar intakes; (2) create opportunities for middle leaders to work with their counterparts in other schools; (3) having clearly agreed plans, targets, and time frames; (4) having a small amount of funding for cover to enable teachers to visit other schools; (5) having a lead headteacher who drove the agenda, and who received appropriate training. Furthermore, Hadfield and Jopling (2006) and West (2010) coincide describing the ability of existing leaders in ECN programs to manage change and collaborative improvement, underlying such actions as the following: focusing on strategic and long-time-oriented approaches to school improvement; greater use of data and critical dialogue; enhanced commitment to their own learning and to supporting other leaders; and a broader sense of responsibility for the educational success of their local communities.

Finally, we note that there are fewer guidelines on how ECN leaders can build a collaborative culture among community professionals. A small body of research digs into the specific drivers that facilitate a networked leadership; however, this research is typically incomplete. It is the goal of this paper to delve more deeply into these ideas through the use of an illustrative case.

Methodology

The city of Barcelona, Spain, has an important number of community philanthropic associations (the province of Barcelona has a population of 5,000,000 and has one entity for every 152 citizens) and has a long tradition of educational issue-related public–private partnerships. In addition, in the last 15 years the city administration has promoted the creation of ECNs through several educational programs, such as the *Community Development Plans* and the *Community Educational Plans* or the *Joint use of School facilities*, leading to the rapid emergence of these networks. There have been numerous sustainable ECN initiatives that produced critical social and educational benefits at the community level. The Barcelona case, with numerous high-performing ECNs, can provide a series of instructive data that may inform other ECNs in cities across the globe.

The research design uses a qualitative methodology based on understanding and describing data rather than validating the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; O'Connor et al., 2008) through the technique of content analysis as the set of interpretative text procedures focused on the specific topic of ECN leadership, obtained from diverse communicative research processes in a specific context. This design allows us to enhance the research discursive orientation in its process of meaning-creation, building a narrative of networked leadership (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

Our sample is composed of 18 leaders involved in the current leadership of 18 high-performing ECNs in the city of Barcelona, holding leadership positions for the last 4 years, and collaborating to implement educational policies in their municipalities. Leaders represent a significant sample that can provide a deep and nuanced approach to networked leadership in educational contexts.

The ECN programs are located in different districts of the city, including low-income and medium-income communities. These ECNs are focused on three core educational challenges: improving school success; developing a comprehensive response to infancy and families at risk of exclusion; and improving students' school engagement to avoid truancy. All of the ECNs meet the following criteria: (1) more than 10 members; (2) previously consolidated in the territory with more than 8 years of experience; and (3) ECNs have noted a significant increase in goal achievement in their communities, recognized and certified by the Education Department of the City Government in 2012 as successful initiatives that develop important roles in the city.

Instruments and data analysis

We analyzed a range of documents specifically focused on ECN leadership, capturing the experience of the 18 leaders in their programs through different sources. The data collection process included three main types of sources as follows. (1) Ten semi-structured interviews of 60 minutes each were conducted to capture individual expertise of networked leaders. The interview was divided into two parts; the first intended to delve into leadership tasks that facilitate network collaboration, including organizational charts, coordination strategies, and decision-making processes; and the second was to describe the drivers that facilitate ECN outcome achievement, including common analysis of needs, planning, and implementation of ideas and evaluation. (2) Five communications were presented by five of the experts in a national congress entitled “Education and Innovation; Educational Collaborative Networks in Catalonia” – held in Barcelona, Ramon Llull University, in 2013. The congress was addressed to practitioners, managers, and policy makers, where experts described and discussed key priorities for ECN success and key managerial issues regarding their own ECN experiences. Communications were captured lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, including 10–15 minutes of open questions. (3) Two focus groups offered a broad discussion between these experienced professionals regarding necessary conditions, managerial tasks, and outcomes provided by ECNs. We selected focus groups as a complement to interviews and communications as an opportunity to have leaders interact with one another regarding key topics. We then triangulated our data to obtain an in-depth approach to our research objectives, test cross-cutting ideas, and enrich the narrative discourse of networked leadership in ECNs and their outcomes (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

