Challenges in managing a multi-sectoral health promotion program

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate program management teams’ views on issues and challenges in managing a large, multi-sectoral child health promotion program in Sweden.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 17 participants representing two autonomous program management teams, one strategic and one operational, were interviewed. Analysis of interview data was complemented with reviews of program documents.

Findings – Program management teams identified important issues concerning the program’s formal structure, goals, role distribution, and change and dissemination processes, but lacked a shared mental model of the situation. Inter and intra group communication, long- and short-term strategic planning were further areas in need of improvement. While issues and challenges might seem to be agreed upon by the program’s change agents, closer inspection reveals variation in key characteristics as well as in perspectives on solutions.

Originality/value – Health promotion programs are challenging. Researchers trying to understand program success have focused on particular interventions, contextual factors and program recipients. Less research has focused on the internal processes of teams tasked with wide-ranging change mandates and the effects such processes can have on program outcomes. This study contributes to a deeper understanding on internal processes and mental models of change agent teams.

Keywords Health promotion, Sweden, Mental models, Change management, Implementation process, Program management

Paper type Research paper
Introduction
Health promotion (HP) programs originate from different sources: political initiatives, new scientific evidence, clinical guidelines, etc. The intended outcome is typically long term health improvement in the population. Change interventions in HP programs may target several aspects: service organization, staff activities, work routines, and the habits and behaviors of individuals. Despite established relationships between lifestyle habits and health, achieving rapid and sustainable change via preventive and HP programs has proved challenging (Inman et al., 2011; Judd et al., 2001; Merzel and D’Afflitti, 2003; Robinson et al., 2005). Previous research on change programs has focused on interventions, contextual factors and recipients (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Partington et al., 2005; Schein, 1990). There is also substantial research on organizational challenges affecting senior management (e.g. Knight et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1984), but less on temporary management teams. Few have considered the internal group processes of program management and its significance for the success of longitudinal programs (Partington et al., 2005; Schein, 1990). The importance of managing change is well documented (e.g. Buchanan et al., 1999; Partington et al., 2005) but a linear view on change processes, which prescribes a rational approach, has been criticized for not being sufficiently flexible (Burnes, 2009; Kitson, 2009). With this study, we intend to shed more light on the internal process of managing a large, multi-sectorial health promotion program for children in a northern region in Sweden.

The multi-sectoral nature of health promotion often includes joint efforts from health and social services, requiring coalitions across organizational levels and borders (Bryson et al., 2006; Butterfoss et al., 1993; Hearld et al., 2012). This places demands on those in charge of change management processes and necessitates collaboration to handle strategic and operational issues (Garvin, 1998; Lehtonen and Martinsuo, 2008; Orme et al., 2007). In such contexts, shared cognition, and multifaceted and strategic approaches become essential. Change management teams are important factors in the change process, especially for creating readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Fullan and Miles, 1992; Knight et al., 1999). Despite the presence of appointed management teams in most change contexts, several authors point to a lack of knowledge on how these groups actually function (Martin, 2011).

Organizing for change is an interactive process with no universal approach. Organization varies and management change processes occur in different ways. Change interventions in complex organizational environments often start with the appointment of a management team, usually comprised of people from different sections, levels, or organizations, as there is a need to ensure expertise and competence as well as political representation (Doppler, 2004; Knight et al., 1999; Fullan and Miles, 1992; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002).

Heterogeneous groupings comprised of participants from different cultures, functions and everyday realities can give rise to complications as well as gains. Group dynamics including role issues (e.g. Katz and Kahn, 1978), goal-setting procedures (Durham et al., 1997; Locke and Latham, 2002), communication (Smith et al., 1994; Miller, 2012) and decision-making rules can affect the work of management teams (Boonstra, 2004; Bunderson and Reagans, 2011; Ensley and Pearce, 2001; Pettigrew et al., 2001). Shared mental models have been found to be an essential element to overcome these challenges (DeChurch and Mesmer-Magnus, 2010; Van de Ven and Sun, 2011). If team members can improve the way they construct and share mental
models, then conditions for decision-making performance can improve (Jeffrey et al., 2005), ameliorating the group dynamic issues that often challenge heterogeneous management teams (Knight et al., 1999; Senge, 2006).

