**ORIGINAL PAPER**

# Conditions for Workplace Learning as a New First-Line Manager in Elderly Care

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore first-line managers' experiences of workplace learning in elderly care, with a particular focus on the conditions for learning when entering a new workplace as the new manager. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 35 first-line managers from three organisations in Sweden. Four learning conditions emerged as being particularly significant for first-line managers: the managers' previous professional experience, job-specific training, social support, and the joint repertoire of organisational arrangements. These conditions shifted in importance during the process of entering the workplace, and the way in which the conditions gave access to learning for different managers varied. The managers' professional experience and others' recognition of them had a considerable impact on their admittance to the new workplace. After the initial entry phase, the other three learning conditions became more significant and played a role in enabling or constraining the managers' learning and becoming the new manager. One conclusion is that contextual and work experiences from elderly care were significant for learning during the initial phase and in order to gain access to workplace learning. Another conclusion is that high expectations and great responsibility were placed on the managers to satisfy their own learning needs. This implies that professional, social and emotional support that is received informally is just as significant for learning as formalised training for entering a new workplace as a new manager.

**Keywords** Workplace learning · Legitimate peripheral participation · First-line manager · Elderly care

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## Introduction

The elderly care sector in most Western countries has undergone a profound transformation. For example, it has evolved into a systematised and professionalised welfare activity (Kamp and Hvid 2012) with increasingly high internal organisational pressure to cut costs, and New Public Management (NPM) standards have been implemented (Corin and Björk 2017; Meagher et al. 2016). This transformation changes how organisations function, which also affects the work of individuals responsible for first-line leadership and management within the organisation: first-line managers. First-line managers in elderly care can be said to be 'sandwiched' (Gjerde and Alvesson 2020) between obligations such as meeting NPM efficiency standards, decentralised budget responsibilities, management by objectives, cost-efficiency demands (Hood 1991) and digitalisation. Additionally, these management obligations must be met by managers while balancing them with professional ethics of care (Leicht et al. 2009) and dealing with the complex care needs of an ageing population and staff shortages (Lill 2020). Working as a manager requires qualifications and skills to deal with the changes that arise continuously in elderly care. Providing managers with continuing competence and career development could be a potential response to tackle sectoral challenges and ensure a good quality of care (Ellström and Ellström 2018; Else Ouweneel et al. 2009). However, there are no well-defined educational and career pathways for these managers (Furåker and Nilsson 2010). Previous research shows that managers instead rely on learning from everyday managerial work, and that work in itself provides opportunities for professional development (Brinck and Tanggaard 2016; Davis 2012). Even if managers' learning and professional development has strong support in research on managerial work (Davies and Easterby-Smith 1984; Day 2011), it has primarily focussed on leadership training (Lacerenza et al. 2017) and leadership development (Day, 2011). As several researchers have identified, managers' learning in everyday managerial work has received relatively sparse attention (Antonacopoulou 2006; Else Ouweneel et al. 2009), and little is still known about how managers' workplace learning occurs in organisations (Andrianova and Antonacopoulou 2020).

Based on previous research, there are good reasons to assume that first-line managers, and especially first-line managers in elderly care, are under-researched from the perspective of workplace learning. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore first-line managers' experiences of workplace learning in elderly care, with a particular focus on the conditions for learning when entering a new workplace as the new manager.

Starting from a workplace learning perspective, our ambition is to increase understanding of conditions for workplace learning that are interlinked with the process of entering a new workplace as a new manager in elderly care. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) serves here as a theoretical lens to understand managers' entry into a new workplace, which is shaped by different learning conditions that they can use or must adapt to in order to access the community of practice (Wenger 1998). As will be shown, being the new manager at a new workplace – a so-called newcomer (Lave and Wenger 1991) – does not necessarily denote a lack of experience. Adopting Gardiner's (2016, p. 108) line of argument, a newcomer can be regarded as an experienced newcomer if he or she has been employed

in a similar position, for example as a manager in a different occupational domain or in a different position, such as a subordinate, in the same occupational domain. The 35 first-line managers interviewed in this study were all considered newcomers, as they were new to the workplace they entered. The pathway to the new workplace differed. Some managers advanced from a subordinate position to a management position in a new workplace within their existing care provider. Others began working at another care provider, or had previous worked as first-line managers within or outside elderly care and changed employer.