To increase the consistency of the interpretation process, we employed two levels of analysis. Initially, an individual analysis of all of the documents was carried out in parallel by three researchers on the team, using ATLAS.ti 6.2 informatics software to encode managerial strategies and outcomes. We then clustered the themes into categories establishing the frequencies and setting the network of relations by the process of constant comparison (O’Connor et al., 2008). Next, we initiated a comparison and discussion between the three individual networks of categories obtained by the three researchers, based on the position that the interaction process building on consensus is important in the process of meaning-creation (Altheide et al., 2001). The objective of the contrast and consensus was to complement and build a shared interpretative network of categories with a high degree of consistency.

Results

Networked leadership drivers

Leaders describe an active effort on networked leadership that embraces tasks through all of the program process, from planning to implementation, noting different leadership levels across and giving special attention to collaborative and interdisciplinary interactions. Specifically, the analysis of leaders’ perceptions allows us to interpret four ECN conditions that become key aspects for its high performance and success: *Interactions*, *Leadership levels*, *General plan*, and *Interdisciplinarity*. Although we did not find significant contradictions between experts’ reports across documents, we found different focus and priorities on its leadership that lead our analysis to higher levels of complementation. Figure 1 shows the general families and their inside frequencies of categories regarding the number of themes noted in the analysis of all documents (for further specifications, refer to the Appendix).

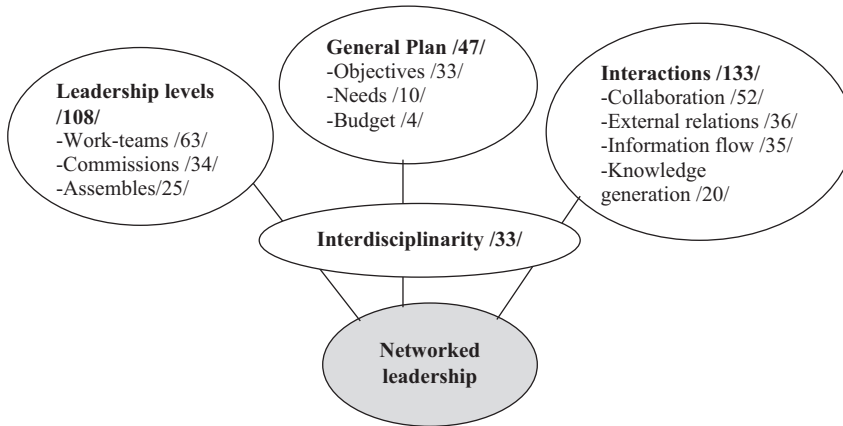


Figure 1. Families and categories of networked leadership.

Leaders consistently share the priority of creating and nurturing collaborative interactions between members in ECNs. In this regard, *Interactions* have been the most referred to condition found across documents with 133 references, including relational actions as coordination mechanisms and the promotion of collaborations between members through the creation of mutual knowledge and interdisciplinary spaces. For example, one participant noted:

We are focused on the connection of different views, interests and programs (...) and we can only achieve that by enabling and guiding professionals to carry decisions together. (Interview, January 2013)

In addition, leaders indicated the importance of building specific interactions as internal or external connections. The internal connections were represented by a category entitled, *Information and Communication Flow*, where a large number of themes indicate key actions as the establishment of direct communication channels between members and the explicit creation of spaces to share ideas and concerns. These internal ties were also coded as *Knowledge generation* for those times when ideas and information were created based on successful projects. In support, one leader explained:

Putting together professionals from different organizations to explain their own institutional projects has led us to develop a specific space to share experiences and learn one from another ... building (future) initiatives. (Personal communication, September 2013)

The content analysis shows that experts describe the need of leading different collaborative spaces through the implementation of the program. We clustered 108 actions on the variable of *Leadership levels*, identifying three operational decision-making spaces from general decisions to specific implementation. For instance, one focus group participant explained:

Once the institution's members agree on the priorities all the professionals start to organize the common action (...) and we need to manage collaboration from general decisions, what we call institutional priorities, to the specific action in the community developed by the work teams. (Focus group, January 2013)

The different levels provide a possible structure to organize collaborative teams and also to understand the different levels of networked leadership across the horizontal chart. An initial level found is primarily named *Assemblies* or Institutional level, characterized by the participation of all network members, mainly those professionals who have leadership positions in their organizations. The analysis marks the value of this space to establish consensus of the general objectives, defining priorities and identifying strategic execution steps. Once we have determined the strategies, a second level of specificity included/s *Commissions* or Medium level. Commissions are work spaces responsible for developing each strategic step that was previously decided in the Institutional level. A majority of themes related to commissions emphasize the importance of promoting interdisciplinary compositions and their across axis. A considerable number of leaders provide special focus to taking advantage of this space to integrate similar projects and programs into the commission strategies, creating connections and continuities between them to optimize community resources and actions. Furthermore, there are a high number of references that locate the existence of *Work teams* or Operational level, responsible for implementing policies and projects in the community. The findings show this network space as the most reported. The interview data note the importance of consensus in the daily collaborative work, the common planning of all members on the team, and the shared definition of operational objectives. Leaders specifically emphasize the interdisciplinary composition of the team as a key structural driver to achieve comprehensive and innovative action.

One example that emphasized all three levels was reported by an ECN that was specially targeting achievement in a low-income community. This ECN was composed of the following: public schools; a community recreation center; social and educational philanthropic entities in the community; the social care services for infancy, youth, and families; and local police. Initially, on the Institutional level, all stakeholders met in an *Assembly* at a general meeting to discuss and determine needs and priorities to achieve the common goal. As a group, they then determined three specific strategies to drive collaboration across the community: reducing truancy; parental training; and individual mentoring. The medium level was the creation of three individual work spaces or *Commissions* formed by ECN professionals involved in the specific strategy. Each of the three *Commissions* attempted to connect all of the resources in the community engaged with their specific issue, connecting member views and actions. Finally, on the Operational level and regarding the *Commission* for parental training, the ECN decided to develop three *Work teams* to implement three new programs; the first was related to training courses for pregnant women, the second, to parents with children from 0 to 6 years, and the third, for families with teenage children from 12 to 16 years.

Leaders stress the importance of an assessment of community educational needs that are shared as important among members, as well as the development of an inventory of social-educational resources in the community. This initial effort is necessary to create a baseline and to avoid overlaps and gaps of actions in the network efforts, providing the required foundations of an optimized and interconnected performance in ECNs.

Finally, leaders indicate across the analysis that focusing on interdisciplinary action and promoting interdisciplinary spaces through the network structure was critical in terms of integrating actors' views and expertise. The following representative quote captures that idea:

To develop strategies and actions from a comprehensive perspective, we intend to develop a scheme with several areas of work composed by professionals from divers sectors and disciplines. It what really differentiate our work. (Interview, June 2013)

Table 1. Outcomes provided by networked management.

Categories	Perceptive outcomes	Freq.
Efficiency of social-educational performance	Coordination increase between the triangle based on members, government departments, and public social-educational services	5
	Resource optimization in the community	4
	Performance and organization adapted to real community needs	3
	Vacuum detection of social-educational actions in the community	3
	Detection of redundant practices and resource waste in the community	3
	Versatility and complementarities in policy planning	2
	Total	20
Participation and representativeness	Network inclusion of diversity of educational scopes and levels of specificity	6
	Participation and involvement of a large number of organizations with common goals in the community	6
	Promotion of consensus and equality	3
	Representation of all educational sectors	2
	Total	17
Linking and collaboration	Activate new connections between social actors in the community	6
	Empowerment of informal links or social networks among educational agencies	3
	Qualitative increase of collaboration between members	3
	Increase mutual knowledge and trust between members	2
	Total	14
Comprehensive performance	Incorporation of a global perspective of the community needs	4
	Integration of members' diversity into a common structure of action	3
	Development of structures for interdisciplinary work	3
	Integral and comprehensive approach of the educational reality	2
	Total	12

References to an interdisciplinary composition were referred to in the three conditions relating to Interactions, General plan and Levels of specificity. Thus, we observed that *Interdisciplinarity* appears to be the most frequently named across all of the analysis and, as such, is central to the work of networked leadership.