Previous research has examined: managerial teams in organizations (e.g. Smith et al., 1994; Carpenter, 2002), group processes within heterogeneous teams (e.g. Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1998; Somech, 2006), and decision making in work teams (e.g. Jackson et al., 1995; Korsgaard et al., 1995). Less evidence exists on how management teams handle large-scale, longitudinal change among multi professional approaches to health promotion in health and social care.

The study focused on two management teams, jointly responsible for the implementation of a child health promotion program in Sweden. The program was implemented in a cross-organizational setting where challenges of managing the internal strategic process and the program’s progress were relevant. The purpose was to investigate the program management teams’ views and reasoning on issues and challenges when managing a large, multi-sectorial program and to expose patterns of views within teams (i.e. shared mental models) working within a change program. Given this context/background, our research questions were:

RQ1. What issues and challenges do individuals in program management teams perceive as relevant during the implementation of a multi-sectoral program?

RQ2. How do participants in program management teams value these perceived challenges/issues?

Method
Empirical setting
In Sweden, health care is tax-funded and organized and delivered by publicly-governed county councils. Private healthcare providers are not common, and especially so in Västerbotten county. Over 250 municipalities, 15 of them in Västerbotten, run social services and schools, which are also essentially publicly funded. Some private providers exist, mainly for primary and elderly care, and in/for schools. In Sweden, public health activities are carried out at regional as well as local level, by county administrative boards, county councils, municipalities and private actors. We studied a multi-sectorial program initiated in 2004 by the Västerbotten County Council in Sweden, in order to improve health for children. The program, named Salut, aims to optimize child health through consistent and high quality care, supported by parents. The program involves multi-sectorial collaboration between a county council and 15 municipalities, including health care, dental care, social services, day-care and schools. This study covers the first years of program development, including tests in four pilot areas. Program focus during this period was on the pregnant woman and children up to 18 months.

Parallel studies with focus on progress and outcomes of the Salut program are showing promising results, see; Edvardsson et al., 2011a, b, Edvardsson et al., 2012 and Eurenius et al., 2011.

The starting point of the Salut program was a county council political initiative, in response to alarming information on child health. A group of child health experts outlined a program to address obesity, dental health and psychological well-being. After an initial planning period, two program management teams were formed, both with influence over, and responsibilities for, program implementation and development
The strategic management group (SG) comprised formal representatives from the county council and municipalities. SG had an overall decision and policy-making mandate. The process management group (PG) was oriented towards operational management. PG had three subgroups, a core group (PGc) with long term commitment, a child health expert group (PGe) from different levels in the county council and municipalities, and a process facilitator group (PGf) with members from the county council’s development unit. A process leader was appointed for the PG. This function became the main communication link between SG and PG. This organizational structure stimulated an interest to compare the views and value patterns between the groups to determine the degree of coherence, shared cognition and mental models for the coordination of program activities. The term value refers here to expressions that indicate if a situation or phenomenon is perceived as an important prerequisite, a facilitator, a neutral factor, or as an obstacle to the programs’ progress.

Data collection
The case study design was employed (Yin, 2009; Flick, 2009), and qualitative data were collected. In total, 17 team members, identified as active in program management during a specified time period, were approached and agreed to participate. In-depth interviews (between 45 and 90 minutes) were performed with each respondent. The interviews covered four main areas in which respondents were asked to describe experiences of: program development; relevant issues, challenges and events and actors involved; difficulties, possibilities and potentials during the program; and what lay ahead or had been planned for the immediate future. Archive data, including minutes and official documents, provided complementary information on issues that had been discussed at meetings. Data collection covered the initial four years of the program (Table I).

