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Lessons Learnt by Process Supervisors from Supporting School Organisers' Development Work within the Initiative Co-operation for the Best School Possible (CBS)

By Marcia Håkansson Lindqvist[*] & Agneta Persson[±]

The Swedish government initiative Co-operation for the Best School Possible (CBS) (Samverkan för Bästa Skola, CBS) is aimed specifically at schools that are deemed to have the greatest challenges in terms of improving their knowledge results on their own or increasing equivalence within and between school and preschool units (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). The school development work is done in tripartite cooperation between the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) (Skolverket), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and school organisers. The aim of this study was to explore and analyse the final reports written by a HEI's process supervisors following the completion CBS with seven school organisers. The following research questions were posed: 1) How do the process supervisors describe their lessons learnt from the co-operation process in the final reports? and 2) What challenges and opportunities are described in the reports? The results of the study show that the process supervisors face challenges in creating beneficial conditions for participation, anchoring, consensus and ownership within the school organisers and the school units. Opportunities for co-operation and learning are found through the process supervisors' flexibility, responsiveness, adaptation and self-reflection. Aspects such as communication, joint learning and time appear to be central. Exchanges of experience via various arenas, forums and networks, both internal and external, could be important to support process supervisors. How co-operation processes among the HEIs process supervisors in their work with school organisers to support and advance continue school development will have impact om strengthening students' learning.

Keywords: *Collaboration, Dialogue, Exchanges of experience, Professional development, School development*

Introduction

The Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) decides the right to an equal education, an education that is expected to be compensatory and offset differences in students' different circumstances. Despite the intentions of the Education Act, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) review, *Improving Schools in Sweden*, showed that differences in equivalence between and within schools in Sweden have increased and that many Swedish schools lacked the ability to systematically address the problem. Furthermore, the OECD (2015) reported that many schools were left alone in their efforts to address the problems after the School Inspectorate's reviews. Based on these results, the Government commissioned the Swedish Agency for Education (SNAE) (Skolverket) to begin

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school development work (U2015/3357). In 2016, the SNAE presented a plan for carrying out this assignment and since then, almost 150 school organisers, spread over more than 400 school units and some 100 preschool units, have participated in the initiative Co-operation for the Best School Possible (CBS) (SNAE, 2022). Thus, CBS is one of the most extensive school development initiatives undertaken in Sweden in recent times. CBS is specifically aimed at those organizations that are deemed to have the greatest challenges in improving their own knowledge results or increasing equivalence within and between school and preschool units (U2019/03786/S).

CBS can be said to be timely and a natural development based on the paradigm shift emerging today, where school organizers and universities are increasingly expected to collaborate and contribute to an increased benefit aspect. There are several government policy documents that indicate the government's move in this direction, as well as the accompanying government funding and incentives. For example, the official government report *Research together* (SOU, 2018:19) emphasizes that research issues should be based on the problems and challenges that arise in the school practices, and the final report recommends strengthening the participation of the school leaders in research. The bill *Research, Freedom, Future - Knowledge and Innovation for Sweden* (Prop. 2020/21:60) proposes a legislative amendment that aims to clarify the mission of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to collaborate with the surrounding society. In summary, there is strong policy pressure to shift the focus from knowledge transfer or mediation to bringing together HEIs and school practice around different knowledge, challenges and issues.

CBS can be interpreted in the context of contemporary societal changes. CBS emerged at a time when many voices were drawing attention to counter-reactions to *New Public Management* (NPM). For example, Kronqvist Håård (2021) describes New Public Governance (NPG) as a trend for more horizontal governance via networks and relationships where interactions between actors are in focus and a system that is based on there being room for autonomy for the actors in the networks. Similar thoughts are put forward by Nihlfors (2018) when she points out the importance of horizontal communities rather than vertical ones. Nilhlfors (2018) argues for "leaving the implementation mind map and having the courage to develop locally, based on shared visions" (Nihlfors, 2018, p. 11). Future dialogue should be characterized by trust and confidence, which has long been in short supply in the Swedish context. NPG is about governance being shaped in co-operation between politics and representatives at different levels and, as a result, trust, participation and relationship capital become essential prerequisites. Governance takes place primarily through professional networks, where inter-organizational relationships and interpersonal levels become important: "The winds are blowing towards new governance ideals where trust and co-operation between school actors form the basis" (Österberg, 2018, p. 80)

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to investigate and analyse the final reports written by one HEI's process supervisors following the completion of CBS with seven school organisers. The following research questions were posed: *1) How do the process supervisors describe their lessons learnt from the co-operation process in the final reports?* and *2) What challenges and opportunities are described in the reports?*

