**Leadership and Collaborative Governance in Community Educational Projects**

**Introduction**

The Spanish education system is currently facing the complex challenge of evolving in a context of socio-economic crisis and decrease in public resources. This fact represents a tense and complex reality as cutbacks in public budgets and the resulting discomfort among the educational community occur together with the social demand of facing great educational challenges, such as improving the students’ academic results; inclusion of pupils with special educational needs; pedagogic adaptation to social changes caused by the technological revolution; or teaching foreign languages in a more and more globalized world, among others.

In view of this scenario, today more than ever, educational leadership is facing the complex challenge of generating sense, gathering commitments, and constructing sound educational projects. Even though the government and leadership of schools are always determining functions in school success (Coronel, 2003; González, 2003), at present educational leadership goes beyond schools and is considered one of the most critical and urgent issues in the educational agenda both in our country and at an international level (Bolívar, 2010; Carpenter et al., 2010; Miller, 2008; Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, 2010). In this context, both the leadership role and the governing team of educational organizations have the immediate challenge of taking full advantage of existing resources.

Optimizing available resources becomes a key element for effective educational centres. In this respect, the need to find connections and synergies emerges both at an intra-school and extra-school or community level, thus highlighting the relational and collaborative side of educational leadership. These synergies are aimed at getting the maximum benefit from the human capital of the organization, on the one hand, and enlarging this human and social capital by looking for alliances with the close socio-educational environment, on the other (Castiñeira, 2011; Daly, 2010; Longo, 2008, Mandell & Keast, 2009; Miller, 2008).

In the last few decades, the concept of educational leadership has clearly evolved from more instructive concepts to more distributive concepts (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Bolívar, López-Yáñez, & Murillo, 2013; Murillo, 2006). In this respect, there is a large body of literature about a concept of educational leadership aimed at taking greater advantage of the teaching staff’s capacities, thus understanding that excessively centralized leadership wastes the human capital existing in the organization (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; García, 2011; Lopez & Lavié, 2010; Stewart, 1997).

On the other hand, there are not many studies focusing on a type of leadership that can create synergies at the extra-school and community level. In the last few years, the complexity of social problems and the lack of resources in disadvantaged communities have led to cases of good collaborative practice among different socio-educational organizations. These community-based educational projects are called Educational Collaborative Networks (ECN) in our country, where schools and educational and social agents of the community collaborate in the construction of a strategy or shared project around common educational goals. The ECNs have reached a notorious presence at an international level, obtaining significant educational outcomes (Miller, Díaz-Gibson, Miller-Balslev, & Scanlan, 2012; Carpenter et al., 2010; Tough, 2008; Ubieto, 2012).

Thus, we understand that the ECNs adopt a relevant role in the development of an approach to leadership and collaborative governing at a community level and, therefore, the study of good ECN practices in our country can describe some of the optimum and necessary conditions to lead in the current educational context. This paper proposes a single research question: How can the educational organizations in the community lead collaboration processes to improve their impact? In this sense, we aim at contributing with strategies to improve the educational efficiency of schools and other socio-educational agents by setting up community-wide collaborative educational projects. With this approach, the article delves into the concepts of leadership and governing of ECNs and aims at describing both the skills needed to lead in collaborative environments and the decision-making structures required to take full advantage from inter-organizational collaboration. To do so, the study is based on the case of the city of Barcelona, which has a renowned tradition in community collaboration among educational and social entities and institutions (Díaz-Gibson, Civís, & Longás, 2013; Ubieto, 2012). A qualitative approach to 30 ECNs with experience in the city is proposed, through content analysis from interviews to head managers and other socio-educational professionals with responsibilities in leadership and governing.

**Conceptual Approach. Leadership in Educational Collaborative Networks**

Castiñeira (2011) and Coronel (2003) pointed that, in an educational context, the roles of direction, leadership and management, although they may be linked to a single person, are essentially different, which should be distinguished to understand the real nature of leadership. *Management* includes competences linked to managing people, budgets, actions, etc., through planning, organizing, coordinating, and making technical decisions. *Direction* involves a greater capacity to make decisions and the ability to develop plans and design strategies with a remarkable margin of autonomy. However, *leadership* implies a higher step, beyond managing and directing; it involves setting goals, describing horizons, drawing a group project, and guiding teams through it. In this way, leadership involves the joint and common purpose to carry out real changes in the organization, whereas management and direction involve the coordination of the members and resources to develop the activities of the organization (Coronel, 2003).