The article is structured as follows. The next section elaborates on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation and research on conditions for workplace learning. The research context and method are then described. Thereafter, the findings are presented. Finally, the findings are discussed and conclusions are drawn.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) is used to analyse the first-line manager's entry to a new workplace as the new manager. Legitimate peripheral participation is a way of learning that describes newcomers' advancement from the periphery to a legitimised position of expertise in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). According to Wenger (2010), a community of practice implies a promise of sharing and belonging, and this is particularly significant for learning. A newcomer is acknowledged as a member (legitimacy) of the community of practice by other members, and gradually moves from a position near the boundary (periphery) to a more central role as a full member by participating (participation) in activities in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Participation points to the importance of gaining access to learning activities in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

A newcomer is not always guaranteed access to learning – this depends on established members' appraisal of the newcomers' personal attributes, such as competence, employment status and gender (Billett 2001). Even experienced newcomers may have reduced access to learning because higher expectations are placed on them than on novices (Gardiner 2016), and their questioning of prevailing conditions and norms is not desirable (Lave 2019). Established workers ('old-timers', see Lave and Wenger 1991) with power over the organisation of work and status have the authority to control newcomers' access to participation in learning activities. Therefore, power is a central issue for understanding legitimate peripheral participation (Fuller et al. 2005). A newcomer who is experienced can present a threat by opposing the existing power structures in the community of practice, which established members may find hard to accept. However, established members can overcome power struggles and increase control over the collective activity by forming alliances with newcomers (Fox 2000). Gardiner (2016) suggests that experienced newcomers' legitimising process is more complex than that of novices, because they have more difficulty adapting their previous experience to prevailing workplace conditions. Newcomers need to be recognised by established members and obtain legitimacy to gradually become a member of the community of practice; conversely, the inclusion of new members is needed to secure the community's survival (Lave 2019; Lave and Wenger 1991). According to Fuller et al. (2005), there is an ambiguity about who is (or is not) peripheral

in the legitimate peripheral participation process, as it is difficult to distinguish between experienced and inexperienced newcomers. They maintain that legitimate peripheral participation and newcomers' learning are more complex than Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest. Not only do inexperienced newcomers learn from experienced newcomers, they also have useful skills that can support learning in the community of practice. In such a situation, an experienced member becomes an inexperienced learner.

In this article, the notion of access is regarded as a basic condition for learning and becoming a new manager at a new workplace. A number of studies in the field of workplace learning have identified a range of additional workplace-related and organisational conditions that can provide access to learning (Fuller et al. 2005; Fuller and Unwin 2004). In research, there is substantial support for workplace-related conditions such as on-the-job training, mentorship, leadership support and colleague support (Billett 2004; Eraut 2004; Evans et al. 2006; Fuller and Unwin 2004). These can facilitate learning, but can also represent constraints if such conditions are lacking or are difficult to access. This is also true of strategic networks, meetings, other support structures (Evans et al. 2011; Gustavsson and Fogelberg Eriksson 2010) and a high degree of autonomy (Ellström 2006; Else Ouweneel et al. 2009).

From the perspective of legitimate peripheral participation, less attention has been paid to organisational conditions that influence access to learning at work (Hotho et al. 2014). Newcomers need to adapt to organisational conditions, and these are assumed to provide equal access to learning for individuals in similar positions on similar levels within a hierarchy (Gardiner 2016; Hotho et al. 2014). Individuals who work under equal organisational conditions can benefit from them in different ways; therefore, these conditions do not always provide equal access to learning (Akre and Ludvigsen 1997). For example, an unclear division of labour can cause ambiguity in one workplace but result in greater scope for creativity and agency in another (Hotho et al. 2014). Different interpretations of divisions of labour mean that individuals may view their access to learning – and what they can actually do at work – differently. Access to learning is therefore also dependent on individual-related conditions such as age and gender, and dispositions (Evans et al. 2006) or personal epistemologies (Billett 2009) describing each person's specific experiences, such as previous education, employment and professional knowledge. Individuals' dispositions can motivate what they do, what they strategically choose to engage in (Billett 2009), their own initiatives for learning (Akre and Ludvigsen 1997) and their use of learning invitations from experienced colleagues (Billett 2001, 2004; Campbell et al. 2009). Individuals' prior knowledge of a workplace's (material and cultural) history facilitates their understanding of the workplace (Campbell et al. 2009), their willingness to participate in provided learning situations (Eberle et al. 2014) and their learning of the professional language (Gardiner 2016).