Background

The origin of the policy pressure described above, and the accompanying government incentives is a belief that knowledge is generally enriched when multiple perspectives meet in co-operation (SOU, 2018;19; Prop 2016/17:50; Prop 2020/21:60). Knowledge generated from a context where both theoretical and practical perspectives have contributed is promote quality. In practice-based research, co-operation is a starting point and consequently there are several experiences and lessons that can enrich CBS. In CBS, the HEI is not considered a norm, but the knowledge and voices of the organizations are expected to be equal, which could be a challenge. A distinctive feature of CBS is that it does not see HEI participation and contributions solely in terms of traditional words such as training and education, but instead there is an ambition to contribute to locally adapted support where words such as guidance and process support are based on a research foundation better describe the support and role of the HEIs. One of CBS's contributions is that it currently creates a unique contact area and arena for HEIs and school organisers to meet around the challenges, opportunities and approaches described above. The focus on equality and interactivity between activities and HEIs appears to be a governmental statement of intent, and CBS can be seen here as an example of when political wishful thinking is realized.

Different Perspectives on Co-operation

Vangrieken et al (2017) discuss the importance of teachers' professional development and learning within the framework of collegial co-operation in the form of Teacher Communities (TCs). The different roles of teachers, school leaders, school organisers and school authorities and researchers are described using a scale between a bottom-up and a top-down perspective. According to this categorization, formal initiatives are mainly characterized by external actors as a kind of traditional knowledge transfer. In contrast, teachers have a more active role in what is referred to as the emergent and participatory communities. Here practical experiences and challenges are given great importance. The difference between the two is that emergent communities are informal and malleable in nature, while participatory communities have a more formalized structure with goals and frameworks clearly defined from the outset.

The Swedish School Research Institute (2022) notes that in practice there are no sharp boundaries and that teacher communities all work differently based on

different goals and purposes of school development. While continuity is highlighted as a success factor, it is noted, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, that various unexpected events usually arise during the process. In CBS, it is unusual for "interventions to be implemented according to the original plan to the letter" and there may therefore need to be flexible (Rogberg et al., 2021, p. 17). Based on the categorization of this research review, CBS can most closely resemble so-called emerging communities. CBS is characterized by a view of school development where what is to come is largely shaped together. Structures, frameworks and goals exist, but nevertheless the actual work is very much characterized by process-oriented work where goals can be moved and frameworks changed along the way.

The Evaluation by the SNAE

The SNAE has, in accordance with the government assignment, reported on how the implementation of CBS is progressing. The SNAE compiles the final reports submitted by the school leaders and conducts its own process evaluations (SNAE, 2022). The SNAE's report (2022) on the assignment of CBS is based on the 2021 co-operation with 17 different school organisers.

CBS strives to strengthen the school organizations' own ownership, but here experience shows that it can take a long time and a lot of effort before HEI and the school organisers meet in their different expectations of how this should actually be done: "the dividing line is thin between governing oneself and allowing oneself to be governed without being aware of it" (Öjien et al., p. 181). In other words, there needs to be continuous negotiation and transformation or mediation between the actors involved in CBS, and this is one of the reasons why the aspect of time is central. The SNAE (2022) summarizes: "All parties involved need to be clear in their communication about expectations, responsibilities and arrangements to create consensus and build a foundation for the development work" (SNAE, 2022, p. 30).

The assignment from the Government to the SNAE(U2015/3357/S) emphasizes the importance of co-operation:

> "The SNAE shall, in co-operation with each school leaders concerned, identify initiatives that can strengthen the school leader's ability to plan, follow up and develop education so that the knowledge results in the selected schools are raised and the equivalence within and between the schools increases... The SNAE shall then agree with each school organiser concerned on how the initiatives are to be designed and implemented. (U2015/3357/S)

Thus, the SNAE's work with the school organisers during the first part of the CBS process is guiding and crucial for the HEIs that continue to work with the school organisers.

HEIs' Lessons learnt

Like the SNAE, the Research and Development Support (FOUS) also presents lessons learnt in various reports. The *Final report FOUS 2018 - 2021* (Roberg et al., 2021) provides a final account of the HEIs' work during the period 2018 - 2021. The report describes CBS as part of the ongoing change in the Swedish school system where a higher degree of co-operation is expected and that CBS is unique in the sense of tripartite co-operation. A solid foundation for school development is also focused on in descriptions of the work carried out in tripartite cooperation. FOUS and the SNAE believe that the CBS work differs from the work that HEIs are used to carrying out in the form of various external assignments. The work with CBS is more of a locally adapted improvement support rather than a traditional university or commissioned education and, based on this, the importance of flexibility, good communication and co-operation skills is highlighted (Rogberg et al., 2021).

High staff turnover can have a negative impact on the implementation of CBS and turnover in leadership can threaten development work. Achieving stable structures requires a culture of responsibility and sustained work with a high level of participation, both at school unit level and at the level of the school organiser. The fact that initiatives are designed to strengthen groups rather than individuals and that structures are built so that the school leader does not become the sole bearer of the improvement work are success factors for sustainable school development, which influences the design of the initiatives. CBS work can be said to take on wicked problems in schools, which seldom can be met with simple analyses, given targets and simple measures (Rogberg et al., 2021).