Interview guide
Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed respondents to describe their experiences and views on program development and implementation.
Respondents were provided with information on the topics to be covered in advance of the interview.

Using a printed timeline, respondents were asked to describe important phases and milestones in the Salut process and their own participation in these. They were also asked about key actors’ and their own initial and evolving role(s). Thereafter, questions were asked about perceived obstacles and facilitators, and how these were addressed. No limit was put on content provided. The respondents were also asked to describe the purpose of the program, if this had changed over time, and if and why change could be achieved. Finally, they were encouraged to express views on other important issues or information.

**Data analysis**

Analyses were performed iteratively; inductive category development was followed by deductive category application (Mayring, 2000). “Directed content analysis” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) was also used to amplify the analysis and interpretation (Flick, 2009; Kohlbacher, 2006; Stemler, 2001; Silverman, 2010). The interview findings were then compared with archive data from the period, (minutes, public information and presentations). This procedure was used in order to comply with the “approach of systematic, rule guided qualitative text analysis, which tries to preserve some methodological strengths of quantitative content analysis and widen them to a concept of qualitative procedure” (Mayring, 2000 (abstract)). Data from transcribed interviews were analyzed in a stepwise process as follows:

1. Text was separated into segments, each containing a coherent statement. A segment could be part of, or a complete statement.
2. Text segments were scrutinized, hypothetical themes identified and content categories agreed. Content categories were then used to classify all text segments. Data concerning other content aspects, unconnected to the program were classified as such and excluded.
3. Subcategories of the four main content categories were identified.
4. Finally, the potential values expressed in relation to text segments were classified according to three categories: “obstacles” (perceived difficulties, resistance or negatively loaded phrases), “facilitators” (perceived drivers, possibilities or positively loaded phrases) and “important prerequisites” (normative expressions

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### Table I.
Overview of methods for data collection used in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Archival data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>June-September 2008</td>
<td>2004-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Minutes, notes and official documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Two interviewers did three joint and 14 separate interviews that were recorded and transcribed verbatim</td>
<td>Digital and paper documents, collected from the program archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>SG (six out of seven members)</td>
<td>PG (11 out of 13 members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17 interviews</td>
<td>Approx. 200 documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LHS 26,4
of demands or conditions required for processes) and one category for “neutral information” (information or facts). The value categories could appear in the same subcategory, i.e. a respondent could see obstacles as well as facilitators for the same subcategory phenomenon. Each change in value category resulted in a division of the text into a new segment. The results are presented in intervals, indicating the strength of perceived values for each content subcategory. The first interval was zero, to show where no text segments were found for a particular value of a content subcategory. The next two intervals displayed low or medium indication. If more than 50% of all classified text segments had a certain value for a subcategory, it was judged as a strong indicator of a value perspective.

A total of 1,211 statements were classified. Proportions of category counts were calculated to determine indications of content patterns (Kohlbacher, 2006; Weber, 1990). Respondents’ participation was based on informed consent. Ethical approval for the study was also obtained from the Ethics Committee of Umeå University, Sweden (Ref. 08-168O).

Results
In total, four categories of perceived challenges in implementation management were identified. Listed in order of proportion of classified statements, these categories concerned the Program’s formal system, mission and goals, processes, and informal systems. In addition to the value categories of obstacles (O) and facilitators (F), a category of prerequisites (P) and an unvalued category of neutral information (I) were identified and included in the analysis. Our analysis reveals a dynamic pattern of valuing between SG and PG, and between PG subgroups. Results are presented by content and area of challenge. Thereafter, a value pattern comparison is presented. Results (symbols and abbreviations in brackets) are presented in four intervals based on the proportion of statements; zero percent (-), 1-25 percent (Ο), 26-50 percent (●) and 51-100 percent (†). The first two intervals are considered as low emphasis, the third interval as high, and the last interval as very high.