In summary, the concept of legitimate peripheral participation can be interlinked with a range of organisational and workplace-related conditions and individual dispositions. These shape managers' entry to a new workplace as a new manager, their learning and their access to learning in the community of practice.

## Research Context

The study was carried out as part of a larger research project examining first-line managers' learning and work in the Swedish elderly care sector. Like other

Scandinavian countries, Sweden has an explicit public welfare commitment to ensure the health of its inhabitants, including care of elderly citizens (Erlandsson et al. 2013). The responsibility to provide welfare is divided between 290 local municipalities, each of which is politically controlled. Elderly care in Sweden is 95% publicly funded through taxes. Municipal care providers have a dominant position in this sector, but a change in the national legislation has also permitted private providers to perform elderly care services (Hagerman 2019). The municipalities often reach agreements with private providers to fulfil their commitments for elderly care services.

The study was conducted at two municipal and one private elderly care provider, located in two different cities in central Sweden. Both the municipal and private care providers offer home help services and special housing (nursing homes and residential care homes). Regardless of the care provider, first-line managers (mostly women) have direct responsibility for the required quality of these services, and for leading a large number of employees.

### Participating Managers

The managers' (30 female, 5 male) ages ranged from 26 to 64 years. In terms of education, some managers had undergraduate education, but most of them had a university degree in behavioural science, such as human resources (HR), social work, nursing (licensed or specialist nurse), occupational therapy or physiotherapy. Some managers were recently employed, while others had been working for as long as 30 years in different first-line management positions at the same care provider. On average, they had worked as first-line managers for 9.5 years.

All managers had direct employer responsibility, but the span of control varied from 25 to over 100 employees. Regardless of care provider (municipal or private), the managers had similar duties and assignments, in line with laws governing the Swedish elderly care sector. However, their working conditions varied depending on the type of care services they oversaw: home help services, nursing homes, serviced apartments or day centres. Managers who were responsible for two smaller units divided their time between both locations.

## Method

### Design and Selection

A qualitative interview design was adopted, consisting of 35 interviews with first-line managers from two municipalities (A 15 managers and B 10 managers) and one private elderly care provider (10 managers). The care providers were selected to represent both public and private elderly care providers from metropolitan and rural areas, and the organisational size differed. After each care provider gave their informed consent to participate in the project, the next step was to select first-line managers. The criterion for selecting managers was formal managerial employment with executive responsibility for a group of subordinates. The selected managers led similar groups of subordinates, consisting mainly of assistant nurses, but also physiotherapists and nurses. In this study, the care providers were not compared since, regardless of

employer, there were more similarities than differences between the managers' descriptions of the entry phase to a new workplace. The terms 'first-line manager' and 'manager' refer to the selected managers, and the managers' superiors are referred to as 'superior managers'.

## Data Collection

Three of the authors conducted the 35 interviews between February and June 2016. The managers voluntarily participated in interviews that took place at their workplaces and lasted approximately 60 min. A semi-structured interview guide covering eight themes was used: background, managerial work activities, being a manager in elderly care, role models, work relationships, conditions for workplace learning and career development, and development of a professional identity. In this article, we focus on data from the six first themes.

The interviewer began by asking open-ended questions to gather descriptive information about the managers' current work, manager role, opportunities for learning and development. Examples of questions were: Can you describe what you do during a working day? What types of collaborations are most important to you in your work? Where do you meet other managers with a similar position? How did you learn your job? What facilitates or hinders your learning in everyday work? What career and competence development opportunities do you have? Using this information as a reference the managers were then asked to reflect on entering a new workplace and being a new manager in a new workplace. Examples of questions included: "If you look back to when you started here, what was it like?", "How was the first week of work?", "Has the work turned out to be different than you first thought it would be, or not? No manager had difficulties remembering what it was like to enter the workplace and be the new manager in their current workplace. Instead, the managers talked openly and provided descriptions of the issue in focus, which they remembered clearly even though it, for some of them was many years ago. Some managers reflected not only on what it was like to be the new manager in their current workplace, but also being a new manager in other elderly care workplaces.

## Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were then read to obtain an overview of the material. An inductively driven qualitative content analysis was carried out inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). The first analysis step resulted in identifying a content area – a significant part of the interview material – was identified. The identified content area 'entering a new workplace as the new manager' was then divided into units of meaning and condensed into shorter descriptions, for example: 'help from colleagues', 'two-day course' and 'previous professional knowledge'. The units of meaning were then categorised and divided into four emerging conditions for learning that cut across the workplaces and influenced the managers' entering and becoming part of a community of practice, that is, the new workplace community. The first condition related to the managers' previous professional experience. The other conditions – job-specific training, social support and a joint repertoire of organisational arrangements – related to the new workplace and

organisational conditions. This part of the analysis was also guided by the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave 2019; Lave and Wenger 1991), which made it possible to follow the learning process through which managers became part of a community of practice and in this process analyse the significance that the identified learning conditions had for managers' entry to a new workplace.

## Findings

In this section, the four main learning conditions for entering a new workplace as the new manager are presented.

### Managers' Previous Professional Experience

The managers' previous professional experience seemed to be the starting point for accessing learning in the initial entry phase to the new workplace. In the analysis, the managers' previous experience of elderly care and management (or lack thereof) appeared to be related to the significance of being seen as experienced or inexperienced during the initial entry phase. Differences in the managers' previous experience led us to identify four newcomer positions, which are presented in Table 1. In the following text, these are referred to using numbers in parentheses (e.g. 1 and 2) when there is a difference between positions.

The managers who had no experience of elderly care or managerial work (1) can be seen as inexperienced in both senses, while those who had experience of both elderly care and managerial work (4) can be regarded as comprehensively experienced newcomers. The managers who had experience of working in either elderly care (2) or managerial work (3) can be regarded as experienced in one respect but inexperienced in another. As shown in Table 1, most of the managers were recruited from the elderly care sector and there were few managers with no such experience.

Established managers' and subordinates' approval of the new manager's experience was regarded as a precondition to be accepted in the work community and to access workplace learning. The managers pointed out both advantages and consequences of experience in elderly care and/or managerial work, or a lack thereof. Managers with experience of elderly care (2 and 4) emphasised that this was an advantage because it made it easier to gain acceptance from subordinates. Subordinates were prone to take a more favourable attitudes if the new manager had experience of elderly care. The managers with elderly care experience but no managerial experience (2) emphasised that their familiarity with elderly care

**Table 1** The four newcomer positions and participating managers distributed by position

|  | No experience of managerial work | Experience of managerial work |
|---|---|---|
| No experience of elderly care | 1 (n=2) | 3 (n=4) |
| Experience of elderly care | 2 (n=11) | 4 (n=18) |

contributed to subordinates placing confidence in them, which reinforced their feeling of legitimacy as the manager.

> When I started out it was a bit of an emergency, so I didn't get much of an introduction. […] But I knew what to ask for. I didn't know all the systems, but I knew I could learn that later on. So, if I hadn't worked for several years before, then I wouldn't have made it, I think, because I knew what to ask for. (Manager in position 2)

Their knowledge and understanding of elderly care made the managers (2 and 4) feel confident about accessing learning situations in the workplace. They described this as being aware of what to do, how to attract invitations for learning and who to request help from. The managers' self-awareness emerged, in that they felt they had the right personal attributes to know what was expected of them. However, managers (1 and 3) without experience of elderly care did not think their lack of experience inhibited their ability to perform the managerial job. These managers relied on their leadership skills (3) or thought that they could achieve a contextual understanding of elderly care in due course and with guidance from experts and established managers (1).

> So, I've had very good schooling, because sometimes you may come directly from university and become a manager. And that's all good, but it's pretty tough. But I have had the privilege of growing gradually. (Manager in position 1)

Managers with managerial experience (3 and 4) felt few doubts about management work and adopted the role of new manager fairly quickly. Other managers with no managerial experience but with experience of elderly care (2) had worked as an assistant nurse or a group leader. Their transition to a managerial position was seen as hectic but exciting in an expected development step at the elderly care provider.

Nevertheless, all managers (1, 2, 3 and 4) felt to some degree that they did not receive the learning support they needed on entering the new workplace. Managers with managerial experience (3 and 4) and especially those who also had elderly care experience (4) felt a great expectation from superior management to find tangible solutions to work problems without any learning support. Also, managers without managerial experience (1 and 2) did not receive the learning support they wanted when entering the new workplace, although some of them (2) also had a good understanding of the elderly care context. The need for more learning support during the initial phase resulted in the managers struggling to build collaborative relationships with subordinates who supported their learning of workplace routines and adapting the leadership role to the workplace.