Networked leadership outcomes

Leaders noted that an active leadership promotes greater ECN performance, provides representative input, general commitment to goals, and also improves linkages among community professionals. We found 63 themes in the process of analysis, showing a final number of 18 outcomes provided directly by the action of networked leadership. Table 1 shows the outcomes encoded and frequency ordered into four main categories of improvements provided by managerial action: *Efficiency of Social-educational Performance*, *Participation and Representativeness*, *Linkages and Collaboration*, and *Comprehensive Performance*.

The findings show that leaders attribute a significant relation between the activation of leadership tasks and the efficiency of comprehensive performance. The largest number of outcomes found was related to the *Efficiency of the social-educational performance* in the community. Most of these outcomes reflect an increase in coordination between members, government

representatives, and social educational services, resource optimization, the detection of redundant work and vacuums of actions, and adaptation to real community needs. For example, one participant noted:

From our leadership positions we try to unify efforts and not to waste resources (...) and people (professionals) really feel that they are getting the most out of the common cake. (Focus group, September 2013)

In addition, leaders indicated the importance of including members from different sectors and scopes. Taking a more inclusive stance supported the development of consensus as well as increased involvement and representation in educational decision-making in the community. Skilled leaders deeply understood that greater participation by social actors strengthens the ECN performance. A significant number of outcomes were noted regarding the enhancement of *Participation and Representativeness* of all members in the community. This quote is an example of many we noted:

The educational commission is now bigger than ever, we have been working hard to bring them (secondary schools) to participate... now (the commission) has its own identity, all of us are a little part of the whole and we understand that together we better represent common interests. (Interview, January 2013)

It is also significant that an important number of outcomes were determined to be related to improvements on *Linking and Collaboration* between ECN members. Leaders defined direct outcomes as the generation of new connections, the creation of informal links and networks, and the improvements on the quality of collaborations. These leaders mainly offered the idea that building new linkages across community agencies is new, and this needs to be performed because this work empowers the community and builds capacities. For example, one participant explained:

Professionals have had the opportunity to learn more about other institutions in the community, meeting colleagues that work with the same students and families (...) and the new connections are now part of our capital. (Personal communication, September 2013)

The findings show specific conditions that drive a networked management in ECNs, embracing the entire program process from the collaborative design of the General plan to the organization of Levels of specificity, providing special attention to collaborative interactions and interdisciplinary teams. The results also highlight the incidence of leadership management on the promotion of a major efficiency on ECN performance, providing higher quotes of representativeness and general commitment and improving linkages among community professionals.

Discussion

This paper's objective was to advance the concept of networked leadership as a key driver to enhancing ECN outcomes. The results show that networked leadership is primarily focused on enhancing quantitative and qualitative connections within community professionals. Findings also indicate the importance of the specific architecture of interaction composed of both relational and structural conditions. The results indicate that specific efforts on networked leadership, both relational and structural, are essential in overcoming cultural barriers that exist in different

organizations that come together for a common purpose of improving education. The promotion of trust within community professionals was critical because these high-trust relationships provided for the exchange of practices, the willingness to risk new approaches, and the potential to enable social and educational innovations in the community. In addition, a networked leadership approach is perceived by leaders as an effective and efficient driver for community action, primarily based on increased coordination between community partners and the resulting policy. Therefore, it appears that networked leadership is a key factor in change in educational contexts, assuming these ECNs are able to build and sustain a collaborative culture with a shared purpose.