Perceived challenges and valuations
Program’s formal system
The program’s formal system was the dominant content category, accounting for almost half (46 percent) of the classified text segments. In total, four subcategories were identified (see Figure 2). The overall value pattern showed a high emphasis on Obstacles, often combined with a high emphasis on Prerequisites. Both SG and PG saw few Facilitators in any of the content subcategories. Equivalent value patterns were observed between SG and PG for Resources. Here, Obstacles and Prerequisites were the dominant value categories. Subcategories Structure and Plan and strategy had a similar group pattern with mainly Obstacles and Prerequisites. Differences were most pronounced in the Staffing subcategory. SG focused on Obstacles and Prerequisites, the PG on Information.

Program’s mission and goals
In total, 20 percent of all text segments were classified according to the program’s mission and goals; four subcategories were identified and valuations placed high
emphasis on Prerequisites for most categories in both groups (see Figure 3). PG had high or very high emphasis on Obstacles for all content subcategories, but also a large proportion of Facilitators in Program monitoring and Goal development. SG put high emphasis on Obstacles in Program monitoring and Goal clarity, but for the latter also expressed Facilitators. SG identified no or very few O or F values regarding Goal development and Goal Focus. Altogether, no common value patterns were found for SG and PG.

Program processes
In total, 21 percent of the classified text segments focused on program processes, mainly on Learning and change, with only a small proportion in Dissemination. Each of the three subcategories had different value patterns, but this was consistent overall for both groups (see Figure 4). For Learning and change the analysis revealed that both groups placed a high emphasis on Facilitators and Prerequisites, and PG also on...
Obstacles. In Activities, the groups strongly emphasized both Obstacles and Facilitators and to a lesser degree, Prerequisites. For the Dissemination subcategory, high emphasis was only detected in terms of Obstacles, which, for SG, were very high.

Program’s informal systems
This content category contained 14 percent of all classified text segments, including three equally large subcategories (see Figure 5). The overall value patterns were similar in both groups, with one exception for SG with a combination of Obstacles and Prerequisites in the Collaboration subcategory. For the subcategories, Collaboration and Role issues, both groups put high or very high emphasis on Obstacles. For Role expectation the high emphasis concerned Facilitators and Prerequisites.

The value analysis reveals a multidimensional view of challenges and indicates the teams’ ability to identify and discuss challenges from several perspectives. This is a prerequisite for the comparison of patterns between groups, as presented below. Figure 6 shows the distribution of valuations for each content subcategory, arranged by proportions of obstacles. The categories with large proportions of obstacles were 1.4 Resources, 4.3 Role issues and 2.4 Goal clarity. Subcategories with a high emphasis on Facilitators were 4.2 Role expectations, 3.1 Learning and change, and 3.2 Activities. No subcategory reached the very high emphasis level for Facilitators. Prerequisites were
### 3. Program processes

#### 3.1 Learning and change
- Learning and change processes  
- Form, approach and language  
- Work forms and views  
- Timing and pace  
- Resources, support and competence  
- Empowerment and participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
<th>Information (I)</th>
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<tr>
<td>SG</td>
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<td>PG</td>
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#### 3.2 Activities
- Meeting forms, content and tools for program activities  
- Organizational condition like economy, planning and experience  
- Context activities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
<th>Information (I)</th>
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#### 3.3 Dissemination
- Strategies and work forms  
- Attitudes and experiences in target groups  
- Other program actors  
- Competence

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<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
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<td>PG</td>
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**Notes:** Zero % (●), 1-25% (○), 26-50% (●) and 51-100% (●). The first two intervals are considered as low emphasis, the third interval as high, and the last interval as very high.