> I was new and it was difficult to get into a new professional role after being a nurse for so many years. But I'm glad I had that knowledge. But then a lot was very new, and as a manager and leader I probably had very high expectations on myself too. It has changed over the years, feeling like I should have the answer to everything. Now I think I do not have to know everything. Everything does not depend on me. You can take a step

back, because people usually develop from that. So, I have probably changed my leadership quite a bit. (Manager in position 2)

We have now described the importance of the managers' previous professional experience, which in itself constitutes a precondition for being accepted as the new manager in the workplace community. Subsequently, other conditions seemed to be more important for success (or difficulties) in gaining access to learning to continue entering the workplace and to develop a legitimate role as a manager. These learning conditions were job-specific training, social support and a joint repertoire of different organisational arrangements. These conditions are described below.

### Job-Specific Training

Becoming the new manager required job-specific training provided by the care providers. All care providers offered courses (introductory and leadership development courses) and mentorship to prepare managers for work-specific issues. The introductory courses created a sense of belonging, and provided a coherent workplace platform to ensure that formal regulations and routines for managerial work were followed. On the one hand, some managers regarded these induction courses as well-planned and comprehensive, letting them access a range of practice-based hands-on tools such as checklists, work instructions and scheduled appointments. On the other hand, some managers felt that the course content was too hard to understand at an early stage of employment. The care providers also provided courses in leadership development. These voluntary courses stretched over a longer period of time, including regularly scheduled training activities to improve managerial skills and work performance. The managers without any experience (1) saw these formal courses as significant for learning the managerial work and becoming familiar with the elderly care context. Experienced managers with (4) or without (3) elderly care experience described them as an opportunity to access work-related tools and familiarise themselves with workplace duties.

> The first week was very confusing. I met [my superior manager] in the morning on the first day and got an induction schedule with things to do. Some were booked and ready, while others I had to book myself, or contact people. It was about the staff and the exciting support functions and meeting them. And then on the unit, and it is a special assignment, it became clearer and clearer what the unit oversees. It was the kind of thing that became clearer during that week. So, it was a bit confusing but good, I would say. There was a clear schedule, which people you should meet, and they should inform you about this. (Manager in position 3)

Regardless of their level of experience, the managers saw the courses as beneficial if the content was useful for leadership and solving work-related problems, such as staffing and administrative issues. The managers showed an awareness of standing alone when deciding what was or could be beneficial for them. However, this also implied an uncertainty for some managers that led to self-doubt about not being the right manager for the workplace.

The second type of job-specific training was planned mentorship. This was based on the principle that managers should learn managerial skills by working alongside a mentor in the workplace. Usually, the mentor was the previous manager who the new manager was replacing. The idea was that the resigning manager should provide the new manager with important knowledge about subordinates and the workplace. The mentorship arrangement was seen as a favourable condition for accessing knowledge informally from established managers about how things should be done.

> I started working alongside a senior manager. We had offices next to each other. I could go to her, we made plans: "If you take care of that, I will take care of this." After all, I was able to get guidance all the time. While at the same time I was given the responsibility to do certain things. (Manager in position 3)

Nevertheless, for some managers, it did not work out as intended.

> The first weeks were horrible, I can tell you that. Absolutely awful. And as I said, I think they thought that the manager, who worked here with me, was going to take care of me and show me. And she did not. I can tell you, she did not. (Manager position 4)

These managers felt that resigning managers did not prioritise the mentor role, and in the worst case gave no advice. The mentorship model did not function at all if the employer struggled with staff shortages. In such circumstances, there were also fewer opportunities for support from other managers in the organisation. Being neglected, or 'rushed over' as some managers put it, created a feeling of wanting to leave the employer.

## Social Support

Social support was another condition for accessing workplace learning. This took the form of a 'helping hand' or 'guidance' from others to carry out everyday leadership duties or solve difficult situations. The managers appreciated trustworthy colleagues who could provide prompt advice. Emotional support was also needed in situations, where they 'just wanted to have someone to talk to' about issues such as staffing. The managers felt that personal chemistry with established managers and other professionals such nurses was crucial for more solution-oriented conversations that helped them deal with the issue in focus.

> It feels very good that we trust each other and that, without exerting much effort, we speak the same language, understand each other. I don't need to explain so much because she gets it immediately… and I understand when she asks me something. So, we don't need to, it's smooth, it's oil in the machinery, it's no gravel, but it's smooth. And I think it's good and that we have fun together, we have the same sense of humour, that's positive. (Manager in position 4)

Social support in the form of confidence from others was another important condition for accessing learning to support the progression to a legitimate position. The managers

with experience of elderly care (2 and 4) underlined how their access to learning depended on a good understanding of elderly care and personal relationships with like-minded managers who used the same professional language. This seems to differ from the managers without elderly care experience (1 and 3), who rely more on job-specific training and organisational arrangements provided by the employer.

