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Customer participation and its leadership in managers' accounts

The research scrutinises the views of managers and leaders in child and family services about customer participation and its leadership. The concept of “customer participation” includes expertise by experience, peer support, and other relevant concepts. The main questions of the research were: How do the managers describe and rationalise the inclusion of patients or customers in their service provision? How do they describe the leadership of customer participation? The data consists of 25 thematic interviews conducted with leaders and managers of NGOs or public organisations in social and health services. The data are analysed with content analysis. The study indicates that the views vary with the background organisation: the NGO managers emphasise volunteer work and justify their leadership with values. Leaders of health organisations use the concept of expertise by experience and emphasise context-bound leadership. Leaders of social service organisations often use the word “companionship” and see that the role of the leader is mainly in securing prerequisites for operation and the organisation’s structural level. Despite the background organisation, the major importance of employees is seen as crucial in customer participation leadership. The employees are expected to show leadership in the everyday activities of customer participation. In addition, some of the interviewees hope that the employees could activate the managerial level of the organisation.