### 4. Program's informal systems

#### 4.1 Collaboration
- Inter and intra group communication, cooperation and relations  
- Form and conditions of collaboration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
<th>Information (I)</th>
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<tr>
<td>SG</td>
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#### 4.2 Role expectations
- Expected and perceived individual roles, management group roles and organizational actor roles

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
<th>Information (I)</th>
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<td>SG</td>
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#### 4.3 Role issues
- Individual and group role conflicts, role distribution, role uncertainty and change  
- Individual role overload  
- Organizational culture and work forms

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<tr>
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<th>Obstacle (O)</th>
<th>Facilitator (F)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (P)</th>
<th>Information (I)</th>
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<td>SG</td>
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<td>PG</td>
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**Notes:** Zero % (●), 1-25% (○), 26-50% (●) and 51-100% (●). The first two intervals are considered as low emphasis, the third interval as high, and the last interval as very high.
found in all subcategories, but less for 3.2 Activities (19 percent) and 4.3 Role issues (10 percent). The combination of high emphasis on both Obstacles and Prerequisites was common in the subcategories. Neutral information was found in almost all subcategories, but the extent varied, from 0 percent in 2.4 Goal clarity to 39 percent in 1.2 Staffing.

**Group comparisons – variation and patterns**

Comparing content subcategories between SG and PG revealed that in 34 out of 56 cases, SG and PG made the same valuation. Generally, content category valuing contained more divergent views. These were 1.2 Staffing, 2.1 Program monitoring, 2.3 Goal development, 2.4 Goal clarity, 3.3 Dissemination, and 4.1 Collaboration. As PG contained three distinct subgroups, a comparison of the subgroup valuations was appropriate. This analysis revealed a large variation in value emphasis between subgroups. In only two of the 56 cases, all three subgroups showed the same value emphasis of a content subcategory. PGc and PGe shared 21 cases of similar valuation of content subcategories, PGc and PGf shared 11, and PGf and PGe shared four. When examining the value patterns for PG subgroups, some content subcategories showed a pronounced scatter (see Figure 7).

**Comparison with documents**

The analysis of minutes and notes from SG and PG meetings was consistent with the interview data analysis. All content categories and subcategories were part of the ongoing discussions in both management teams. The SG and PG were working in parallel, communicating almost solely via the process leader who attended meetings in both groups. No joint meetings were held until the end of the period (when they were initiated by the research team as part of the action-oriented approach). These meetings contained feedback on the study findings, and also provided an opportunity to compare SG and PG responses in the beginning and end with preliminary analysis and conclusions respectively. This step served to validate the findings.

**Discussion**

The interest in exploring the views of program management teams on the implementation of a child health promotion program originates from the question of
why so many change efforts fail. In this case, change included not only working routines in health care and social services, but also increased access to knowledge and innovations for staff, which in turn were aimed at affecting the attitudes and lifestyles of parents and children. Organizational change and development are necessary in a context of changing demands and opportunities, but remain an enigma and a focus of research (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Boonstra, 2004; By, 2005; Pettigrew et al., 2001). The results revealed detailed information on some of the main issues and challenges of managing change, and provided indications on the struggles facing temporary and heterogeneous teams in this context. These results are consistent with well-known challenges in change management (e.g. Burnes, 2009; Carpenter, 2002; Knight et al., 1999; Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1998).

**Program’s formal system**

Few facilitators were identified in the category Program’s formal system. High emphasis was, however, expressed in terms of obstacles and prerequisites. This might

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Program’s formal system</th>
<th>Obstacle (%)</th>
<th>Facilitator (%)</th>
<th>Prerequisite (%)</th>
<th>Information (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Structure</td>
<td>PGc: ○</td>
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<td>PGf: ○</td>
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<td>PGe: ○</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Staffing</td>
<td>PGc: ○</td>
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<td>PGf: ○</td>
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<td>PGe: ○</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Program’s mission and goals</td>
<td>2.2 Goal focus</td>
<td>PGc: ○</td>
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<td>PGf: ○</td>
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<td>PGe: ○</td>
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<td>3. Program processes</td>
<td>3.1 Learning and change</td>
<td>PGc: ○</td>
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<td>PGe: ○</td>
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<td>3.2 Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Program’s informal systems</td>
<td>4.1 Collaboration</td>
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<td>PGf: ○</td>
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**Figure 7.**