> I probably didn't understand what this would entail. Absolutely no idea. Really. I remember, at [where I started], she talked about 'rows', how to 'go on rows', talked about who went on which… on those rows. She might as well have spoken Chinese. (Manager in position 1)

Learning from subordinates who know about specific tasks, such as administrative systems, was seen as valuable when learning the job. However, subordinates with a more negative attitude towards the manager could be openly sceptical and hinder the fulfilment of their managerial duties. In situations with complex staff issues, they did not have the management's full support. They said that struggling with staff problems required them to maintain a calm authority in the eyes of their subordinates. The senior manager could be contacted for advice and support when they did not know how to resolve a situation. This support was a significant learning condition, as it encouraged managers to learn by finding solutions to complex problems.

## Joint Repertoire of Different Organisational Arrangements

All managers, regardless of their previous experience, were obliged to learn a joint repertoire, containing formal procedures and administrative routines, such as reporting information about staffing and sick leave in several digital systems. This learning was necessary for carrying out managerial duties, but was also very time-consuming. The managers said that these administrative tasks took up a large part of their working time. It was even impossible for the managers to be experts at all tasks across multiple areas of expertise.

The managers were able to turn to central administrative support functions such as the organisation's HR, quality and finance departments. They explained that they accessed the expertise of these administrative functions by asking questions that led to hands-on suggestions for dealing with different administrative tasks.

> It's so rewarding working with and having great cooperation with our quality department, with HR and so on. I'm learning a lot from it. I have to be the generalist, who can do a bit of all sort of things, and then I can get help from specialists when I need to. (Manager in position 1)

Learning from the expert functions was conducive to learning about managerial work, as shown in the quotation above. The central support functions were available to all managers, in contrast to the social support they established informally for personal knowledge about elderly care. However, the ability to use the services of support functions differed among managers. Those who were experienced in a double sense (4) seemed to obtain expert knowledge more easily. However, geographical distance from administrative functions and other managers hampered access to expert services.

Another condition for learning the joint repertoire was participating in weekly management meetings (arranged for all managers by all care providers). Here, managers received information and discussed changes in the organisation, such as new working methods. Organisational changes were also made at short notice, requiring managers to implement regulations in the workplace. These meetings were seen as supportive by managers because they also calibrated the development of similar routines between the care provider's units.

The managers also mentioned other meetings such as 'development groups' for sharing the joint repertoire. These groups often focused on a specific task such as revising work instructions. A selection of managers was invited to participate in these groups, which were led by an established manager in an expert role. Participation did not require experience of elderly care and/or managerial work, as inexperienced managers (1) also took part. These managers saw this as a good opportunity to learn about the organisation and managerial work. However, disagreements within the groups sometimes resulted in demonstrations of power in favour of established managers.

## Discussion

The key finding of this study is that four learning conditions were interlinked with managers' entry to a new workplace, which also shifted in importance within the process of learning, viewed as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991). In the early entry phase, managers' previous professional experience constituted a precondition for learning, but was also explicitly expressed as a condition to ensure that managers gained access to the new workplace and gradually received legitimacy (Lave and Wenger 1991). It was necessary to be acknowledged as the new manager, but the findings indicate that this was conditioned by established managers' and subordinates' appraisals of the new manager's past experience of managerial work and elderly care. As the findings suggest, in line with other studies (Gardiner 2016), considering who is a newcomer is a complex matter. A newcomer can be completely inexperienced when entering a new workplace, but can also be an experienced new-comer with experience of management and the elderly care context. Both managerial and elderly care experience (or at least experience from the latter) were conducive to the managers' learning and provided managers with access to information and help from others (Akre and Ludvigsen 1997). Contextual experience of elderly care may also have sped up the legitimate peripheral participation process compared to managers who lacked this experience. Despite a seemingly quicker progression into the work-place for managers with elderly care experience, such experience did not necessarily predict the manager's work performance.

