

Leadership and Legal Competence: The Key to a Good Kindergarten Environment

Atle Kristensen¹, Morten Einar Edvardsen²

Nord University, Norway^{1, 2}

Abstract

This study looks at how kindergarten leaders' legal knowledge affects the work environment in kindergartens. It uses a qualitative research method and is based on a social constructionist perspective. Four kindergarten leaders who have taken legal training were interviewed in a semi-structured format. An abductive approach, inspired by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017), combines both deductive and inductive methods to understand the leaders' experiences. The work environment in kindergartens is influenced by physical, psychosocial, and organizational elements. These are guided by the Working Environment Act (§ 4-1) and health, environment, and safety rules. The findings indicate that leaders with legal knowledge handle challenges like physical strain, conflicts, and organizational uncertainty better. Legal competence helps create safe and inclusive workplaces. This aligns with Edmondson's (1999) idea of psychological safety and Dewey's (2015) view of learning as a social process. Leaders combining legal frameworks with good leadership, improves the work environment. Transformational leadership [7] and distributed leadership [10] are useful for increasing staff participation and sense of ownership. Physical challenges, such as ergonomic strain, can be reduced with better organization, while psychosocial challenges improve with clear communication and a strong team culture. The findings suggest that combining legal knowledge with effective leadership creates a more sustainable and positive work environment.

Keywords: legal competence, work environment, kindergarten leadership, transformational leadership

Introduction

The kindergarten owner holds the overall legal responsibility for ensuring that the kindergarten operates in accordance with laws and regulations, as stipulated in the Kindergarten Act §7. The employer responsibility is assigned to the Preschool Manager, who, according to the Kindergarten Act (2020), must ensure sound pedagogical and administrative leadership. This means that the Preschool Manager must have sufficient leadership competence to maintain the quality of the kindergarten services while adhering to legal frameworks [7]. In many municipalities, the municipal kindergarten administration has been reduced, increasing the Preschool Managers' responsibilities and autonomy in their work. Preschool Managers are increasingly required to speak up for their kindergartens, as the municipal administration no longer assumes this role [9], [26], [30].

Kindergartens function as open systems that must continuously adapt to societal expectations, laws, and national guidelines. This adaptation affects both structures and work processes within the kindergarten. There is a strong correlation between the work environment and the quality of kindergarten services, where a good work environment contributes to higher quality and vice versa [21]. The Working Environment Act (2024) regulates both the physical and psychosocial work environment, and employers have a legal responsibility to ensure that working conditions are adequate and do not impose unnecessary strain on employees.

To ensure high quality and well-being, work environment efforts and quality improvement must be viewed together and developed through continuous improvement processes. The increasing demands for documentation and administration have resulted in kindergarten directors spending more time on administrative tasks than on pedagogical leadership. This is particularly evident in large kindergartens, where administrative tasks dominate the workday, whereas directors in smaller kindergartens have greater opportunities to prioritize pedagogical work [10]. Holte and Grimsmo (2006) found that half of kindergarten Preschool Managers believe they need further education in administration and leadership to strengthen their competence. Excellent work-environment is strictly regulated by national laws, regulations, and international conventions designed to protect workers' rights and ensure their physical and psychosocial well-being. Legal competence is therefore crucial for kindergarten leaders to maintain high quality and ensure that operations comply with legal requirements [10]. Based on this, the following research question has been formulated: *How do kindergarten leaders describe the impact of their legal competence on the work environment in the kindergarten?*

Kindergarten leadership consists of pedagogical leadership, administrative leadership, and personnel management. However, administrative tasks have increasingly become dominant, often at the expense of pedagogical leadership. This is particularly evident in large kindergartens, where Preschool Managers spend considerable time on administrative duties, whereas directors in smaller kindergartens (1–2 departments) are more likely to prioritize pedagogical leadership tasks [16]. A solution is to delegate certain administrative tasks, automate processes where appropriate, and ensure that Preschool Managers have sufficient resources to focus on pedagogical work.