Thus, the organizational changes encouraged by ECN leadership promote the opening of institutional borders to their environment, as ECNs are socio-educational projects integrated by schools and social and educational entities in the same community. Particularly, these schools and entities collaboratively develop a programme and a joint strategic action aimed at achieving common goals, such as for example reducing school truancy, increasing educational success, improving the transition from school to work, or reducing child obesity, among others (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2013). ECNs are characterized by an intense relational component among actors, apart from a strong accent on the collaborative leadership of the action. ECNs have become effective strategies to optimize community resources, thus impacting on the school and community educational improvement (Carpenter et al., 2010; Renée & McAllister, 2011).

Despite the fact that there is scarce international literature on the leadership of ECNs, some studies observe that the leadership of the intra-school relationships and governing of educational centres imply important differences in comparison to the leadership of extra-school relationships and governing a ECN (Carpenter et al., 2010; Daly, 2010). Although there is a regulation and certain hierarchy in the relationships among school professionals, the relationships between different community organizations lack explicit rules and hierarchies (Díaz-Gibson & Civís, 2011). The initial informality of extra-school or community relationships determines the actions regarding their leadership, as well as their governing. Collaboration incorporates an inherent horizontality among the different professionals, where no-one has higher or inferior power than others (Díaz-Gibson & Civís, 2011; Renée & McAllister, 2011; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009).

On the other hand, the emerging perspectives of organizational leadership have a clear relational orientation in common, which tries to exert change by promoting the relationships among members, extending the influence on the others, sharing and distributing leadership, promoting the emergence of informal leaders (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Longo, 2008; López & Lavié, 2010; Bolívar et al., 2013). Likewise, literature coincides in pointing out that leadership in community and inter-organizational environments requires some specific functions particular to their interactive and collaborative reality (Mandell & Keast, 2009; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Gordó, 2011). In this sense, the lack of vertical hierarchies and the deregulation of ECNs involve that a priority organizational objective for their sustainability is cohesion and articulation. Saz and Ospina (2009) presented three basic actions in ECN leadership, coinciding with many previous studies: mediating between differences of members *(bridging*), promoting a common working culture (*framing*), and empowering members to lead actions (*capacitating*). These actions are clearly aimed at influencing the network members towards constructing a common organizational and educational project.

Furthermore, a personalistic approach to the figure of ECN leader is represented by Miller (2008) with the figure of the *boundary spanner* or the person who reaches across borders, who described a leader as possessing contextual knowledge, social skills, connections and confidence, who is willing to deal with social problems through strategic collaboration. Besides, the role of the leader in ECNs is based on the ability to be a *process catalyst* (Mandell & Keast, 2009), considering the goals and activities of the network, but focusing on the process as a critical element that will lead to the construction of a new globality, generating new ways of working together. In summary, recent research highlights the importance of social relationships, the democratization of the decision-making process, interdisciplinary collaboration, and empowerment of members to take on leadership quotas.

**Governance Structures of Educational Collaborative Networks**

Literature relates governing of collaborative networks at a community level with the concept of local governance, as the networked collaboration itself transcends the hierarchy of government and governed (Navarro, 2002). Network governance springs form the idea that no local or community actor (public or private) on its own currently has either enough knowledge or information to give response to the socio-educational problems of our complex societies (Kooiman, 2000; Longo, 2008; López & Lavié, 2010). This collaborative concept of governing, whether at a political, local or organizational level, has strongly emerged in the last decade (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). Despite this, there are few empirical studies that look into the structures needed to govern a ECN towards achieving proposed goals (Provan & Kenis, 2007). This certainly is one of the most important and at the same time complex aspects, as all the ECNs have to think themselves and choose a governing structure in accordance to their characteristics, conditions and resources.