Value patterns for PG subgroups
reflect a situation whereby the management teams had no formal power to make decisions for the participant organizations, leaving implementation to depend on other factors, such as negotiation. The results indicate difficulties in creating a suitable program management structure in the varied and complex organizational context, and the importance of the involvement of higher managers (Bryson et al., 2006; Butterfoss et al., 1993; Inman et al., 2011). The approach of two program management teams was adopted at an early stage to ensure organizational anchoring, as well as to achieve operational efficiency. The staffing of the program management teams was based on organizational affiliation as well as expertise. As there were no joint meetings between the teams during the period, nearly all communication was channeled through the process manager as part of his/her coordinating function, which can be viewed as a vulnerable communication strategy (Smith et al., 1994; Miller, 2012). The basic program idea originated in the county council, so plans and strategies were initially formed from the perspective of the health care organization.

Program mission and goals
The valuation of Program’s mission and goals focused on perceived obstacles, this result was also supported by archive data. The deceptive simplicity of the program’s vision of achieving good health for all children may have been easy to agree on, but required a great deal of further clarification and sub-division in order to be an operational entity (Durham et al., 1997; Locke and Latham, 2002). The resulting plethora of levels and perspectives on goals and sub-goals were a concern expressed among respondents. The process management group’s emphasis on facilitators might be explained by the close connection of this group to operational levels and program actions. Otherwise, obstacles generally concerned strategic and organizational issues. A common understanding of the goals was not straightforward, as the views on what should be achieved, and how, as well what to measure and why diverged. There was a clear lack of goal clarity, and the absence of a shared view on goal issues, and how to handle them, probably influenced the issues regarding program monitoring (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Jeffrey et al., 2005).

Program processes
Issues related to program processes mainly concerned views and strategies for learning and change, a core intervention aspect. The program aimed for an implementation of an evidence-based and coherent health promotion approach but the program management teams’ views on individual and organizational learning and change had a potential to influence the strategic decision making on program actions and activities in different ways (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003; 2004). SG and PG showed a consistent value pattern with clearly identified facilitators and prerequisites for both the Learning and change and Activities subcategories. The issues and challenges of program processes mainly concerned activities in relation to the target context, e.g. seminars with staff. One of the immediate facilitating factors identified was the PGs, appointed to the program for their expertise in change management. Facilitation has been emphasized as an important factor for implementation success (Kitson, 2009), and both groups similarly valued the Dissemination subcategory. Perhaps since the dissemination period had recently been planned and initiated, with initial trials, errors and uncertainties, a high or very high emphasis on obstacles for dissemination was observed in the narratives.
Program’s informal system

The program’s informal system included the perceived and expected roles of program actors. Extensive efforts by individuals and groups in the program management teams were required to manage inter and intra relations and tasks, as the role issues entailed tension, ambiguity and dual loyalties, well known role problems (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Collaboration and Role issues had the strongest emphasis on obstacles for all categories. SG and PG placed an equivalent emphasis on this valuing. The Role expectation category contained issues about expectations and views on one’s own and other’s roles. Valuing revealed a common PG and SG pattern on facilitators and prerequisites, indicating a strong conviction of how roles could and should be distributed. Paired with the results for Collaboration and Role issues, we can conclude that this was an unattended core issue. A key challenge for program management teams is therefore to clarify program role expectations in relation to the multiple roles of participants (Bunderson and Reagans, 2011; Marks, 1977; Smith et al., 1994).

Value categories in analysis

SG and PG provided a broad range of perspectives on issues and challenges. The value patterns indicated problem areas and areas where solutions had been identified. In an attempt to find indicators of common and shared strategies and mental models, we found that even though the challenge areas were commonly identified, they still involved notable difficulties for program management when not attended to.

