

# The Legal Competence of Leaders - a Contribution to Organizational Development in Kindergartens

This study examines how preschool managers' legal competence promotes organizational development in Norwegian kindergartens.

Based on the Kindergarten Act (2020), the Framework Plan (2017), and leadership theories, the study shows how legal knowledge strengthens leaders' ability for responsible operation, legal compliance, and development of a reflective culture among staff.

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# Nord university

Campus Bodø – 146 km above the arctic circle



# Methodology



## Research Design

Qualitative study with a social constructivist perspective where knowledge is formed in the interactions between people.

Semi-structured interviews with four kindergarten directors that allowed room for the informants' own perspectives.



## Analysis Process

Systematic sorting of interview data into key categories.

Abductive approach combining theory and empirical data.

Categorization into meaningful units for structured presentation of findings.



## Research Question

*How can a Preschool Managers' legal competence contribute to organizational development and learning in the kindergarten?*



# Theoretical Foundation

## Theoretical Foundation

The study builds on theory about kindergarten as a learning organization, pedagogical and administrative leadership, as well as leadership as a dynamic and continuous process.

## The Best Interest of the Child

All practice and leadership must be anchored in the principle of the best interest of the child, which is stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.





# Introduction to the Kindergarten Framework



## Kindergarten Act (2020)

Sets requirements for quality, staffing, competence and educational content, and clarifies the division of responsibilities between owners, employees and parents.



## Framework Plan (2017)

Builds on the law and provides a common value foundation and clear pedagogical goals, with focus on inclusion, respect and equality.



## Preschool Manager's Responsibility

The Manager has a special responsibility to ensure that the kindergarten operates in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, which requires legal competence.

# Legal Competence of Preschool managers



## **Legal Understanding**

Knowing the laws and rules

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## **Interpretation and Application**

Making good decisions based on laws

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## **Building Trust**

Setting clear and fair rules

Legal competence means knowing the laws a Preschool Manager needs to run the kindergarten properly. This helps make sure all kindergarten activities follow the law and helps build trust with parents and staff.

# The Kindergarten as a Learning Organization

## Continuous Development

Collective learning and knowledge sharing

## Professional Learning Communities

Values and norms that promote learning



## Reflection

Joint reflection on practice

## Innovation

Openness to change and new knowledge

A learning organization develops through collective learning and adaptability.

In kindergarten, this means staff reflect together, share experiences, and continuously improve their pedagogical work.



# Working Together in Kindergarten



## Staff Working Together

Regular teamwork and idea-sharing builds trust and enhances learning outcomes.



## Working with Parents

Framework Plan emphasizes home-kindergarten collaboration through clear communication.



## Working with Outside Help

Collaboration with support services requires interpersonal skills and regulatory knowledge.



## Handling Disagreements

Effective conflict resolution promotes learning and process improvement.





# Findings



# Findings

## Legal competence strengthens leadership



### Leadership Confidence

Leaders feel more confident and decisive after further education in law, providing a better foundation for clear and fair decisions.



### Organizational Learning

Legal competence helps leaders develop the kindergarten as a learning organization through collective reflection and structured development work.



### Improved Collaboration

Clear frameworks and increased legal certainty contribute to better dialogue between management, employees, and external stakeholders.

# Findings

## Legal competence strengthens leadership



### Conflict Management

Knowledge of the legal framework enables leaders to handle conflicts more professionally and fairly, creating a safer working environment.



### Innovation & Development

Legal understanding facilitates more creative and holistic approaches to organizational development in kindergarten settings.



### Quality & Predictability

A Preschool Manager with legal competence creates predictability and clear structures, which promote quality in kindergarten services.



# Findings

## Reflective Practice and Organizational Learning



### Reflective Practice

Integrating legal and leadership knowledge improves work processes.



### Continuous Learning

Staff prioritize collective learning despite administrative demands, maintaining focus on educational leadership.



### Concrete Development Projects

Enhanced legal and leadership competence drives focused improvement initiatives.

# Findings

## Improved Routines and Systems

Findings suggest significant improvements in routines and systems as a result of new competence. The organization develops by integrating new knowledge into practice, for example through better internal control and clearer procedures.



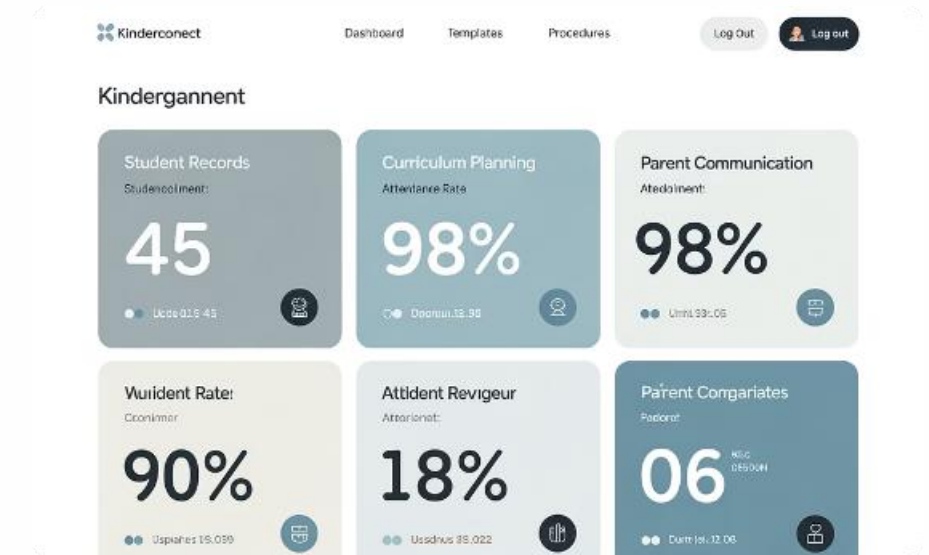
### Learning Arenas

Informants emphasize the importance of learning arenas where they have gained insight into others' experiences and perspectives.



### Tools for Practice

The informants mention various tools that have contributed to better personnel management and handling of difficult processes.



### Improved Routines

Routines and templates have been adjusted as a result of new competence, making everyday work easier for preschool managers.

# Summary



## Legal Competence as a Prerequisite

Legal knowledge is essential for running kindergartens effectively. This is especially true given the many laws and growing need for proper documentation and fair decision-making.



## Strengthened Practice Leadership

Understanding laws helps leaders improve how they run kindergartens. It helps them create better teaching methods and ways of working by applying legal principles.



## Confidence in Collaboration

Knowing the rights and duties gives kindergarten managers more confidence when working with staff, representatives, and outside partners.



# Legal competence – a necessity for responsible preschool management



## Complex legislation

It's about understanding both the rules and how they are applied in different situations.



## Analytical approach

A manager explains that she now breaks down the legal text to understand it better. This demonstrates a more thorough working method.



## Holistic leadership

Laws provide structure, while pedagogy fills them with content.

Good leadership requires using the law correctly.



## Increased confidence and humility

Good legal understanding gives managers more confidence in their job. They can act more consciously, while simultaneously becoming more humble.

# Conclusion and Implications



Our findings answer the main research question:

- Legal knowledge makes preschool leaders better at fair and responsible leadership.
- Legal knowledge is not just helpful for the leader - it helps the whole organization grow.
- Leaders who understand the law build trust and safety that motivates staff.