Provan and Kenis (2007) proposed three significantly different governance models, and added that every model has different strengths and weaknesses linked to the context where they develop their action, producing at the same time differentiated results both in professionals and the community. The first governance model is that of *shared participation,* which is the most common and is characterized by the members themselves being in charge of governing the network. Networks governed in this model are remarkably decentralized, as all the members participate voluntarily and equitably in the governance. In this sense, all of them are responsible for managing internal and external relationships, administration aspects, and coordination. This type of governance is common in social, educational and health networks mainly due to its capacity to construct social capital in the community (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). Finally, the authors considered that this governance model is efficient in networks with a low number of members and with relative easiness to reach agreements.

Some of the difficulties caused by total decentralization may be overcome with a second more centralized governance model such as a *Lead organization.* This model usually occurs when an organization has the legitimacy and necessary resources to exert a leading role in the network. Literature shows how in the social, educational and health fields, the lead organization is usually an institution with a central position regarding community resources and users (Provan & Milward, 1995; Weiner & Alexander, 1998). Within this model, important decisions and main activities are coordinated from and by a lead organization, which in this way assumes higher power quotas than the other network members, thus reducing horizontality and discussion in the network. In turn, it will provide administrative and management support needed to achieve the network’s objectives, which will usually be quite near to the objectives of the same organization.

Moreover, a third governance model is that of the *Network administrative organization.* This model is based on the creation of an organization independent from the others with the specific aim of governing the network and its activities. Despite there being a high interaction among the members, this model centralizes their relationships through the administrative organization, which has a key role in coordinating and sustaining the network. This organization is exclusively focused on managing the network and usually is a public body or non-governmental organization working in a certain community. The administrative organization can consist of one single person (who will be called coordinator or facilitator), or may be a formal organization consisting of an executive manager, staff and board operating from a different fiscal office (McEvily & Zaheer, 2004; Provan, Isett, & Milward, 2004). This model usually has decision-making structures with the equitable participation of all the network members, where technical and strategic decisions are made, leaving operational issues to the administrative organization. This governance model is used to increase the legitimacy of the network, by exclusively managing their processes and problems, and trying to reduce the complexity of the governance model of *shared participation.*

Thus, we observe the need for a collaborative concept of ECN governance, which adopts different more or less centralized models according to the characteristics of the ECNs and their context.

**Method**

This study proposes a content analysis of interviews carried out to 30 professionals with experience in leading ECNs that are collaborating to improve educational and social outcomes in different communities in Barcelona, Spain. Barcelona has a remarkable number of educational and social associations of the third sector, with there being one such entity per every 152 inhabitants. Moreover, the city has a long tradition of public-private collaboration concerning educational and social issues (Ubieto, 2012). The success of these experiences may provide us with instructive and relevant information to develop and improve other ECNs in the country, as well as to guide professionals in this sector on how to lead collaboration strategies between the school and social entities in the community.

This research is based on a constructivist approach and a non-modelled concept of knowledge (Pérez, 2008), and looks into the construction of reality carried out by participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research design uses a qualitative method and focuses on the comprehension and description data rather than on their validation (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008). Specifically, we opted for the *content analysis* technique understood as the set of text interpretation procedures (writings, visual, oral texts…) coming from previously recorded communication processes. In this way, the analysis allows us to improve the discursive orientation of this research in the process of meaning construction, and at the same time further understand the particularities of leadership and educational governance in a community and collaborative context.

The sample selection was the result of a purposeful approach to successful cases of ECNs in the city of Barcelona. In this way, we selected the 30 socio-educational community projects that meet a ECN structure as defined above, which had been previously assessed and recognized by the Municipal Institute of Education of Barcelona (IMEB) as experiences of reference, all of them with more than 5 years of experience in the country. Once the programmes were identified, we selected a member of the leadership teams in every ECN, on the basis of two main criteria: having been part of the management and leadership team since the beginning of the ECN, and representing their networks in the Education Area of the district. Concretely, the 30 leaders that make up the final sample are head teachers of educational centres, professionals of community psychopedagogical services, and managers of community socio-educational programmes.