The use of value categories originates from an interest in dilemmas that may arise when a complex factor or phenomenon cannot be regarded as solely an obstacle or a facilitator. We tried to find a way to express this multi-dimensional character instead of focusing solely on barriers (Brownson et al., 2012). Prerequisites and neutral information run the risk of becoming obscure or under-utilized perspectives with little meaning compared to more commonly used categories of obstacles or barriers and facilitators. The results illustrate the nuanced reflections of respondents and produced a rich view of the relevant issues and challenges. For example, an area with a large proportion of perceived obstacles could have a corresponding proportion of perceived prerequisites, indicative of a potential solution. Considering the facilitators, one conclusion might be that actions to improve the situation had been taken or at least considered. As for neutral information, this category contained objective information that could be useful for overcoming obstacles and aiding improvement. One assumption that needs to be verified is whether a balanced value assessment made by program management teams can improve change management processes.

Subgroup comparisons

SG and PG had similar views regarding both content and values, which is suggestive of coherence in perceptions and actions. It is noteworthy that the groups had no joint meetings where their views were discussed, shared or unified. Even though needs and solutions had been identified, views were not easily shared. The lack of shared decision-making discussions might have been reflected in the obstacles identified in areas such as Mission and goal and Informal system. On closer examination, the PG subgroups showed higher variation in valuation of content categories relative to the main group comparison (SG-PG). The similarities in value views in the subgroups were few and mainly concerned obstacles, and prerequisites were no longer clearly
connected to obstacles. The differences were large, but not necessarily surprising, as the three subgroups represented different perspectives and motives for program involvement. What might present a concern is if such variation stems from lack of knowledge and shared mental models of where important challenges reside. To blend organizational cultures, functions and levels demands attention to strategies for collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006; Ensley and Pearce, 2001).

Practitioner implications
The data included expressions of subjective perspectives and experiences related to past, present and future activities. As this study had an action-oriented approach, meetings were held between the researchers and management teams to share preliminary analyses and aid development processes. This was well received and allowed us to further enrich and contextualize the results. The SG and PG participants also stated that this activity led to improved connectivity between groups. Following the study, actions have also been taken within the program to improve formal structures as well as plans and strategies, which can partially be attributed to the research (Korsgaard et al., 1995).

Limitations/implications
The analysis was based on the variability of, and relationships between, classified statements. We sought to establish patterns (and deviations) and chose to calculate proportions of classified text segments to these on a group level. This formed the basis for logical reasoning and conclusions, according to methodologies proposed by Mayring (2000), Mays and Pope (2000) and Stemler (2001). The conclusions should be interpreted with some caution however, due to the small numbers of participants in some subgroups, and the consequently small numbers of categorized segments.

Conclusions
During change processes, issues and challenges for program management teams requiring specific attention include those related to roles and collaborative mechanisms. For example, while issues might appear to be agreed upon, closer inspection may reveal variations in key characteristics as well as in perspectives on solutions. This finding is indicative of the need for understanding the internal processes and mental models of program management teams, and their roles as change agents handling expected as well as unexpected challenges. A systematic multi-perspective analysis including prerequisites and information, as well as obstacles and facilitators, might constitute a useful approach for practical program management and research. Shared mental models of important program goals, roles and responsibilities can become a foundation for coherent support of change and development. General and detailed strategies for program goals are important for teams in large change attempts, regardless of hierarchical level. Program strategies might also gain from starting and ending with systematic and attentive communication with the actors involved. If the situation benefits from a mix of individuals with different functions, experiences, languages and cultures, dealing with different assumptions, views and values is likely. A key challenge is how to make this an advantage and not an obstacle.
Participants, and especially key change agents, involved in launching large-scale change programs in complex organizational settings might gain useful information from this study regarding existing challenges and the need for strategies to identify and handle difficulties as well as opportunities. Our results illustrate nuanced and multi-faceted reflections on core challenges, and show that role obstacles and goal issues were well recognized. The key challenge that emerged was how to ensure that such reflections are incorporated in a systematic and continuous process of communication and action to promote change and development.

Post script: after finishing the study, the SG has been dissolved and its functions incorporated in a county-wide collaboration responsible for coordinating work to improve child health and wellbeing.

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Further reading


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