



WHO IS THE CAPTAIN? – The Role of Leadership in Sustainable Small Cooperatives. – Linde van Wichen

How can leadership contribute to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher's cooperatives operating in the north of the Netherlands?

Introduction

Previous research showed that **leadership and collaboration are two elements that can contribute to the transition toward sustainable business models.** A business design that is based on collaboration is cooperative. The number of cooperatives in the Netherlands increased steadily since 2007 and most are active in the agricultural- and food sector. Fishing is part of this sector, and sustainable fishing is getting a lot of attention in the European Union and the Dutch government. However, leadership and collaboration are important elements for the transition of sustainable business, and sustainable fishing is getting more attention, **there is a lack of knowledge about the role of leadership in collaborative business designs, in other words, cooperatives.**



Therefore, the research question is as follows: **How can leadership contribute to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher's cooperatives operating in the north of the Netherlands?**

Theoretical Background

Previous research identified three sustainable leadership tasks: 1) setting direction, 2) creating alignment, and 3) maintaining commitment. Therefore, the following aspects are investigated:

1. Introduction and discussion of sustainable principles
2. Decision-making processes
3. Stakeholder engagement

Methods

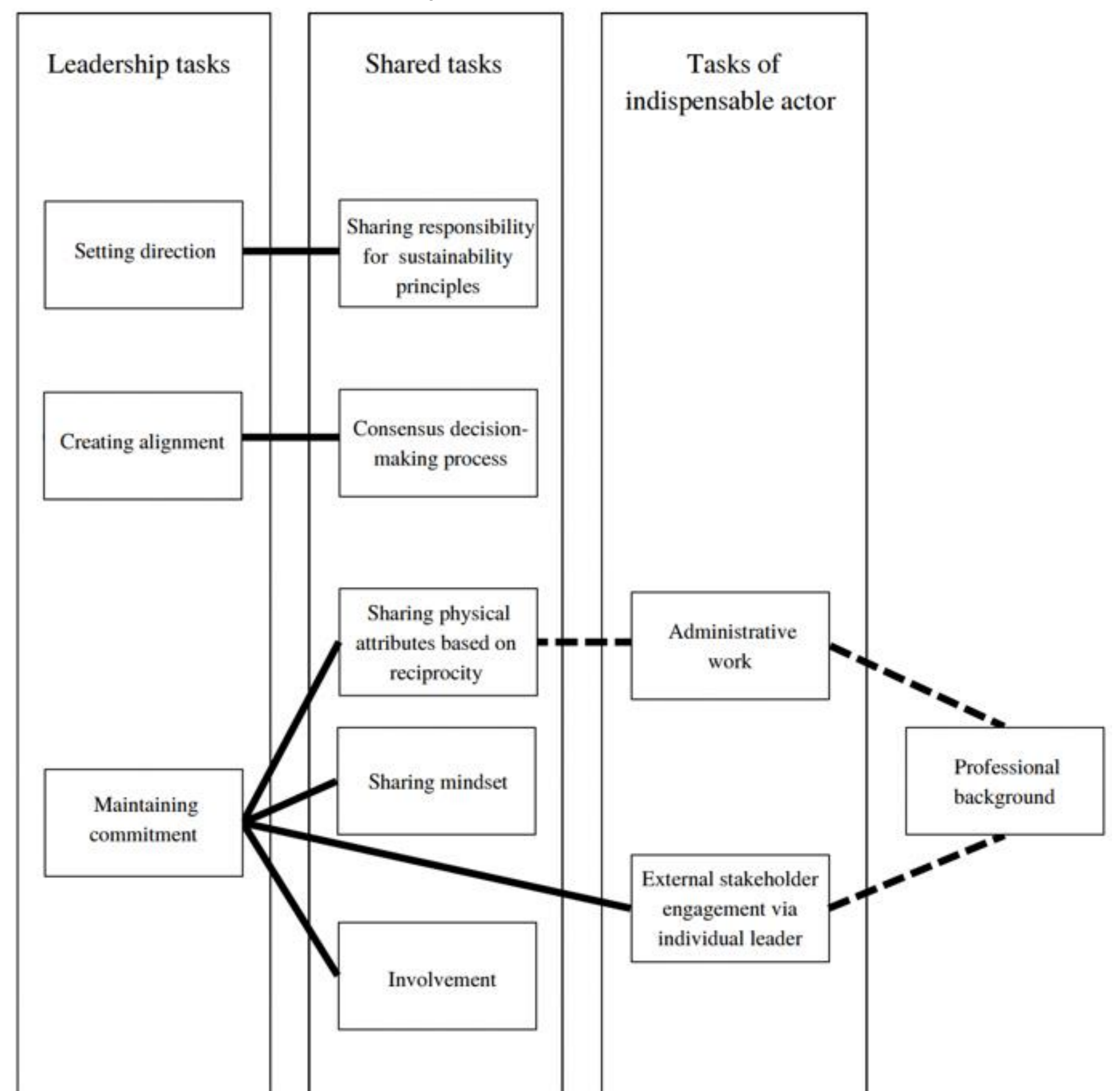
To answer this study's research question, a **qualitative single case study approach was chosen, using semi-structured interviews and meeting minutes analyses to collect data on how leadership is shaped in a small sustainable cooperative in the north of the Netherlands.** Analysing meeting minutes is used as an additional source to confirm collected information from interviews. The case organisation was as follows:

- Legal form cooperative
- Based in the north of the Netherlands
- Cooperative members are board members too
- Four active members
- Sustainable fishing



Results

- All three sustainable leadership tasks are shared except "External stakeholder engagement".
- Administrative work is not one of the sustainable leadership tasks but in this case, is seen as a leader's task.
- **Despite the fact that the sustainable leadership tasks are shared, still one person is seen as the leader by the stakeholders of the cooperative and the leader himself.**
- The leader is seen as an indispensable actor of the cooperative due to his roles which he owes to his professional background.
- One individual as an indispensable actor is seen as a weakness.



Discussion

- Leadership does not have to be managerial, **function title does not make you a leader in a small sustainable cooperative**, tasks do.
- The importance of stakeholder engagement in sustainable leadership could be a reason that the person with this role is seen as the leader.
- Formal voting is not a major form of decision control in small sustainable cooperatives, but agreement is.

Conclusion

The conclusion is that **collaboration and shared leadership tasks contribute to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher's cooperatives operating in the north of the Netherlands.** One person as an indispensable actor is seen as a weakness and therefore does not contribute to the transition toward sustainable business models.

GO COLLABORATE !