**Procedure**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with every one of the 30 leaders, with the aim of collecting information about leadership and governance of their ECNs. In particular, the interview consisted of two open questions: The first one was about the role of their socio-educational leadership, with emphasis on the key activities of the leadership action in the ECNs; and the second focused on the ECN organizational model, as well as on the decision-making processes concerning their governance. The fact that questions were open allowed us for greater laxity when explaining these processes, thus obtaining a more contextualized and open discourse, favourable for the posterior content analysis.

Procedures to collect and analyze data started with the full transcription and creation of 30 text documents. In the content analysis phase, we looked for common categories and indicators among the discourses of the different leaders, thus responding about possible successful models of ECN leadership and governance. With the aim of increasing the consistency of the interpretation process, two levels of analysis were conducted:

The first level consisted in an individual content analysis of all the documents carried out by three researchers of the team in parallel. To carry out this content analysis, the constant comparison process was followed, thus finding out what categories better corresponded to and fitted in with data (Strauss, 2001). The analysis was conducted with ATLAS.ti 6.2 software, with an initial coding with analysis indicators that were later grouped into categories, all of which were organized around the research objectives. Thus, frequencies in the presence of every indicator in the different networks were calculated, so the absolute frequency corresponds to the number of ECNs having the indicators rather than the total number of times that it appears in the documents. A second level aimed at guaranteeing internal validity of the resulting categorization was based on comparing and discussing among the three analyses carried out by each researcher, by contrasting categories and indicators, reaching agreements as the method particular to the meaning construction process (Altheide et al., 2001).

**Results**

The results of the content analysis show a final chart consisting of a total of 31 indicators arranged in 7 categories. Five of them are related to specific leadership actions particular to an interactive-collaborative context as that of ECNs, and the other 2 refer to governance structure and collective decision-making mechanisms at a community level.

Thus, the 5 categories concerning leadership are: *participation in decisions, administrative tasks, sustaining tasks, unity promotion,* and *relationship with environment* (Table 1)*.* These categories account for the main actions taken by ECN leaders to implement educational strategies in collaboration with other community agents:

TABLE 1

The results of the analysis show that *unity promotion* is a particularly significant indicator. When facing a shared challenge with different educational organizations collaborating toward the same goal, leaders reported that it is essential that everyone finds sense to their involvement. Leaders fully share the need to promote both *shared commitment* -83%- and a *feeling of identity and belonging* -80%-. “All the members recognize that the Educational Board is creating a group identity that enriches us all and gives more strength to the approaches that may arise” (Source: Leader of a ECN in Barcelona).

Furthermore, leaders stand out that, as the different professionals usually work inside their organizations, they do not have enough knowledge of either the professional or organization or service, which implies certain difficulties when starting to work together. They highlight a key element in collaboration processes such as the importance of generating trust among the members by *recognizing all the network agents* -70%- and *promoting an atmosphere of trust* -30%-: “At the beginning of the collaboration, it is important to spend some time so that everyone gets to know each other; we certainly know that there are many prejudices among schools (and entities) in the same community” (Source: Leader of a ECN in Barcelona).

Besides, Table 1 shows the specific weight that *participation in decisions* has for the 30 leaders. We should firstly highlight the relevance of the leadership of participation, with 50% placing *promoting discussion* among network agents as key strategy, and 87% standing out that *decision making is carried out in a participative manner.* Secondly, allusions to assessment as a mechanism to justify making technical and strategic decisions are relevant. In this respect, 53% of leaders admitted to *promoting assessment of needs in the community,* and 47% reported that *general decisions are made according to the assessments carried out.*

Moreover, leaders also point at the importance of looking for new synergies in the community, by attracting new agents interested in joining the cause to the collaborative project, facilitating the *inclusion of non-participating agents* -97%-, apart from the *transfer of knowledge to the community* -93%-.

“We work for the connection with other district entities and projects such as the Environment Educational Plan (…) to connect schools in Verdum with all the possible resources to tackle school failure of youth (Source: Leader of a ECN in Barcelona)”.