FOUS also emphasizes in its final report that the CBS work places great demands "not only on theoretical knowledge but also on personal skills and judgment" (Rogberg et al., 2021, p. 19). Another important aspect is how time is used: "The level of activity in the periods between the HEI meetings has proved to be crucial both for learning in the relevant development area and for participation and ownership" (Rogberg et al., 2021, p.18).

The FOUS final report (Rogberg et al., 2021) focuses on experiences and lessons learnt from the local school development support to the relevant school leaders. The report highlights three future development areas, seen from an HEI perspective. The first area concerns an identified need to further develop support for the mobilization process to enable earlier interventions and thus reduce possible waiting times. The second identified area of development describes the need to further explore the outcomes of HEIs' CBS interventions, particularly in relation to the mission of CBS and the aim of strengthening equity within and between schools. The third and final development area is about strengthening the school development capacity of HEIs in relation to specific activities and school types and regarding preschool (Rogberg et al., 2021).

Rönnström and Håkansson (2021) have developed a framework for school development capacity. The framework can be seen as a common starting point and research-based conditions for success in strengthening the improvement capacity of organizations and improving the quality of education. The framework consists of

five aspects that clarify the meaning of and reasons why improvement capacity can be considered essential for practical CBS work. The five circled aspects of improvement capacity that are considered particularly essential are: school leaders' ability to communicate agendas, to activate different identified agents, to organize support as well as meeting and learning arenas, to start from the local context, and distributed leadership (Rönnström & Håkansson, 2021). These five aspects are important success factors that school leaders and other key persons can use in their work to plan, implement and follow up their work to improve the quality of education (Rönnström & Håkansson, 2021).

The CBS Process - The SNAE, the School organiser and the HEI in Co-operation

The CBS process begins in the first semester with the SNAE working together with the school organiser to conduct a current situation analysis in which various causes of the challenges are identified. Based on this, work then follows to formulate various descriptions of objectives for the work ahead, which are collected in the so-called *action plans*. Representatives from the HEIs are usually present at some of these occasions, via tripartite discussions. After about a year's work, the SNAE increasingly transfers the co-operation with school organiser to a selected HEI. However, the SNAE is still present throughout the co-operation period through the various occasions for interim reports that are organized. On these occasions, representatives from HEIs are usually invited and, once again, opportunities for tripartite discussions are created.

During the following two-year co-operation period, various process supervisors from the HEI participate. The process supervisors are researchers and practitioners who work in pairs to support the work of the school organizations. As the co-operation begins to end, the process for the process supervisors to write the HEI's final report begins by each team initially having a preliminary meeting where the focus is on frameworks, formalities, challenges, purpose, etc. Then the writing work continues based on the team pairs that have worked most closely with the preschool, primary school and/or leadership group. Finally, all process supervisors involved meet to find patterns and common lessons in the final report regarding lessons learnt from the project.

For some selected school organisers, the SNAE conducts a special report seminar. Here, the various process facilitators from the SNAE and the HEIs' process supervisors who have collaborated meet to exchange experiences, learn and further develop, with the final report as a base for these meetings.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Lindensjö and Lundgren's (2018) theoretical framework on the governance of reforms. Lindensjö and Lundgren (2018) use the concepts of *formulation, transformation and mediation,* and *realisation* arenas to describe where and how interpretations can take place. The formulation arena is characterized by the actual formulation of, for example, goals, plans and content through selection

processes. The realisation arena is characterized by the process by which "public plans, reforms or programs come to fulfilment" (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2018, p. 176). Between these two arenas lies the transformation and mediation arena: "It is thus not possible to explain the relationship between the formulation arena and the realisation arena other than as a mediated and transformed relationship" (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2018, p. 175). Something happens in the mediation between goals and content and the methods used to realize them, or to put them into practice: "Thus, a gap between the formulation and realisation arenas" (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2018, p. 172). Lindensjö and Lundgren (2018) argue that the earlier the consensus between these different stakeholders in the formulation arena, the greater the concern for a gap between the reform and its target visions, and those who are set to implement the reform in the realisation arena in the practical work of teachers and school leaders. If stakeholders are involved early in the process and contribute with their values and/or interests, the reform risks being met with resistance; sometimes, according to these researchers, reforms may need to be framed as a win for teachers if they are to be successful. Based on this, the conclusion is drawn that; "Increased decentralisation leads to demands for professional competence" (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2018, p. 167). A distinctive feature of CBS can be said to be that interpretation in the formulation and tranformation arena takes place in tripartite co-operation, i.e. between activities (school organisers), authorities (the SNAE) and the HEIs. One concern with many areas of interpretation, many stakeholders and actors already in the formulation arena is that decisions and goal descriptions tend to become increasingly abstract due to the above-mentioned compromises and different perspectives. Within CBS, the overall goal is to contribute to increased equivalence, a goal that many may be perceived as abstract. Lindensjö and Lundgren (2018) argue that a goal is not only abstract but also highlight that the school's ability to achieve social equality appears to be precarious: "Whatever it is that students bring to school seems to be just as important as what the school provides" (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2018, p. 154). Despite knowledge that the activation and involvement of stakeholders is crucial for the outcome of reforms, there is still a belief that there are rational solutions to complex problems in the world of schooling. Lindensjö and Lundgren (2018) argue that Swedish schools today seem to lack what is necessary to move forward in a successful way - namely knowledge, time and long-term strategies.