As the findings indicate, recruiting from the elderly care sector can facilitate managers' workplace entry, but can also risk reproducing the community of practice (Wenger 1998, 2010) and make it difficult to change prevailing practice due to power relations (Fuller et al. 2005). All managers initially encountered barriers to obtaining the learning support needed to enter the workplace. Managers who were assigned high status – those with managerial experience, and especially also those with elderly care experience – were expected to take their own initiative for learning (Akre and

Ludvigsen 1997), such as solving work problems. There were high expectations from superior managers in terms of self-management in order to adapt to the workplace conditions (Gardiner 2016) and to satisfy their own learning needs and personal desires (Billett 2009). Those managers with experience of elderly care were aware of what to do and who to ask for help, and elderly care experience was seen as a qualifying condition in itself for entering the workplace. Managers who only had experience of managerial work applied a different strategy for dealing with expectations. They did not see their lack of elderly care experience as significant, relying instead on their previous leadership skills. Inexperienced managers devoted much of their time to struggling to gain respect in the workplace community, and relied on job-specific training.

Despite different patterns of previous experience (see Table 1), the first phase of entering the new workplace can be characterised as an 'initial trial-and-learning period'. This had a considerable impact on being recognised as the new manager and building trusting relationships with others in the workplace community. After the trial-and-learning period, the managers' previous experience seemed to be less important. As the findings suggest, everyday managerial work became gradually more significant in terms of learning and becoming part of the community of the workplace. According to Lave and Wenger (1991 p. 95; see also Lave 2019 p. 135), an initial entry stage leads to a transition towards an extended period of legitimate peripherality, which contributes to more learning opportunities during the process of becoming full practitioners. As the findings indicate, other learning conditions became gradually more significant for the managers' workplace learning, such as participating in job-specific training, receiving social support and accessing the joint repertoire of organisational arrangements. Although the learning conditions identified in this study are not unique to workplace learning research (see for example Billett 2001; Ellström 2006; Evans et al. 2006, 2011; Fuller and Unwin 2004), they provide a picture of what managers who enter a new workplace perceive as essential conditions for learning to become part of the community of the workplace as the new manager.

The job-specific training consisted of different courses and mentorship provided by the employer. The care providers' main intention with these standardised programmes and learning activities was to prepare managers for their upcoming duties. Although managers stressed that job-specific training was an important condition for learning the job, the findings indicate that the standard job-specific training model did not fit all managers. The managers had different individual learning needs, which they satisfied by selecting useful course content to ensure they did not overlook important workplace regulations and routines, such as dealing with staff and administration. Checklists and other instructions were seen as useful tools for gaining access to formalised knowledge, based on a shared understanding of 'how to do' the managerial work and contextual conditions. Nevertheless, some managers found it hard to implement course content that they deemed not to be beneficial in the execution of their managerial work.

It is interesting to note that many managers shared a feeling of being left alone when deciding what to learn, even if they had plenty of scope (Ellström 2006) to create their own learning opportunities. Faced with a combination of feeling lonely and worrying about not knowing what to learn, managers said that they began to doubt whether they were 'the right manager' for the workplace. According to Akre and Ludvigsen (1997), self-doubt can hamper actively taking learning initiatives and thus also establishing a legitimate managerial position. Mentorship was another form of job-specific training

which was appreciated by managers if it worked as intended. As the findings indicate, sometimes the resigning manager – the mentor – was unwilling or unable to share knowledge and provide learning support for their inclusion in the workplace community (Lave 2008). However, if the mentorship worked well, it was seen as a great opportunity for learning from and with an established manager who knew the work team and the workplace.

Another crucial condition for entering the new workplace was receiving social support from trustworthy colleagues and turning to subordinates with expertise, for example in administrative systems. Social support required approval of the managers' managerial ability – such as knowing the context of elderly care – from subordinates. Subordinates who were sceptical about the managers' personal attributes, such as previous experience and status (Billett 2001, 2009), could even prevent them from carrying out their tasks and accessing useful knowledge in the workplace community. Managers with experience of elderly care seemed to find it easier to access social support, depending on their familiarity with the elderly care sector and occupational language (Gardiner 2016). Social support in the form of personal and emotional encouragement, such as knowing who to ask for advice or talk to about staff problems, facilitated learning together with established managers. In difficult situations, a pep talk from a superior manager was seen as self-reinforcing encouragement to solve tasks independently, which boosted self-confidence. Overall, social support seemed to make it easier to find appropriate solutions to support managers' learning (Billett 2004; Evans et al. 2006), form alliances with established managers (Fox 2000), and achieve a legitimate position in the workplace community (Campbell et al. 2009; Gardiner 2016).