Furthermore, results highlight ECN sustaining tasks as an action that leaders stand out. Particularly relevant are those actions aimed at promoting relationships among members, thus creating interaction and exchange flows such as *internal communication* -87%-, *synergies and collaborations* -77%-, or *internal training courses* -30%-. “The aim is that network collaboration can make up for the limitations of every entity on its own (…) that is why we created a space to transfer information, support, and dialogue” (Source: Leader of a ECN in Barcelona).

Finally, among their actions, leaders highlighted some tasks of an administrative nature such as *managing network resources* -57%-, which includes managing meetings and working groups, and particularly administrative tasks related to *logistics* -50%-, as it is necessary to manage the different spaces for the continuous meetings.

With regard to the second objective (Table 2), we inferred 2 categories concerning the governance of these collaborative processes, which allow us to group those indicators reported by leaders in their discourse; firstly, those elements referring to spaces *to make decisions,* and finally *those elements that give further detail of the particularities of the steering committee*.

TABLE 2

As can be seen in the category *spaces to make decisions,* a particularly significant element is the existence of a *general assembly.* This structure was reported by 60% of leaders as a general organizational strategy, regardless of the number of meetings per year or other particularities of every network. Thus, the *general assembly* was described as a widely participative space where accountability is present and global priorities are approved.

Moreover, in some of the networks under analysis, we found other governance bodies with the aim of speeding up decision-making processes, usually consisting of a lower number of people with executive functions, such as the case of the *technical committee* or the *executive committee*, or support or counselling functions as the *advisory committee*.

The *technical committee* is present in 50% of the networks, and is a space consisting of the main representatives of every entity making up the ECN, where strategic, technical, and executive decisions of great relevance for the project’s future are made. On the other hand, to deal with daily decisions of a more administrative or exceptional executive nature, 40% of ECNs have an *executive committee* consisting of two or three people. A remarkable percentage of leaders stated that setting up an *executive committee* –also called permanent committee- implies a plus of pragmatism and agility for the global action of the ECN, as it facilitates the capacity to meet, make decisions, and implement:

"We are a network of more than 15 entities, it is difficult and tiresome to meet for every decision to be made (...) the executive committee is called autonomously and acts according to the criteria established by the technical committee" (Source: Leader of a ECN in Barcelona).

As for the composition of the steering committee, it is outstanding that 66% of leaders insist that the group that leads the project consists of representatives of all the entities members of the ECN. This highlights the particular nature of governance in interactive contexts such as the ECNs, pointing at the importance given to representativeness when making decisions. In turn, in the other 33% it is one of the entities that is in charge of the governance and management of the network.

**Discussion**

Results confirm the uniqueness of an approach to educational leaderships that goes beyond the school borders (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Mandell & Keast, 2009; Miller, 2008; Gordó, 2011), describing actions that may guide school managing teams to improve the educational impact through the collaboration with other community agents. In this context, the informality of the relationships among the professionals from the different participating institutions is the basis for a leadership based on the promotion of these relationships in order to create unity and trust, as well as on the facilitation of joint decision making, thus promoting agreement and discussion to guide advances. Moreover, promoting a balance between representativeness and operability for the effectiveness of collaborative decision-making spaces emerges as an important element.

Results clearly show the importance that leaders give to promoting relationships among the ECN professionals, highlighting the active promotion of internal communication, creation of opportunities to share and collaborate, and training of members. In this sense, leadership appears as responsible for the qualitative connection among the community agents both for a better global functioning and for greater effectiveness (Daly, 2010). As pointed by Moolenaar and Sleegers (2010), resources aimed at the interaction and connection among educational professionals create knowledge and capacity of educational innovation. In this respect, we can see the efforts of leaders trying to unite some particularly diverse relationships, which such authors as Saz and Ospina (2009) know as *framing*. A great majority of leaders stands out the importance of *promoting unity* and *creating an atmosphere of trust among the members* of a structure that lacks this formality that we are used to. The ECNs are highly heterogeneous (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2013; Saz & Ospina, 2009), and include diverse generally unknown professionals, from different socio-educational disciplines and different institutions. The aforementioned actions, such as promoting *a shared commitment, a feeling of identity or the recognition among professionals,* are evidence of the need to devote specific efforts and resources to unite the structure and activate the flows of communication and exchange among professionals, thus gradually promoting collaborative processes.