Methodology/Materials and Methods

The material in this study consists of seven final reports (2017 - 2022) from one HEI. The final reports describe lessons learnt after the co-operation efforts in CBS carried out in seven different municipalities. This two-year co-operation had, as previously mentioned, ended by describing the work carried out in a final report. The SNAE is the recipient of the final reports. The format of the reports has changed slightly over time. For example, the headings in the final reports have remained the same over the five years, although the number of words allowed has varied between years and municipalities. The reports cover between 7-14 pages of text, depending

on the scope of the assignment. The extracts from the reports have been identified as School Organiser 1-7 (SO1-SO7).

The data material has been analysed based on Thematic Analysis (TA) according to Braun and Clarke (2019). Braun and Clarke (2019) describe TA as iterative, open, organic and flexible. Braun and Clark (2019) suggest that this, now somewhat further developed, approach is best described using the concept of reflexive thematic analysis. In the present study, we have adopted the starting point emphasized by Braun and Clark (2019), to strive for meaningful knowledge production:

> Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves. Quality reflexive TA is not about following procedures 'correctly' (or about 'accurate' and 'reliable' coding, or achieving consensus between coders), but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Reading and allowing the final reports, to allow them to tell their story repeatedly has been central. This is in line with Braun and Clark (2019) who argue that different themes do not lie passively waiting to be discovered but instead need to be considered as narratives. Another starting point in the reflexive thematic analysis is the subjectivity of the researcher.

Larsson (2005) describes the importance of the researcher declaring their personal experiences. We have knowledge and experience of CBS, both as coordinators and process supervisors. The disadvantage of this is that one risks becoming a prisoner of one's own preconceptions and may find it difficult to distance oneself. However, the advantage is that it can provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena to be studied, in a way that cannot be done by the insider (Lundgren, 1999). Finally, the researcher's communication skills are considered crucial, both in terms of asking the right questions in the right way and the ability to listen to the answer (Merriam, 2011). It is our hope that our prior understanding and experience of CBS has enriched the analysis.

In this study, seven final reports were analysed. The final reports can be considered public documents. In the analysis work, both the school organizations and the HEI have been de-identified for reasons of confidentiality, in accordance with good research practice (Swedish Research Council, 2017). As regards the limitations of the study, a small number of final reports have been analysed. It is conceivable that a larger sample would provide deeper insights in a document analysis. However, the selected final reports can be said to provide a good picture of the process supervisors' statements, as well as the challenges and opportunities expressed by the process supervisors in the final reports.

Results

The results section presents the categories that were constructed from the final reports. The categories are *Participation, anchoring, consensus, parallel processes, continuity, ownership, exchange of experience and time.*

Participation

In the final reports, several process supervisors mention the importance of participation. In some interventions, the process supervisors saw the importance of involving politics right from the start of the intervention: "The school organiser decided to also include the elected representatives in some of the CBS interventions and actively address parts of the content of the intervention directly to the responsible politicians… considered a strong success factor" (SO1). Another prerequisite may be the involvement of the administrative management: "Through the involvement of the administrative management, the various processes/ development work… can harmonize with each other to a greater extent instead of the other way around, i.e. competing and thus creating concern and frustration" (SO2). To achieve participation and well-established work, the leadership of both the school leaders and the school organiser is of the utmost importance. Furthermore, the close leadership and involvement of the school leader played a major role in the success of the key staff: "The involvement of school leaders in school development work legitimizes both the mission and the role of the school's key staff, whose competence in leading their colleagues and involvement in school development has been strengthened during the intervention" (SO3).