Preschool Managers are also responsible for personnel and their work environment, which is regulated by the Working Environment Act (aml, 2005, §2-1) and the Framework Plan (2017). The work environment is not a static concept but must be understood in light of professional knowledge and societal developments [22]. A paradox is that the work environment in schools is far better documented than in kindergartens, despite the challenges often being comparable [20]. In this study, the physical work environment, the psychosocial work environment, and organizational conditions will be examined in more detail, in accordance with the Working Environment Act – aml § 4-1, second paragraph.

The Physical Work Environment

Essential aspects of excellent work-environment are related to health, environment, and safety (HMS). The Working Environment Act [3] states that the working environment in the enterprise shall be fully satisfactory based on an individual and collective assessment of factors in the working environment that may affect the physical and mental health and welfare of employees. The standard for safety, health, and the working environment must continually be developed and improved in line with societal developments. Implicitly this means that employers have a legal duty to carry out systematic HSE work. This includes conducting regular risk assessments and implementing measures to prevent injuries, accidents, stress, and overexertion.

The physical HMS work includes factors such as indoor climate, noise, ventilation, and general safety in the workplace. The Working Environment Act [3, § 4-4] states that the workplace must be arranged so that employees are not exposed to burdens that may be harmful to the body. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that necessary aid is available. The Workplace Regulations [4, Chapter 2] emphasize ensuring a good physical work environment in kindergartens, focusing on ergonomics, lighting, air quality, and safety.

In a kindergarten, it is especially important that workstations are ergonomically adapted for employees, for example, by providing furniture and equipment that reduce strain injuries from frequent lifting and carrying of children. There should be arrangements for task variation to avoid heavy lifting and monotonous, repetitive work [3] § 4-4, second paragraph. When machines or other equipment are used, precautions must be taken to ensure that employees do not suffer strain injuries, such as those caused by vibrations or poor working positions. In kindergartens, the physical environment of the workplace is adapted to children rather than adults, contributing to the demanding nature of the kindergarten teaching profession. The loss of six-year-olds due to Reform 97 has resulted in a lower average age of children. This makes the work more physically demanding with more young children requiring assistance, lifting, and carrying—without compensation for this in the staffing norm [17].

The Workplace Regulations [4, §§ 2-11, 2-14] describe lighting and air quality. Good lighting, both natural and artificial, is crucial for creating a safe and comfortable environment for both children and employees. Air quality must be maintained through proper ventilation, as poor air can affect the health of both children and staff. Temperature control in kindergartens should ensure a comfortable climate suited for play and activity. Noise levels must also be considered, as high noise levels in a kindergarten can be stressful for employees. Therefore, measures such as sound-absorbing materials and noise-reducing design may be necessary. Measures to ensure a good indoor climate, reduce noise, and improve workplace ergonomics can help reduce strain on employees. The workplace must be organised and designed in a way that prevents employees from being exposed to burdening physical strain. This includes providing necessary equipment and aids to support staff in carrying out their tasks safely and efficiently. Such measures are essential to maintaining a healthy physical work environment. In kindergartens, for example, this may relate to ergonomically sound working positions when changing nappies or helping children get dressed.

To ensure a sustainable and supportive work environment over time, it is equally important that employees are given sufficient opportunities to rest during the day. Management should therefore take responsibility for facilitating regular breaks and ensuring access to well-equipped and comfortable break rooms.



Safety is a central concern in the Workplace Regulations [4], both generally and specifically in kindergartens, with clear measures to reduce the risk of accidents. This includes slip-resistant floors, safe play areas, clearly marked emergency exits, as well as fire safety and first aid equipment. Dangerous materials, such as cleaning agents, must be stored out of children's reach. Additionally, good hygiene is crucial, requiring regular cleaning and access to washing facilities to ensure hygiene for both children and employees. Employers in kindergartens are responsible for following these guidelines, and the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority (Arbeidstilsynet) can monitor compliance to ensure a safe and health-promoting environment for all.