The large number of identified themes related to professional interactions and organizational connections in ECNs supports the results shown by other organizational network experiences that are described in the literature. These efforts are represented by the largest category of Interactions, showing a prominent number of themes related to collaboration as the general efforts made by leaders aiming to enhance linkages, participation, and coordination among ECN professionals.

Leaders acknowledge the relevance of trust building to overcome a silo or individual culture (Cummings et al., 2011; Eggers and Singh, 2009; Hatcher, 2014) and achieve ECN success, but also provide three specific leadership drivers that enhance trust within network professionals. Firstly, the importance of building specific spaces and time to develop shared knowledge provides members with the opportunity to present themselves and their organizations to the group, which broke down suspicions and prejudices. Secondly, developing cross-organizational activities available to all members as general training courses created the space to share successful projects and practices as well as learn together, which effectively leveled the playing field with regard to expertise. Thirdly, encouraging members to engage in collaborative decision-making, but assuming a collective propriety of ideas and decision produced in the teams. These findings are particularly relevant as they elucidate the specific leadership actions necessary to enhance trust building because trust has been noted across literature as a key condition for ECN success (Ainscow, 2012; Cummings et al., 2011).

The results stress the importance of internal but also external linking strategies in ECNs, such as the following. (1) External relations, showing the presence of an active political management (Moore, 1995; Paletta et al., 2009). Specifically, this strategy's objective is integrating program strategies with existing programs and policies in the community that share similar goals to build community alliances to optimize resources. (2) Information flow and diffusion, emphasizing the establishment of communication channels. These connections may be particularly relevant to reach as many professionals and streamline as many processes as possible (Hadfield and Jopling, 2006). (3) Knowledge generation, noting the creation of spaces to share successful projects, coinciding with other research findings on community-based experiences that noted member exchange and training as a main strategy to accomplish community goals (Carpenter et al., 2010; Hadfield and Jopling, 2006; West, 2010) to leverage collaboration potential by leveraging inter-organizational innovation (Mandell and Steelman, 2003). Internal and external linking strategies, as suggested by the social network literature, appear to be a key condition to take full advantage of network professionals and empower the network capacities to achieve goals (Borgatti and Foster, 2003). Conceptualizing the efforts beyond the discreet components, such as healthcare, economic support, and housing, into a more networked and interconnected system appears to be critical. This suggests the importance of open lines of communication and dense connections between and among network partners.

It was surprising to observe the lack of references to the enhancement of shared or distributed leadership, noted previously by Spillane et al. (2004) (and others such as Milward and Provan,

2006; Shirley, 2009; Sorensen and Torfing, 2011) as a critical action for network sustainability and success. In contrast to other organizational networks described in the literature, we have observed that to better achieve the outcomes of ECNs, networked leadership is primarily focused on enhancing quantitative and qualitative connections among community professionals rather than in promoting individual responsibilities. Thus, networked leadership focuses on building trust and enhancing communication and knowledge exchange among actors, generating the conditions necessary to empower professional collaboration at all ECN levels, and potentially lead inter-organizational innovation.

In addition, we have observed interesting differences between leaders' discourse regarding the priorities on collective decision-making. Most of them shared the need for developing clarity on the ECN purpose to facilitate strategic decision-making (Carpenter et al., 2010) and, for some, building consensus was key in decision-making to maintain trust and representativeness. A leader's focus on consensus helped move collaboration forward, although these deliberations could take considerable time. However, for others, the key focus was building discussion, offering that a focus on consensus could actually inhibit innovation. These leaders reported that, once the diversity of perspective was proffered, consensus was easier to reach; however, innovation was more challenging because it required synergizing perspectives to generate a new approach. There is a need for leaders to guide and empower discussion to help professionals share new visions and ideas; however, at the same time, creating the space for innovations to be birthed is important. Many leaders indicated that this space creating and opening innovation on the survey may appear as a "given"; in fact, however, the skills and capacities necessary for this to occur must be practiced and developed.