Participation is seen as a way of ensuring that all staff are involved and benefit from the lessons learnt during the process: "A contributing factor to raising the schools' capacity for improvement has been the involvement of the schools, mainly in the design and content of the intervention, but also in terms of how all school staff are involved" (SO3). However, reaching all staff could be a challenge: "Consistently, participants now see a risk that the learning stays with the staff who have been most involved in CBS (i.e. school leaders and key staff) and that the rest of the school staff therefore needs to be more involved in the school development processes" (SO3). In the final reports, process supervisors see the importance of involving all staff has also meant including all units: "Another success factor has been that there has been an intervention for all staff in the preschools. This has made it easier for school leaders and key staff in the work of involving all staff and getting a boost in the improvement work" (SO4). The fact that not all units had been included was also seen as a potential challenge: "There are challenges when two of the school units [...] are not formally part of CBS" (SO5).

Anchoring

Anchoring the upcoming work seems to be essential according to the process supervisors' statements in the final reports. Together with the importance of participation, anchoring can be said to be an important aspect in reducing the

resistance that is common in different types of school development work: "The implication is that it is not possible to assume the existence of a receptive capacity among all staff" (SO6). Anchoring also proved to be essential in terms of the actual human resources available in the organizations. Assuming that sufficient time is available for those concerned must not be a foregone conclusion: "Some schools are under hard pressure with too small staff groups or absent staff that the staff present cannot set aside time for the joint or personal pedagogical and didactic everyday work" (SO6).

Another way of approaching the resistance that occurred in some places was to communicate and clarify the staff's different expectations of the joint work. Here the conditions varied, for example, one school leader already had a good understanding that the HEI should not primarily "deliver a lecture" (SO4), while the situation was the opposite in others (SO6). Regardless, the final reports emphasize the importance of communicating the different expectations at the start: "The parties' expectations of co-operation within the framework of CBS are made clear at an initial stage. The HEI's experience is that this is time well invested as the understanding of the mission and the parties' expectations can shape the outcome of the CBS" (SO3). Closely linked to expectations is, as it seems, the understanding of the mission, which is repeated: "In order to provide help for self-help, it is essential to meet expectations about co-operation" (SO7).

Consensus

Besides the importance of discussing the partners' different expectations of the assignment, the need to create a common understanding was also identified. The need for consensus was raised by the process supervisors in the final reports on several levels. This was seen between schools regarding the internal work of the organisations: "During the intervention we experienced discrepancies in how schools interpret, use and understand the purpose of the Team Plans. For this not to counteract favourable school development, the administrative and school management need to work towards greater consensus on the purpose and function of Team Plans" (SO3).

Another example of the importance of consensus relates to the documents on which co-operation is based: "Discrepancies between the school's action plan and the HEI's offer response risks leading to both misunderstanding and dissatisfaction between the school leader/school, staff and the HEI. Therefore, it is it is wise to start CBS activities with a joint and in-depth analysis of the action plan and its foreseeable consequences in relation to the objectives and activities specified in the tender" (SO6). If the work was not characterised by enough conversations about consensus, challenges arose:

> There were times when it became problematic to come to a common view on how these, in terms of the mission, should best be designed and staged and the reasons for this. Here, too, more in-depth work on initially creating a common understanding of the co-operation facilitates the work. (SO3)

Parallel Processes

In several final reports, the process supervisors repeatedly draw attention to various parallel development projects processes that are ongoing in the organisations. During the course of the programme, the HEI has perceived that there periodically have been too many initiatives at the same time, fearing that this has affected the outcome. The process supervisor quoted one participant: "It is raining interventions on us, everything seems good and relevant, but we can't take in this much at once" (SO5).

The school organiser needs to recognise the parallel projects processes going on in the organisation: "Another lesson is the importance of attention to the different processes and actors involved in the school organisers development work. One concern is that there is more competing development work than complementary" (SO5). Based on this picture of many parallel projects, there is the need for coordination. For the school organiser, this became clear when coordination was lacking: "Coordination between the units was non-existent and the school organisers' own quality developers did a good job in trying to coordinate all parts of the initiative, but coordination initiated by the SNAE and the relevant HEI would probably have been welcome" (SO1).

One success factor has been that the school organiser appointed a coordinator who was involved throughout the CBS process. The coordinator was able to facilitate the development work and capture lessons learnt, knowledge and information to the school organiser's administrator, who in turn made strategic decisions to disseminate knowledge to more preschools in the city: "The coordinator is also a key link to the school board, given the complex situation of the participating preschools, with reference to the external factors previously described external factors" (SO4). Here the HEI recognises an enhanced role for the coordinator, as the coordinator also acts as a communication link between different units in the chain of command.