The Psychosocial Work Environment

Psychosocial HSE (Health, Safety, and Environment) efforts focus on factors such as workload, the quality of leadership, collaboration, coping ability, pace, stress, and more. An excellent working environment must also be free from discrimination and harassment. This is required by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which protects employees against discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. Employees are responsible for preventing and handling cases of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. They are required to implement measures that ensure equal treatment and respect for all employees.

Training and competence development in conflict management can contribute to increased well-being and improve the quality of the work environment. Requirements for a psychosocial work environment are set forth in the Working Environment Act [3, § 4-3]. As part of this, conflict prevention and management are crucial tasks, where leaders have a particular responsibility. Employees also have an obligation to participate in conflict resolution [19]. Management should create a culture where conflicts can be resolved constructively and offer support such as facilitated discussions or conflict resolution courses for employees. At the same time collaboration and team cohesion are essential for preventing conflicts. By promoting cooperation among employees through joint projects, meetings, and social activities, management can systematically foster dialogue and knowledge sharing. This can enhance professional development, culture of collaboration, professional communities, and contribute to a positive psychosocial environment [5].

Psychological safety within a team can function as a mechanism that translates structural traits into behavioral action patterns [14]. Workplace flexibility, such as opportunities for part-time work or adjusted working hours, can help reduce stress and improve employees' work-life balance. Management should ensure that employees receive support and guidance, for example through mentoring programs or coaching. This can make employees feel more confident in their roles and better prepared to handle everyday challenges. Support and guidance can strengthen their performance and contribute to a healthier and more supportive work environment.

A team's effectiveness will depend on reducing barriers to progress. When team members feel confident in their chances of success, psychological safety in this context involves working towards a sense of inclusion among members. Such inclusion can occur through social, professional, and cultural adaptation [27], preferably as a process that maintains the work environment for all participants within the framework of the community [18]. A perspective on social inclusion involves incorporating real experiences that promote inclusion. It also gives employees opportunities to reflect on and learn from their actions and experiences in a safe and supportive environment. This approach aligns with educational perspectives and the theory of cooperative learning, where learning is viewed as a social, interactive process [13].

Leadership

Management strengthens the kindergarten's working environment by applying leadership theories, practical experience, and legal and educational principles. Clear communication and active employee involvement are essential. By practicing transformational leadership, management ensures that employees are heard and included in decisions that shape their everyday work. Regular employee meetings, workplace surveys, and open discussions are effective ways to achieve this [7], [31]. Clear expectations and goals allow leaders to give constructive feedback that drives employees' development and engagement. Recognition and rewards, as emphasized in transactional leadership, play a vital role in promoting job satisfaction and motivation [32]. Management can strengthen this by combining formal rewards with informal, everyday praise, helping employees feel seen, valued, and motivated [24], [33].

Transactional leadership often involves maintaining administrative order, creating structures, motivating through rewards for performance, and ensuring the smooth operation of daily tasks [25]. These two leadership styles, transformational leadership and transactional leadership, complement

each other. Balancing administrative tasks with pedagogical leadership can often be a challenge for Preschool Managers. These busy transactional duties can be time-consuming for the Preschool Manager, leaving less energy for transformational leadership [32]. Therefore, the Preschool Manager should delegate some administrative tasks where possible. Børhaug and Lotsberg (2014) describe that pedagogical leaders in kindergartens are rarely involved in managing the entire institution but hold significant leadership responsibilities within their respective departments and have a clearly articulated awareness of themselves as leaders. Distributed leadership can ease the manager's burden by emphasizing that: "Distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures." [35].

In this way, a group or organization where democratic and collegial ideals are strong can implement distributed leadership as a collective leadership form in decision-making processes, which can lead to an increased focus on development and drive organizational change [31]. Distributed leadership can thus provide a foundation for employers and employees in the kindergarten to maintain and develop their working environment collaboratively, as referenced in the [3, § 1-1]. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the leader sets direction, formulates a strategy, and establishes goals to effectively distribute leadership within the kindergarten. In this context, competence development for employees is essential. Management should facilitate opportunities for employees to enhance their skills in both pedagogical and administrative leadership, as well as stay updated on regulatory requirements.