Also, leaders reported how relational strategies alone were not sufficient to achieve ECN outcomes. In addition to relations, leaders note that structural strategies must also be in place through all processes from planning to implementation. These findings are significant in that they specifically identify the need for guidelines and facilitating structures within which relations can be built, which ultimately may enhance ECN success. Leaders attribute significant importance to drive the common action from the beginning of the project, specifically starting collectively on the General plan's development. In addition to general strategies noted by Carpenter et al. (2010) and McDurham (2007), such as establishing common objectives and strategies and developing integral planning, leaders emphasize the main structural strategies that allow higher comprehensiveness in network performance, such as the common and interconnected assessment of community educational needs, the development of a community resource inventory, and the members' consensus on community priorities. These specific initial steps are highly relevant to advancing ECN performance and avoiding future redundant work by establishing a coherent background while creating synergies between members and taking qualitative advantage of their collaboration.

The results show that all of the spaces described share a core focus not only on collaboration but also on interdisciplinary composition. Hence, interdisciplinarity becomes a key structural issue that drives ECN performance. The description of the three leadership levels becomes an important finding because it provides a useful specification both of the type of teams needed to create the architecture for the ECN's horizontal structure, and the types of leadership strategies needed at all levels.

Thus, leaders displayed different collaborative priorities. Some were particularly focused on relational strategies and others were focused on structural strategies. From leaders' discourse, we understand that a lack of leadership on relational strategies appeared to be related to less impact on the quality of community connections or joint commitments. Consequently, this resulted in less

closeness between professionals and limited sustainability of the interactions and impaired action. In contrast, a lack of an operational “hands on” focus can reduce the effectiveness of the practices and, in turn, the sustainability of professionals’ involvement because professionals involved perceive that there is no incidence of collective action in the territory. We understand that there are variables in the ECN program that must guide leader priorities and balance between collaboration and action regarding the maturity of the program, number of participants, or the current collaborative culture in the specific community. For example, if the ECN is sufficiently mature and connections are reliable and sustained, leaders could focus on structural strategies to advance operations and projects. However, if the interactions are not fluid or the ECN is young, leaders need to empower the quality of the interactions and build trust between actors. Hence, an ebb and flow exists between structure and relations.

Although framing a collaborative culture among professionals is a consistent relational strategy across the literature, it has been surprising to learn of the significance that leaders attributed to cultural issues. The organizational outcomes noted by leaders become evidence of the cultural implications within networked leadership. The findings show how leadership efforts are mainly addressed to build a new means of interaction between professionals and a new focus based on interdisciplinary collaboration between actors involved in child and youth development in the community. Hence, three of the four categories of organizational outcomes found refer to collaborative improvements, represented by higher levels of participation and involvement in social-educational decisions, the enhancement of linkages, and collaboration between professionals, and comprehensive performance in the community. The value placed on representativeness and participation confirms other works (Gray, 2000; Sorensen and Torfing, 2011), asserting that ECNs are making social-educational decisions more representative and collaborative at a community level.

Therefore, we understand that a key goal of networked leadership is to develop a collaborative culture among ECN professionals, which is oriented to inter-organizational innovation. Accordingly, networked leadership becomes a specific driver of change capable of managing diversity tensions, overcoming the ECN cultural barriers and leveraging network potential to achieve ECN goals. An active networked leadership can produce change in ECN professionals, changing a culture based on independency and siloed thinking into a culture based on collaboration and innovation in the community.

Conclusions

This paper provides a relevant contribution to school and community leaders, managers, and policy makers who are involved in ECN programs and have the opportunity to shape the conditions necessary to enhance educational outcomes. The findings contribute to our understanding of the insights of networked leadership and the cultural implications. Specifically, networked leadership involves not only a wide range of collaborative strategies with the objective to establish quantitative and qualitative connections among organizations, but it also includes structural strategies involving the leadership across the entire program process from planning to activities’ implementation, and enhancing the interdisciplinary composition of all of the work teams. There is a need to balance between collaboration and operational strategies that must be achieved by studying ECN characteristics and that, dependent on conditions, one or the other may move to the fore while the other is in the background. The findings suggest that networked leadership is instrumental in building a collaborative culture in the ECN, which enhances ECN efficiency and inter-organizational innovation possibilities.