Likewise, leaders give clear significance to assessment processes to justify the network’s decision making. Thus, we understand that the lack of hierarchies and the existence of equitable power relationships require a contrasted justification to back up decision making. In this respect, it is not enough for the ECN leaders to have professional command or expertise, or wide contextual knowledge, or their ability to influence on a certain collaborative context, as concluded by previous research (Miller, 2008). In other words, a ECN leader, besides having these capacities, has to actively promote an assessment culture that helps to make sustainable strategic decisions, thus contributing to improve the quality of processes.

On the other hand, although allusions to the importance of mediating and trying to find agreements when making decisions in the network are a majority, it is relevant how half the leaders share the idea that, to reach agreements, promoting discussions is also necessary. This is not a minor aspect, as the vision of a leader who tries to reach agreements and another who promotes discussions to reach agreements is significantly different. In this respect, as pointed by Sorensen and Torfing (2011), trying to reach agreements *per se* may lead to simple and not very contrasted decisions; however, the active promotion of interdisciplinary discussions is more likely to produce creative processes and solutions. Thus, we understand that the fact that the leader actively promotes discussion to reach agreements is a brilliant way of taking advantage of the human and social capital available, and therefore an important source of collaborative innovation at an educational level.

Finally, we should mention that results do not show relevant allusions to actions aimed at distributing leadership. Although 86% of leaders reported participation as the usual method when making decisions, and some of them stood out the importance of expanding responsibilities as a strategy to make professionals co-responsible, we found no indicators directly related to leadership distribution (Bryston & Crosby, 1992; Saz & Ospina, 2009; Stewart, 1997; Longo, 2008). In this respect, we understand that the set of actions that ECN leaders give priority to shape a leadership model closer to the *relational leadership* or process catalyst by Mandell and Keast (2009), emphasizing relationships as the main focus of the network, leading processes aimed at nurturing, inspiring and enhancing interactions, generating trust, synergies, and new ways of working together.

On the other hand, and concerning the second objective about the organization of group collective decision-making mechanisms, we understand that the *spaces designed for decision-making* contribute to empirically nurture the organization and the concretion of ECN governance. In this respect, a representative funnel is established with the aim of assembling representativeness needs and operability needs, by specifying decisions from more general to more specific; the *general assembly* becomes a widely participative space where the main lines of action are approved; the *technical committee* consists of a representative per every entity, and they discuss technical and strategic issues of the project; and the *executive committee* gathers all those members with more involvement in the objectives, and leads already approved operational actions.

Likewise, we have to stand out that the content analysis clearly shows the 3 network governance models developed by Provan and Kenis (2007). In this respect, the analysis confirms the theory and gives consistency to these models in a socio-educational area. The governance structure most described by leaders -43.͡33%- corresponds to a governing body or steering committee consisting of a representative from the different entities that make up the ECN – *the steering committee consists of representatives from every entity -,* which Provan and Kenis (2007) know as the *Shared participation* model. In turn, in 33.͡33% of networks under analysis, it is one of the member entities that mainly governs the network –*one of the entities in the network acts as steering committee* -, being the quarters for meetings and, in general, allocating some of its own resources to manage the ECN, which theory calls *Lead organization.* Thus, it is important to highlight that this organization does not always have a core position concerning community resources and users, as stated by Provan and Milward (1995) or Weiner and Alexander (1998), but sometimes it is just the person or people most committed to the collaborative and community action. Finally, 23.͡33% of networks resort to a team of people –between one to three- not members of the network so that they take on part of the leadership functions –represented by the category *the steering committee is representative and besides there is an entity not belonging to the network that support its functions –* and called by Provan and Kenis (2007) as *Network administrative organization*.