Method

This qualitative study is positioned within the social constructionist tradition, where knowledge and all meaningful reality, is created through interactions between individuals in a given context [12]. To gather rich descriptions from kindergarten leaders, we conducted semi-structured research interviews [28]. The participants were four kindergarten leaders who had completed continuing education in law for leaders. The questions and topics in the interview guide were developed using a deductive approach, based on our own experiences and understanding in interaction with the theoretical framework. Simultaneously, the interviews were structured in a way that allowed informants freedom to describe and reflect upon open-ended questions and themes [23].

The study combines deductive principles, grounded in theory, with an inductive approach aimed at gaining insight into participants' retrospective experiences [15]. In our analysis, we strive for objectivity and have therefore critically assessed our findings when generalizing from specific instances to broader conclusions, a process that can be described as inductive [22]. At the same time, we acknowledge that our own subjectivity might influence the analysis of the empirical material, as we moved between deduction and induction in our design, a process known as abduction [1]. This abductive approach is anchored in an interpretative model which provides the framework for our analysis [34]. Across six stages, we applied our pre-existing understanding, knowledge, and experience related to the research project's topic. This approach guided the coding and categorization of the empirical data. Through this process, we identified meaningful units that serve as headings in the subsequent presentation of findings.

Physical Challenges in Kindergarten

Physical strain in kindergarten represents a significant challenge for both employees and leaders. The daily operation involves heavy lifting, continuous static strain, and a high level of activity. Leaders in the kindergarten sector describe facing a complex reality where they must balance employees' physical strain with children's need for care and development. However, the study's findings indicate that physical strain is not only about the work tasks themselves but also involves emotional demands, organizational conditions, and relational challenges between employees and management.

Innovative strategies to reduce strain are highlighted as an essential factor in improving the physical work environment. Some kindergartens have integrated the Occupational Health Center (Arbeidsmiljøseneteret) into their development work to foster a better balance between the learning environment and the work environment. As one informant explains: "We did this because one cannot work independently of the other." This increasing understanding that proactive measures are more effective than reactive solutions is emphasized. Informants believe that leaders must be aware of this when organizing work to prevent challenges before they arise. In this context, one informant states: "It is important to be ahead of the curve. If we only react when the problems have already occurred, it is often too late."

To stay ahead, informants describe how their legal competence has increased through studies, making them better equipped to handle difficult situations related to physical strain. Legal challenges related to sick leave, employer management rights, and the duty of loyalty are specifically



mentioned. This requires a comprehensive understanding of both the Working Environment Act and the legal frameworks regulating the employer's obligations and rights. One informant expresses it as follows: "I feel more confident now when handling difficult personnel cases. I know what the right course of action is, and I document much more systematically than before."

In addition to strengthening legal competence, several informants emphasize the importance of employee inclusion and participation. Innovative work environment strategies are highlighted as central to reducing strain, and the significance of including employees in decision-making processes to create a better work environment is underlined. "When we listen to employees and consider their experiences in our assessments, we create a safer and more sustainable workday for everyone," says one informant. Expanding the HSE (Health, Safety, and Environment) team by including representatives from each department is mentioned as an initiative to ensure that employees' voices are heard. This approach can help employees feel ownership of decisions and contribute to a safer, more predictable, and improved physical work environment.

Psychological Challenges in Preschool Leadership

Descriptions from the participants in the study suggest that it is not only the physical demands and workload that create challenges; the emotional pressure that employees face daily can also be demanding. Findings from the study indicate that leadership in preschools entails significant psychological strain, particularly related to legal issues, personnel matters, and organizational challenges. Several informants state that this causes stress and influences how they develop strategies to manage their workday. Psychological safety arises when leaders feel competent, have clear frameworks for their work, and can rely on collegial support.