While social support was tailored by the managers to suit their individual learning needs, the learning condition 'joint repertoire of organisational arrangements' was something that the managers were obliged to learn. Access to the joint repertoire of routines and administrative systems should be equal for all managers. However, this depended on the managers' ability to use the HR, quality and finance expertise offered by the care providers' centralised support functions. Managers with experience of elderly care and management knew to a greater extent than other managers how to use these support functions. Knowledge about these services brought benefits that helped managers to access more learning opportunities. In line with other studies (Gardiner 2016; Hotho et al. 2014), the findings show that organisational conditions cannot provide equal access to all those on a similar hierarchical level. One interpretation of this is that these managers' individual dispositions, such as previous experience, may have influenced their capacity to initiate and search for invitations and help from others.

Nevertheless, learning the repertoire of different organisational arrangements – such as formal procedures and administrative routines – focused on maintaining the repertoire (Wenger 1998) and ensuring similar routines between care providers' units. Weekly meetings served as a collective learning opportunity to find out about and discuss routine changes, and to calibrate working methods between units. Some – but not all – managers also had the opportunity to participate in development groups. Certain managers became involved in those groups, led by an established manager with expert knowledge in a specific work area. Established managers appeared to exert control over who was allowed to participate in a group (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Experience of elderly care or management was not essential, since inexperienced managers were elected as participants. Involving inexperienced managers may allow established managers to support less experienced managers' learning of traditions and norms related to first-line management practice in elderly care.

## Limitations

A limitation concerns the use of retrospective probing questions in the interviews. Some managers had been working as long as 30 years for the same care provider, while others were recently employed. Asking the managers to recall the event of entering a new workplace and what they felt in this situation may provide a particular type of answer. It is possible that the managers retrospectively did not remember all things that happened when they entered their new workplace. Nevertheless, the empirical material provides a reconstructed picture of the managers' experiences of learning conditions for entering a new workplace as the new manager. A strength of the relatively extensive data material is that the managers were selected from a variety of workplaces at four care providers and had diverse personal backgrounds, including age, gender and education.

## Conclusions and implication

The findings discussed in this article highlight, from a legitimate peripheral participation approach (Lave and Wenger 1991), first-line managers' learning in elderly care, focussing on the conditions for learning when entering a new workplace as the new manager. Becoming part of a community in a new workplace is a complex process. For this to succeed, a new manager must first gain acceptance from other managers and subordinates. They must also gain an understanding of what they are supposed to learn and do, and how to secure access to learning about the many managerial duties in elderly care. Four main learning conditions (previous professional experience, job-specific training, social support and a joint repertoire of organisational arrangements) were interlinked to the managers' entry into the new workplace, but also shifted in importance in terms of learning and becoming the new manager. Managers' previous professional experience was a primary condition for learning, but it was also striking how experience of elderly care was significant for learning during the initial entry phase and accessing learning in the workplace community. This observation constitutes our first conclusion, that is, the importance of having contextual and working experiences from the employer or sector. Perhaps this is significant for entering a managerial position within elderly care, depending on the complexity and challenges managers face in their everyday managerial work, such as high staff-turnover, budget responsibilities, attaining cost-efficiency, and ensuring good quality of care. It was evident that managers with experience of elderly care easily 'cracked the code' of elderly care, including thoughts, traditions and norms. It is also interesting to note that care providers predominantly seemed to recruit managers with experience of elderly care (see Table 1). Knowing about contextual workplace circumstances was a

resource for accessing other learning conditions and how to use them, such as job-specific training and organisational arrangements. This included ascertaining the usefulness of course content for carrying out the work, and turning to central expert functions such as HR.

This leads us to the second conclusion. The employer's provision of learning conditions and support resources was supposed to be equal for all new managers, to prepare them for upcoming duties. While the employer had every intention to provide these conditions, managers still had a significant responsibility to satisfy their own learning needs. They faced high expectations in terms of learning formal regulations and work routines, dealing with staff issues and solving problems independently. Professional and informal emotional support, such as encouragement, advice and feedback from established colleagues and subordinates, was valuable in situations when they felt alone and worried about not knowing what had to be learned. Managers' workplace learning in elderly care signifies that a particular type of informal learning condition is important when entering a new workplace, in order to meet the challenge of finding ways to access learning and become a new manager.

The implication of this study is therefore that it is important to acknowledge the learning that takes place in everyday managerial work. Professional, social and emotional support that is received informally is just as significant for learning as formalised training when entering a new workplace as a new manager.

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