Continuity

The majority of final reports describe continuity and stability as success factors. Continuity has been important at the HEI:

> The HEI has used the same provider for all activities during the CBS period. This has been perceived as successful by both the school organiser and the schools. The providers have been able to both keep the links in the chain of command together and act as intermediaries within the chain of command, which in turn has made it possible to support the challenges of individual activities and to problematise experiences both up and down the chain of command. (SO6)

Continuity and stability have created good conditions for the HEI to support the school organiser's various activities. Furthermore, continuity and stability have been an important aspect of the activities themselves:

> There has been continuity in the co-operation, both among key staff and school leaders and among the process supervisors. Trusting co-operation takes time to establish and by not having to 'start over', the development work becomes more sustainable. This continuity has ensured that we have achieved the necessary depth in the dialogues. (SO2)

Stability and continuity have also been important according to the HEI: "Another success factor is that all the school leaders and key staff have been the same for virtually the entire initiative, which has contributed to stability and continuity as a carrier of CBS" (SO4). In other words: "The HEI has also experienced that continuity in terms of participating staff has been an important factor for the CBS work" (SO7).

However, an example is also given of when staff changes could potentially benefit the work: "During the implementation of the intervention, there have been changes of centralised persons in the administrative management. One lesson learnt is that these changes can be both beneficial to the implementation of the initiative as well as a problem in terms of continuity" (SO2).

Ownership

Developing ownership of the processes by the school organisers themselves is described in some of the final reports, using the concept of gap learning: "When the school development process continues between meetings with the HEI, an active in-between learning and ownership are created, which is a prerequisite for continued long-term work" (SO3). Furthermore, it turns out that how the school organiser develops its own ownership seems to be of importance in terms of how the co-operation takes place:

> When the HEI is responsive and flexible to the needs of the schools in co-operation, we are better placed to 'get there'. By having progression in the supervision, where we initially take a slightly larger space, and then increasingly take on the role of critical friend, we see that key staff and school leader are given increased ownership and how they gradually become more active in their everyday development work, the so-called in-between learning. (SO2)

In several of the final reports, the HEI's process supervisors emphasise the importance of flexibility at the HEI: "It is important that the HEI both contributes to maintaining the direction of the initiative and is flexible and responsive to unforeseen events during the course of the initiative" (SO3). Flexibility is about being responsive, adaptable and following up:

> Working with high-needs schools requires flexibility, patience and the ability to establish trust and build good relationships. The HEI has endeavoured to be as accommodating as possible, for example by adapting and rescheduling meetings, reminding and emailing, despite a lack of feedback. This has been perceived as a success factor and is a prerequisite for co-operation. (SO7)

Flexibility and responsiveness are seen as ways of creating benefical conditions for the work in terms of relational aspects: "The focus on the relational aspects of the co-operation contributed to the schools being open with both strengths and development areas during the course of the intervention" (SO3). Another important aspect that the process supervisors highlight is the attitude of those involved in the work: "The unpretentiousness and openness of the school leaders and key staff have also been contributing factors to success' (SO4). This can also be linked to the process supervisors' approach to building ownership: "Encouragement and affirmation can help to increase self-confidence and the courage to scrutinise one's own activities, two essential elements of the HEI's work with schools" (SO3).

Sharing Experiences

In the final reports, the process supervisors highlight the importance of the school leader continuing to organise exchanges of experiences after the CBS intervention. These meetings create opportunities to develop and disseminate the lessons learnt and the knowledge that has emerged during CBS: "The school leader's initiative to hold a closing conference was seen as a success factor, this provided an opportunity for valuable evaluation dialogue and a starting point for the school leader's continued work after CBS has ended" (SO1). This process supervisor also notes positive aspects of the exchange of experiences: 'The HEI looks favourably on the signs of development that are now taking place, one concrete example of which is the "show and tell" days initiated by the school organiser and where the voices of key staff are also beginning to be of interest" (SO7).

In the final reports, the process supervisors also emphasise the importance of continuous and joint learning together: "The HEI generally and repeatedly discovers that we need to continue working together with those affected to understand, sometimes reformulate and work with ownership and everyone's participation regarding the goals of the development work" (SO5).

This in turn can lead to new ideas for further development of co-operation in general: "In its work, the HEI [has] in some cases had challenges in achieving successful peer learning between some of the school units. The HEI therefore also questions whether and how we could have organised ourselves in other alternative ways" (SO5). At the same time, the process supervisors see when the interventions seem to have been well organised:

> The HEI's view is that the organisation of the interventions, which included both the school leader, the management key staff and all staff, has been beneficial for the development work. This has meant both the opportunity to strengthen the organisation and created opportunities for increased participation and consensus among all staff. (SO2)

Time

The fact that development work in an organization takes time and needs to take time recurs in several of the final reports. The process supervisors note an increased awareness of time: "Awareness [has] increased that a change process takes time"

(SO4). Once process supervisor sees an increased understanding among the participants: "One pattern is that the participants at the three primary schools say they have gained a deeper understanding that development work needs and must be allowed to take time to become long-term and" for real" (SO2). In one final report, the process supervisor links the importance of time to achieve a move from theory to practice: "It is challenging for those involved to move from reflection to action, from learning to doing, where time is a crucial aspect" (SO7).