One of the most challenging aspects of the leadership role described is handling personnel matters, especially following up on sick leave and conflict resolution. One informant highlights how being a middle manager in such a context can be particularly challenging, as they are responsible for personnel but simultaneously have limited autonomy within the organization: "Being a leader like this is incredibly difficult and especially being a middle manager." Another describes how sick leave often presents a dilemma where it is unclear whether the case is a personnel issue or a health-related challenge, requiring sensitivity in interactions with employees. Additionally, this also demands legal competence and insight into legal issues, which is highlighted as a significant stress factor. Having responsibility for these dilemmas can feel challenging, especially since mistakes can have serious consequences.

At the same time, the participants describe how increased legal competence has made them more aware of these issues, but that they often feel they do not have enough time to delve into them. One informant expresses how learning more about legal matters provides both a sense of security and an increased awareness of how demanding the legal responsibility actually is: "I have gained a better overview of the legal fields, but at the same time, you become a bit more afraid because, my God, I don't have full control."

The leadership role is sometimes described as demanding, particularly when it comes to balancing various considerations within the organization and how the work environment affects both employee well-being and their own mental health. In this context, one informant states that they have become more aware of their own impact on the work environment and how this, in turn, affects employees' daily work. Another points out that leadership in the preschool sector is often underestimated, which can be a burden in itself. These challenges are made worse by external factors like budget cuts and changes in the number of enrolled children. This can have significant consequences for employees' job security and is something informants describe as a constant source of stress in their daily lives, creating anxiety and uncertainty about how best to facilitate a safe preschool environment.

Despite the challenges highlighted, the findings suggest that informants develop strategies to manage the psychological strain. Many emphasize the value of collegial support and collaboration in leadership groups as a way to handle demanding issues. Psychological safety is described as something that can be strengthened through increased legal competence and clearer structures. Several mention the importance of being proactive in addressing challenges rather than reactive, and one informant specifically mentions how increased awareness of documentation and clear communication has made them feel more secure in their leadership role.

Leadership for a Good Work Environment

The significance of leadership for a good work environment in kindergartens is highlighted from various perspectives related to leadership strategies, culture-building, and legal understanding.



Leaders describe how they address challenges related to the work environment and how they attempt to improve the psychosocial climate through different approaches. This is especially clear through experiences connected to legal frameworks, conflict management, and efforts to build a common organizational culture. One informant state that complex cultures in the kindergarten can lead to different approaches among employees, where experienced educators "some of the good old ones" meet "the young newly educated" in practice. This challenge is described as managing a divergent culture that can create tensions, particularly concerning how children and parents are met in daily interactions. To address such challenges, it is crucial to "document how a leader can facilitate that those working in the kindergarten are able to do their job effectively." It is suggested that clarity in expectations and frameworks helps to reduce tensions and promote a shared understanding. Other informants describe that good leadership practices can play a central role in creating security among employees, especially when complex legal issues are part of the work environment. One informant points out that "employment law and obligations for both leaders and employees" become more understandable through studies, and that this insight leads to clearer and fairer practice. This creates security among employees but also fosters a sense of fairness and structure in personnel management. Another informant emphasizes the value of building a work environment that is "proactive in how we manage to work" by using legal methods.

Such findings in the study suggest that structures and tools can help prevent conflicts and increase predictability in the workday. The informants in the study also highlight how leadership support and clear communication can positively impact the work environment. One informant state that working with legal issues provides "greater security in one's leadership practice," which in turn enables clarity and transparency with employees. This was concrete in situations where difficult personnel cases required a balanced handling of both rights and obligations. Another describes that a more legal, analytical approach can reduce emotional strain while still maintaining a strong focus on human considerations: "When I am confident in how I communicate, they also become confident." The work of creating a common culture and increasing awareness of the legal aspects of the leadership role is emphasized by several informants. One informant points out the importance of working on "awareness of being a leader" throughout the organization, not just within leadership groups. The informants describe that when staff are actively involved in processes and given the chance to participate, as the regulations recommend, it helps them feel ownership and better understand changes in the organisation.

