

## A Survey Study Exploring Principal Leadership and Teachers' Expectations in the Social Working Life of Two Swedish Schools

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**Abstract :** The expectation on principals to manage, lead and develop their schools and teachers are high. However, principals are not left alone without guidelines. Policy texts, curricula and syllabuses guide the orientation of their leadership. Moreover, principals' traits and experience as well as professional norms, are decisive. However, in this study we argue for the importance to deepen the knowledge of how the practice of leadership is shaped in the daily social working life with the teachers at the school. Teachers' experiences and expectations of leadership influence the principal's actions, sometimes perhaps contrary to what is emphasized in official texts like the central guidelines. The expectations of teachers make up the norms of the school and thus constitute the local school culture. The aim of this study is to deepen the knowledge of teachers' expectations on their principals to manage, lead and develop their schools. Two questions are used to guide the study: 1) How do teachers' and principals' expectations differ in realistic situations? 2) How do teachers' experience-based expectations differ from more ideal expectations? To investigate teachers' expectations of their principals, we use a social psychological perspective framed within an organisational development perspective. A social role is defined by the fact that, within the framework of the role, different people who fulfil the same role exhibit greater similarities than differences in their actions. The way a social role is exercised depends on the expectations placed on the role's position but also on the expectations of the function of the role. The way in which the social role is embodied in practice also depends on how the person fulfilling the role perceives and understands those expectations. Based on interviews with school principals a questionnaire was constructed. Nine possible real-life and critical incidents were described that are important when it comes to role shaping in the dynamics between teachers and principals. Teachers were asked to make a choice between three, four, or five possible and realistic courses of action for the principal. The teachers were also asked to make two choices between these different options in real-life situations, one ideal as if they were working as a principal themselves, and one experience based - how they estimated that their own principal would act in such a situation. The sample consist of two elementary schools in Sweden. School A consists of two principals and 38 teachers and school B of two principals and 22 teachers. The response rate among the teachers is 95 percent in school A and 86 percent in school B. All four principals answered our questions. The results show that the expectations of teachers and principals can be understood as variations of being harmonic or disharmonic. The harmonic expectations can be interpreted to lead to an attuned leadership, while the disharmonic expectations lead to a more tensed leadership. Harmonious expectations and an attuned leadership are prominent. The results are compared to earlier research on leadership. Attuned and more tensed leadership are discussed in relation to school development and future research.

**Keywords :** critical incidents, principal leadership, school culture, school development, teachers' expectations

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