Another aspect of time is when time has been scarce. More time would have been desired to achieve clearer results. This makes it difficult to describe changes or results: "The HEI's CBS effort with regard to the school organiser has been limited to two training days, otherwise the work at administrative level has been carried out in co-operation with an external consultant. For this reason, it is difficult to identify clear lessons or patterns in terms of the HEI's input" (SO2).

Other reflections on time can be thought to be related to the time to organize for work, and when in time the HEI should enter the process. This highlights the challenges faced by organizations in formulating goals in the action plans and the challenges that arise for the process supervisors:

> Schools' previous experiences, their history of improvement, are important in the development work. It is difficult to say whether the differences we note between primary and secondary schools are general differences. One conclusion, however, is that the specific conditions of the school type regarding the improvement culture are important. The schools' improvement agenda is set out in the action plan; these action plans are sometimes poorly anchored in the activities and may contain unclear descriptions of objectives. This needs to be taken into account, and the two aspects raise the question of whether the HEI should have been included more regularly in the tripartite dialogues which were carried out on an ongoing basis. (SO3)

Furthermore, the HEI's process supervisor sees that the objectives in the action plans can sometimes be found to be many and difficult to formulate. Getting to grips with these objectives is time-consuming in itself:

> The HEI generally and recurrently discovers that we, together with those concerned, need to continue the work of understanding, sometimes reformulating and working with ownership and everyone's participation regarding the objectives of the development work. A concrete example of this is that we note in our results descriptions that we have rarely had time to address all the goals formulated in the action plans, sometimes due to lack of time and in other cases because there have been other parts that have proved to be more fundamental to get in place, such as, for example, organization, structure and cultural aspects. In other words, a lesson learnt is that it seems to be difficult to describe the challenges, complexity and reality of practice in the initially produced documents, i.e current situation analysis, action plans. (SO5)

Results in Summary

In summary, the statements of the process supervisors in the final reports describe several challenges and opportunities in the CBS process at the school organisers. The categories that emerged in the final reports were: Creating beneficial

conditions for participation, anchoring, consensus, ownership, parallel processes, continuity, exchange of experience and time which are all important for achieving results in the change work for the school organisers. At the same time, according to the final reports, the process supervisors see opportunities through flexibility, responsiveness, adaptation and self-reflection to help the school leaders take ownership of their own development process.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore and analyse the final reports written by a HEI's process supervisors following the completion of CBS with seven school organisers. The following research questions were posed: *1) How do the process supervisors describe their lessons learnt from the co-operation process in the final reports?* and *2) What challenges and opportunities are described in the reports?* The results of the study showed the importance of participation, anchoring, consensus, parallel processes, continuity, ownership, experience sharing and time. The process supervisors' statements about the CBS work highlight both challenges and opportunities in working together with the SNAE and the school organisers to support the school leader's work to transform or mediate and realise CBS: to interpret CBS as an intervention, to mediate the CBS work or to do CBS. Based on Lindensjö and Lundgren's (2018) framework, the CBS process can be seen as mediated in the transformation and mediation arena, in the space between the formulation and realisation arenas.

In the final reports, the process supervisors express the importance of involving everyone, from management to staff, in order to achieve success with the CBS process. A concern may be whether CBS really reaches all staff. The CBS work is based primarily on strengthening key staff and school leaders who, in turn, need to provide active learning to and with other staff between the times the HEI is present digitally or physically. CBS places demands on commitment that school leaders can sometimes find difficult to meet (SNAE, 2022; Rogberg et al., 2021). The school leader and key staff risk being overloaded, instead of relieved, something that HEIs need to take into account in their ambitions to involve all staff. The question is also whether CBS work reaches out those who are not as enthusiastic about the SBS process. Based on Lindensjö and Lundgren's (2018), this could be interpreted as the transformation and mediation arena in the space between the formulation and realisation arena reaching all levels of staff.

With regard to participation, it may be interesting to reflect further on perspectives that are missing from the final reports. One perspective that is only mentioned to a small extent in the process supervisors' statements in this study is the politicians who represent the school organisers. This perspective may be of importance in the work with the entire steering chain. Another interesting perspective that is missing is the pupil perspective. In the final reports there are few descriptions of pupil participation. The learner perspective, i.e. teaching as a support to improve learner outcomes, is the basis of the CBS to support children's and pupils' learning. Therefore, student participation should be supported to a greater extent

(SNAE, 2022). Based on Lindensjö and Lundgren's (2018), this could be interpreted as change in the transformation and mediation arena, in the space between the formulation and realisation arena pointing to the importance of understanding CBS as an organisation-wide school development work. This starting point guarantees reduced gaps and develops professional relationships. A concrete example is that the HEI creates different teams for different interventions for different school units. The aim of the HEI is to enable a common thread to be formed and realised, in order to avoid isolated initiatives that have little cohesion and thus lack a common thread. The aim is to make the school's development a joint endeavour and contribute to the participation of many, from the administrative management to the teachers in the classroom. This appears to be a challenge in the transformation and mediation arena, according to Lindensjö and Lundgren's (2018) framework.