The informants mention how projects that combine work environment and learning environment create a more holistic approach to organizational development. Several informants suggest that legal insight and structure can support an innovative approach to the work environment. One informant state that by learning from a project, "the work environment and learning environment can be more closely linked," creating a common platform for change. Another leader points out that clear routines and structures can help reduce uncertainty among employees and promote open and honest communication: "We address issues more directly, and I also experience that the process becomes clearer and faster." Such findings from the study suggest that leadership in a good work environment involves balancing legal requirements and human relationships while fostering an open and inclusive culture. The work environment is influenced not only by legal methods but also by the leader's ability to manage conflicts, build community, and be clear in their priorities. Leaders who integrate legal perspectives with a strong relational approach seem to be able to promote a safer and more collaborative work environment in kindergartens.

Discussion

This study examines how leaders' legal knowledge affects the work environment in kindergartens. Leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring a good work environment, where legal competence, leadership strategies, and organizational conditions must be considered together. The work environment is regulated by legal frameworks that place responsibilities on employers to ensure a proper work environment [2], [29]. The quality of the work environment and the kindergarten's service quality are closely connected, and leaders must balance employees' workload with the needs of children [21].

Physical challenges in kindergartens go beyond heavy lifting and ergonomic strain; they are also linked to emotional and organizational factors. The study shows that employers must understand legal frameworks, implement preventive actions, and ensure employee participation. The work environment must be fully adequate, which requires steps to reduce the risk of injuries, such as ergonomic adjustments, rest periods, and safe work routines [4], [2, § 4-1]. Nevertheless, the study shows that kindergartens are often not adapted to employees' ergonomic needs, increasing the risk of



strain injuries [17]. Many informants highlight financial constraints as a challenge, aligning with research showing that leaders in the public sector often have to balance quality with financial constraints [16]. A holistic approach to the work environment requires legal competence, proactive leadership, and employee involvement. By combining the Working Environment Act with leadership theory, Preschool Managers can create a safe and inclusive workday [31]. Physical strain should not be seen in isolation but in connection with organizational, psychosocial, and legal factors to promote both employees' work environment and children's development.

The choice of leadership style is crucial for how challenges are handled. Proactive leadership, through transactional and transformational leadership, is highlighted as a strategy to improve the work environment via visionary leadership and employee involvement [7]. While transactional leadership focuses on structure and routines [25], transformational leadership emphasizes clear communication and strategic leadership [7]. Informants point out that proactivity provides increased control, in line with transformational leadership, which promotes community, inspiration, and collaboration [18], [27], [24]. Distributed leadership can relieve managers by distributing leadership tasks within the organization [35]. Pedagogical leaders often have a strong leadership understanding but are not heavily involved in overall management [11]. Although responsibility can be delegated, managers must still set direction and ensure goal achievement [31]. Distributed leadership contributes to a more robust organization and reduces the burden on individual leaders [35], [31]. Measures such as expanding health and safety teams and involving employees in work environment efforts strengthen ownership, collaboration, and co-determination [11]. By linking work environment and pedagogical quality, a holistic approach is developed that promotes the well-being for both employees and children. A sustainable work culture is achieved when physical, psychosocial, and organizational factors are considered together [21]. Some kindergartens have also used external actors such as the Work Environment Center to balance learning and work environment.

The psychosocial work environment in kindergartens is a central challenge, particularly related to personnel cases, sick leave, and conflict management. According to the study, legal competence helps leaders handle such cases more fairly, but uncertainty about regulations still creates stress. Psychological safety is crucial for well-being and productivity [14] and involves leadership that listens, supports, and involves employees [33]. When employees feel safe speaking up, problems can be resolved before they escalate.

Findings in the study suggest that leaders who promote participation and inclusion manage work environment challenges better, in line with research emphasizing the balance between the physical work environment and pedagogical quality [21]. Kindergarten leaders must balance pedagogical quality, finances, and legal requirements, which can result in significant psychological strain [30]. Increased legal competence provides a sense of security but also fear of making mistakes, consistent with research on the legal regulation of working life [9], [26]. Administrative demands increase stress and reduce time for pedagogical leadership [32], [10], but clear documentation and communication strengthen confidence in the leadership role [13].