Thus, networked leadership appears to be an apt strategy of change in educational scenarios, capable of transforming educational professionals' culture into a collaborative one. We believe that networked leadership provides a renewed approach to leadership literature, not only focusing on the social side of leadership but responding to social problems by departing from a substantially different epistemological approach grounded on a systemic, collaborative, and community-based perspective, and using methods that are able to organize social educational resources in the community through collaborative innovation.

We acknowledge two specific limitations of the qualitative process. Firstly, the qualitative approach is set in a unique context in which generalization may be limited. Secondly, results are exclusively based on leaders' perceptions of the collaborative issues and outcomes of ECNs. Although we have reviewed the international literature that discusses ECNs as community-based experiences across the globe encountering common issues, and leaders address similar problems in an inside collaborative networked organization, this work remains set in one context. Thus, we believe that the Barcelona case can certainly inform ECN leaders in multiple locations. In addition, using a qualitative methodology as the content analysis has allowed us to develop an in-depth understanding of networked leadership through professionals' perceptions.

To empower the concept of networked leadership, two future avenues for work on this topic would be to study the concept in other international ECNs embedded in different cultures to investigate whether these outcomes at leading operations and relationships necessarily lead to the desired transformational educational outcomes at the social impact levels.

Appendix

Table of families, categories, and indicators of networked leadership in Educational Collaborative Networks.

Families	Categories	Indicators	Fre.
Members	Diversity	Participation of members from different educational scopes	15
		Participation of members from different educational sectors	10
		Integration of members from different governmental levels	5
	Unity	Spaces of shared responsibilities	2
		Common performance territory/community	3
		Common problems and interests	13
General Plan	Needs	Shared analysis of community needs	6
		Interconnection between needs	2
		Detected needs as central axes of content	2
	Objectives	Consensus of community priorities	13
		Objectives based on detected needs	8
		Objectives that base and create interdisciplinary work strategies	3
		Inventory of community social educational resources	2
		Order and optimization of resources	3
		Mediation of differences to create unity	4

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Families	Categories	Indicators	Fre.
Leadership levels	Budget	Unifying the budget (not fragmented by programs or institutions)	2
		Resources allocation in basis of detected needs and the priorities established	2
	Assemblies	Full participation of all network representatives	3
		Establishing consensus of general objectives	7
		Defining priorities	5
		Concrete strategic execution steps	8
		Rendering of expenses	2
	Commissions/ strategic areas	Interdisciplinary composition	10
		Organization by strategic execution steps concreted (across axis)	6
		Consensus on specific objectives	2
		Unify an agreement for performance criteria	2
		Common establishment of performance plans	3
		Integrating projects and programs into the established plan	2
		Create connections and continuity between projects	5
		Define work groups	2
		Citizen participation on decision-making spaces	2
		Consensus on operative objectives	9
	Work teams	Interdisciplinary composition	7
		Self-management to set meetings	2
		Common execution of projects	7
		Complementarities among actions and tasks	2
		Common activity planning	14
		Flexibility to create specific and temporary work teams	8
		Consensus as the working central axis	14
	Collaboration	Mutual knowledge	8
		Develop explicit coordination mechanisms	13
		Participation of all members in the network	6
		Collaborations between members in the network	12
		Promote responsibilities of network issues among members	2
Interactions	Information flow and diffusion	Create interdisciplinary spaces in the network	11
		Establish direct communication channels between members	11
		Develop accessibility to network of common formal documents	6
		Create a virtual space	5
	External relations	Develop spaces to share ideas and concerns between members	13
		Develop a resource attraction plan	2
		Institutions and community actors inclusion	15
		Relations between different networks	7
	Knowledge generation	Network relations with government agencies	12
		Training opportunities and plans for members	6
		Assessment plan, either evaluations of collaborative processes or project results	2
		Spaces to share successful projects of each institution member	14

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