The results of the study also emphasise the importance of meeting the different expectations that the various actors have. According to the process supervisors' statements, close dialogues are a prerequisite for creating a common understanding, or formulation or realisation of where the target groups are, how they can best be addressed and what the support can look like (SNAE, 2022; Rogberg et al., 2021). In this transformation and mediation arena, the process supervisors work to achieve consensus on expectations regarding the CBS process. This can also be about facing resistance and counter-reactions. In these close dialogues, FOUS highlights the importance of HEIs perceiving backlashes as 'opportunities to learn from rather than as difficult obstacles to overcome' (Rogberg et al., 2021, p.10).

This study also demonstrates the importance of continuity, with the process supervisors' statements emphasising both the continuity of the school organiser's representatives and the process supervisors. Continuity and stability are important aspects of co-operation (SNAE, 2022). High staff turnover can negatively affect the conditions for school development. At the same time, the process supervisors emphasise the importance of being flexible and adaptable (SNAE 2022; Rogberg et al., 2021) when working in an iterative process. Again, the transformation and mediation arena, for achieving success in the HEI's meeting with the school organisers, becomes the place where they are, that is, adapting and changing during the process is commonplace during an exploratory, emerging and continuously developing approach to strengthening student learning.

The process supervisors in this study also emphasise the importance of sharing experiences. Joint conferences and seminars have been successful. The organisations seem to appreciate when arenas and forums are organised for them to meet and exchange experiences and lessons learnt. Here it is a question of having time to exchange experiences and to realise that development work takes time. The fact that development work takes and needs to take time is a recurring lesson among the organisations and is also highlighted in the final reports (SNAE, 2022; Rogberg et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study's results show the importance of skills development for the process supervisors in order to be able to meet the school leaders; to be able to be flexible, adaptable and responsive while the development work requires courage and to challenge. The results of the study emphasise the importance of the internal development work at the HEI through the process

managers' statements on the importance of creating arenas for skills development. The assignment that the HEI has includes planning, implementing and following up its efforts in dialogue with the SNAE and the school organisers (SNAE, 2022; Rogberg et al., 2021).

Lindensjö and Lundgren (2018) argue that the earlier the consensus between these different stakeholders in the formulation arena, the greater the risk of gaps. If the representatives of the school organisers, school leaders and teachers are involved early in the process and contribute with values, interests and experiences, there should be less risk of resistance. This could create favourable conditions for the process supervisors in their work to support the participants and trust in the professional competence and professional legitimacy of school leaders and teachers as part of creating ownership in the existing context. For the CBS process, ownership becomes particularly important. Here, one could problematise the fact that the SNAE is expected to report the results of CBS to the government at regular intervals. The SNAE itself notes that it is complex to report the results of annual work within an assignment that is organised in an ongoing process. An interesting question to ask may therefore be whether the SNAE's reporting requirement affects the participants' opportunities to conduct their processes at the pace that is in accordance with the lesson that development takes and needs to be allowed to take time. Another question is to what extent the SNAE's way of working allows for the fact that the measures may need to grow, over time and based on the current context.

Practical Implications

If the overall results are considered according to the categories highlighted in the results section - creating beneficial conditions for participation, anchoring, consensus, ownership, parallel processes, continuity, exchange of experience and time in parallel with the opportunities that emerge - flexibility, responsiveness, adaptation and self-reflection, then these findings can add valuable knowledge for process supervisors' understanding of leading improvement work in school organisers. Aspects such as communication, shared learning and time for this seem to be central. In the transformation and mediation arena, process supervisors work on trying to reach a common understanding of expectations around the CBS process and the CBS process in general. Exchanges of experience via various arenas, forums and networks, both internal and external, should be an important support in further development.

Future Research

As this study was conducted on a small number of final reports, it would be important to conduct a document analysis on a larger number of final reports. Such a study would highlight the similarities and differences between the final reports of different HEIs. Further suggestions for studies are to investigate the voices of practitioners through in-depth interviews to investigate what picture the school

leaders have of CBS from an operational perspective in terms of the ambition of the CBS process. Follow-up research focusing on results could be conducted in order to capture how the process-oriented aspects persist in the organisation once the CBS process is over, and the final report has been written. The Government states that the work within CBS must be carried out in accordance with the Education Act (2010:800, Chap 1, 5, §3). All education must be based on scientific principles and proven experience. In this way, a meeting takes place within CBS between practice and theory, which creates both challenges and new knowledge. CBS is unique in the sense of tripartite co-operation, which could be compared to the horizontal communities described in the introduction. Ownership and autonomy are other recurring concepts that should be further explored through interviews with process supervisors.

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