The Working Environment Act [3, § 4-3] requires a proper psychosocial environment but handling this is often unclear. Kindergarten leaders must both support employees and fulfil legal requirements, creating dilemmas, particularly when absenteeism and conflicts involve health issues [19]. Psychological safety promotes openness about challenges [14], and informants highlight collegial support and legal competence as key strategies. Collaborative culture and professional community strengthen a safe work environment [5]. Clear structures, legal competence, and conflict management are crucial for leadership [19]. The study shows that predictability and clear communication reduce stress and conflicts, and that the Working Environment Act [3, § 4-1] obligates employers to prevent psychosocial strain, requiring conscious effort from leadership.

Summary

The aim of this study has been to examine how kindergarten leaders' legal competence affects the work environment. The findings show that good leadership requires a balance between legal requirements, administration, and relationship-building. A holistic work environment depends on physical, psychosocial, and organizational measures. Informants highlight that legal insight combined with leadership competence strengthens the work environment, particularly through culture-building and inclusive leadership.

Although the Kindergarten Act (§ 7) assigns overall responsibility to the kindergarten owner, Preschool Managers hold operational responsibility, which necessitates legal understanding and handling of complex personnel matters [8]. Kindergartens, as open systems, must adapt to societal demands [21], requiring a strategic leadership approach where both transformational leadership [7]

and transactional leadership [32] play important roles. Transformational leadership fosters a shared culture, while transactional leadership ensures structures. Pedagogical leaders often have limited influence over the organization's overall leadership [11], but distributed leadership [35] can enhance efficiency and employee participation, thereby strengthening the work environment.

Legal uncertainty, personnel matters, and organizational challenges contribute to stress among leaders. Employers have a duty to ensure a good work environment, in line with the Working Environment Act [3, § 2-1] and the Workplace Regulations (2011), through systematic HSE work. In kindergartens, this includes ergonomic adjustments and the prevention of strain injuries. The strain is both physical and emotional, and changes in children's group structures following Reform 97 have increased physical workload without corresponding staff adjustments [17]. Psychological safety, reinforced through clear structures, legal competence, and collegial support, is crucial for reducing stress [14]. The Working Environment Act (§ 4-3) mandates a workplace free from discrimination, bullying, and unreasonable strain, making conflict management essential [19]. Training in conflict resolution and steps to enhance cooperation can contribute to a more stable work environment. To strengthen kindergarten leaders, increased continuing education in administration and leadership, including law [20], is recommended, along with further research on tailored leadership models. Systematic work on conflict resolution, legal competence, and psychological safety can contribute to a more sustainable work environment for leaders and employees.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2017). *Tolkning och reflektion: vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod*. Studentlitteratur.
- [2] Arbeidsmiljøloven. (2024). *Lov om arbeidsmiljø, arbeidstid og stillingsvern mv. (arbeidsmiljøloven)* Lovdata. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2005-06-17-62>
- [3] Arbeidsmiljøloven-aml. (2005). *Lov om arbeidsmiljø, arbeidstid og stillingsvern mv. (arbeidsmiljøloven)* Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet.
- [4] Arbeidsplassforskriften. (2011). *Forskrift om utforming og innretning av arbeidsplasser, arbeidslokaler og innkvartering* Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet.
- [5] Argyris, C. (1996). *Organizational learning II: theory, method, and practice*. Addison-Wesley.
- [6] Barnehageloven. (2020). *Personalet* (24). Lovdata. https://lovdata.no/dokument/nl/lov/2005-06-17-64/kapittel_6#kapittel_6
- [7] Bass, B. M. & Vanderberghe, C. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. Commentary: Leadership and Organizational Change. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, 8(1), 9-32.
- [8] Berta, O. G., Sæterstad, T., Tollnes, I. J. & Bøe, M. (2024). Alle må med: Styreres erfaringer med å etablere og utvikle profesjonelle læringsfellesskap i barnehagen. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, (3) 21, 340-359. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v21.631>
- [9] Bleken, U. (2004). *Styrer i storm. Første steg, 1, 2.* <https://www.utdanningsnytt.no/files/2019/08/22/FS%201%202004.pdf>
- [10] Børhaug, K. & Lotsberg, D. Ø. (2010). Barnehageledelse i endring. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 3, 79-94. www.nordiskbarnehageforskning.no
- [11] Børhaug, K. & Lotsberg, D. Ø. (2014). Fra kollegafellesskap til ledelseshierarki? De pedagogiske lederne i barnehagens ledelsesprosess. *Tidsskrift for Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 7.
- [12] Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- [13] Dewey, J. (2015). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- [14] Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. *Administrative science quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- [15] Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research: essays*. Duquesne University Press.
- [16] Gotvassli, K. A. (1990). *Ledelse i barnehagen*. TANO.
- [17] Halvorsen, A., Olsen, T. & Lysgård, H. K. (2002). Tidlig avgang fra arbeidslivet: et problem for hvem?: når løsninger på arbeidsplassen blir nasjonale problemer. *Søkelys på arbeidsmarkedet (trykt utg.)*. Årg. 19, nr 1 (2002), 95-102.
- [18] Haug, P. (2017). Understanding inclusive education: Ideals and reality. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 19, 206-217.
- [19] Haugen, A. O. (2022). *Juss i barnehagesektoren* (2. utgave. utg.). Universitetsforlaget.
- [20] Holte, H. H. & Grimsmo, A. (2006). *Arbeidsmiljø i skole og barnehage, en bibliografi for perioden 1995 – 2006*. www.afi.no