Despite this setup, in the model *Network administrative organization* we can see three variations depending on the origin of the person or persons providing support: a member of the managing team in a school that devotes part of his/her task to this cause, a third sector entity exclusively devoted to the project, or a professional specifically hired to develop these functions. Likewise, we can summarize that this administrative figure intends to give management support to the steering committee and the professionals in the community to facilitate technical and shared leadership in the network. Undoubtedly, the presence of a figure to support management can maximize the action of the leadership team, by releasing the professionals from more administrative and operational tasks that, as results show, are particular to these leaders’ actions. Therefore, the option for support and promotion of ECN technical representativeness becomes an interesting element for the operability and effectiveness of leadership itself, as well as for the sustainability of the ECN.

**Conclusions**

This article goes further into the leadership of collaborative strategies in the school and educational area in order to successfully govern community-based socio-educational projects. In this respect, optimizing community resources and improving educational impact involve appropriate leadership and governance for this type of collaborative initiatives. Thus, the leaders’ priorities focus on generating confidence among participants, qualitative connection of professionals, and promotion of discussion and agreement. Besides, there is the need to adopt a model of collaborative governance adjusted to the reality of the started strategy, which combines criteria of representativeness and operability at the same time.

Likewise, we understand that this approach complements and enriches the role of educational leadership in the current context. Our results show how the vision of the leader/leaders figure goes beyond the school borders, projecting an organizational openness towards generating new processes of creative relationship with their environment, which are aimed at improving their educational impact. Finally, we should emphasize that the contextualization of this study exclusively focuses on the ECN experience in the city of Barcelona. This fact, despite offering a detailed and deep perspective about good leadership and governance practices of collaborative strategies at a community level, requires further contrast at a national and international level with the aim of providing this model with greater validity. Further case studies can give us more details concerning the function of educational leadership in front of the challenges of optimizing existing resources and generating a sense of joint project in the current context.

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| **Categories** | **Indicators** | **Absolute Frequency (n=30)** | **Relative Frequency** |
| Participation in decisions | Need analyses are conducted | 16 | 53.33% |
| Decision-making follows the assessment of actions carried out | 14 | 46.67% |
| Decision-making is carried out in a participative manner | 26 | 86.67% |
| Participative discussion is promoted among network agents | 15 | 50.00% |
| Administrative tasks | Search for external resources is promoted | 10 | 33.33% |
| Resource management tasks are carried out | 17 | 56.67% |
| Logistic tasks are carried out | 15 | 50.00% |
| Sustaining tasks | Synergies among participants are promoted | 23 | 76.67% |
| Motivation among participants is promoted | 11 | 36.67% |
| Internal communication is promoted | 26 | 86.67% |
| Internal training courses are carried out | 9 | 30.00% |
| Unity promotion | A feeling of shared commitment is promoted | 25 | 83.33% |
| The recognition of all participants is promoted | 21 | 70.00% |
| An atmosphere of trust is promoted | 9 | 30.00% |
| A feeling of identity and belonging is promoted | 24 | 80.00% |
| Relationship with community environment | The inclusion of non-participating community entities is promoted | 28 | 93.33% |
| Actions to transfer knowledge to the community are carried out | 28 | 93.33% |
| There are situations of negotiation between politicians and technicians | 12 | 40.00% |
| External communication of the network is promoted | 20 | 66.67% |
| TABLE 1. Frequency of indicators over leadership actions  Source: Own elaboration | | | |

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| **Categories** | **Indicators** | **Absolute Frequency**  **(n=30)** | **Relative Frequency** |
| Spaces to make decisions | There is a general assembly | 18 | 60.00% |
| There is a technical committee | 15 | 50.00% |
| There is an executive committee | 12 | 40.00% |
| There is an advisory board | 3 | 10.00% |
| There is an external person for administrative management | 4 | 13.33% |
| Characteristics of the steering committee | The steering committee consists of representatives from every entity | 13 | 43.33% |
| The steering committee is elected by general agreement | 6 | 20.00% |
| One of the entities of the network acts as steering committee | 10 | 33.33% |
| The steering committee is representative and there is also an entity outside the network that supports its functions | 7 | 23.33% |
| TABLE 2.Frequencies of indicators over governance structures  Source: Own elaboration | | | |