- [21] Holte, K. A., Kvilhaugsvik, H., Skagseth, M. & Labriola, M. (2022). «Når det dirrer i rommet» – sammenhenger mellom arbeidsmiljø og kvalitet i barnehagetjenesten www.norcereaserch.no
- [22] Johannessen, A., Christoffersen, L. & Tufte, P. A. (2016). *Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode* (5. utg. utg.). Abstrakt.
- [23] Krumsvik, R. J. (2014). *Forskningsdesign og kvalitativ metode: ei innføring*. Fagbokforl.
- [24] Klev, R. & Levin, M. (2021). *Forandring som praksis: endring og utvikling som samskapt læring* (3. utgave. utg.). Fagbokforlaget.
- [25] Martinsen, Ø. L., Goveia, I. C., Engetrøen, R., Gjestrud, G. & Velsand, K. (2019). *Perspektiver på ledelse* (5. utgave. utg.). Gyldendal.
- [26] Meyer, E. S. (2004). Ingen blir førskolelærer for å bli byråkrat. *Første steg, 1, 2.* <https://www.utdanningsnytt.no/files/2019/08/22/FS%201%202004.pdf>
- [27] Olsen, M. H., Mathisen, A. R. P. & Sjøblom, E. (2016). *Faglig inkludert? fortellinger fra elever med ulik måloppnåelse* (1. utg. utg.). Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- [28] Postholm, M. B., Jacobsen, D. I. & Søbstad, R. (2018). *Forskningsmetode for masterstudenter i lærerutdanningen*. Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- [29] Rammeplanen. (2017). Kunnskapsdepartementet. <https://www.udir.no/contentassets/7c4387bb50314f33b828789ed767329e/rammeplan-for-barnehagen---bokmal-pdf.pdf>
- [30] Raustøl, T. (2004). Jo mindre vi vet om framtiden, jo viktigere blir ledelse. *Første steg, 1, 2.* <https://www.utdanningsnytt.no/files/2019/08/22/FS%201%202004.pdf>
- [31] Robinson, V. (2018). *Færre endringer - mer utvikling*. Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- [32] Roland, P., Hye, L. & Øgård, M. (2023). *Kapasitetsbygging i barnehage, skole og PPT: profesjonelle lærende fellesskap, implementering og ledelse* (1. utgave. utg.). Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- [33] Skrøvset, S. & Tiller, T. (2015). *Verdsettende ledelse* (2. utg. utg.). Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- [34] Smith, J. A., Larkin, M. & Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method, and research*. SAGE.
- [35] Spillane, J. (2005). Distributed Leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69, 143-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720508984678>