

Strengthening leadership for quality development and staff retention at all levels of the ECEC system

What needs to be considered?

Prof. Dr. Petra Strehmel

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Strengthening leadership for quality development and staff retention
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Overview

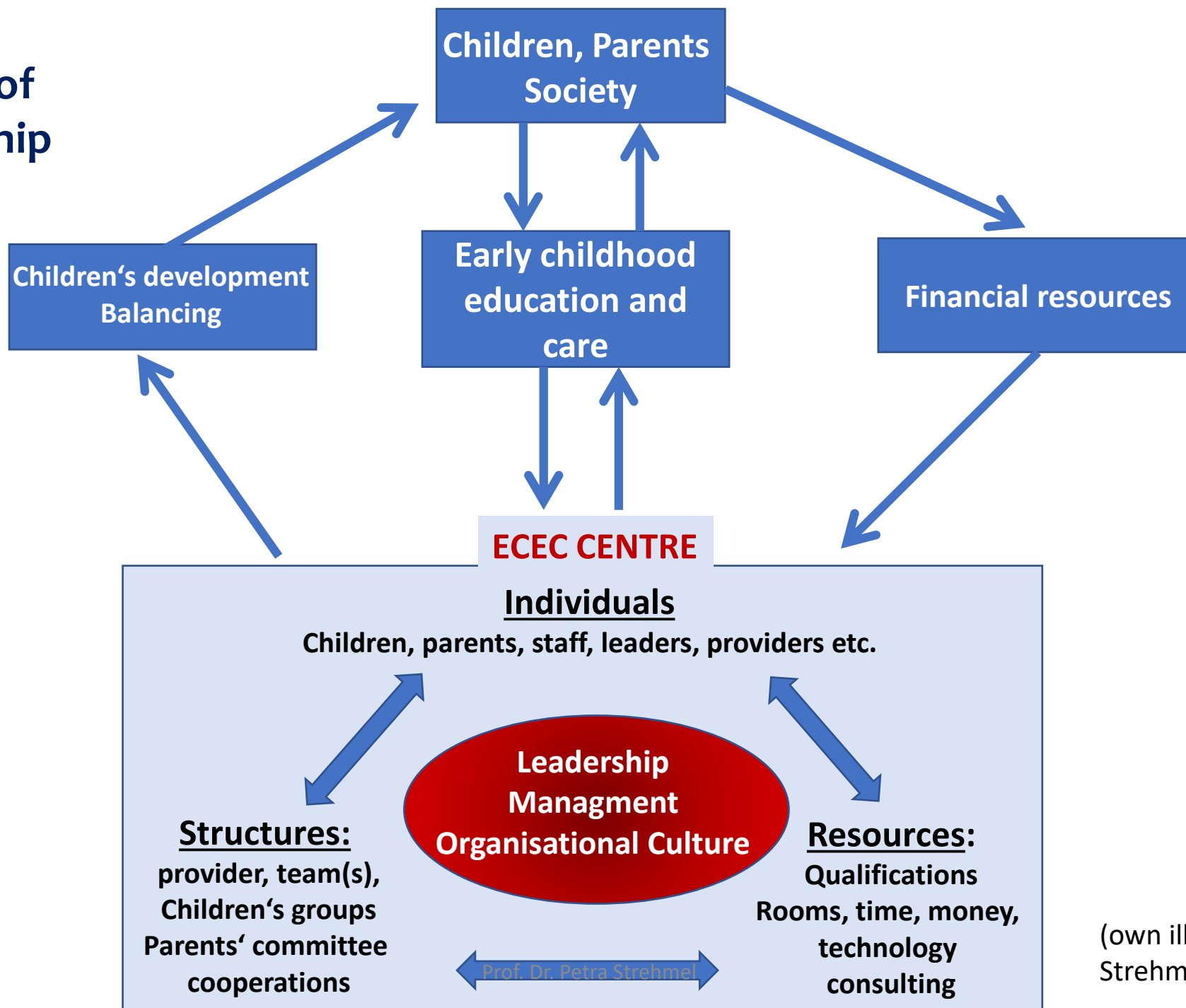
- The ECEC system
- Leadership and management in ECEC
- Leadership approaches to develop pedagogical quality
- Leadership approaches to reach staff retention
- Conclusions

The ECEC system

purpose and mandate

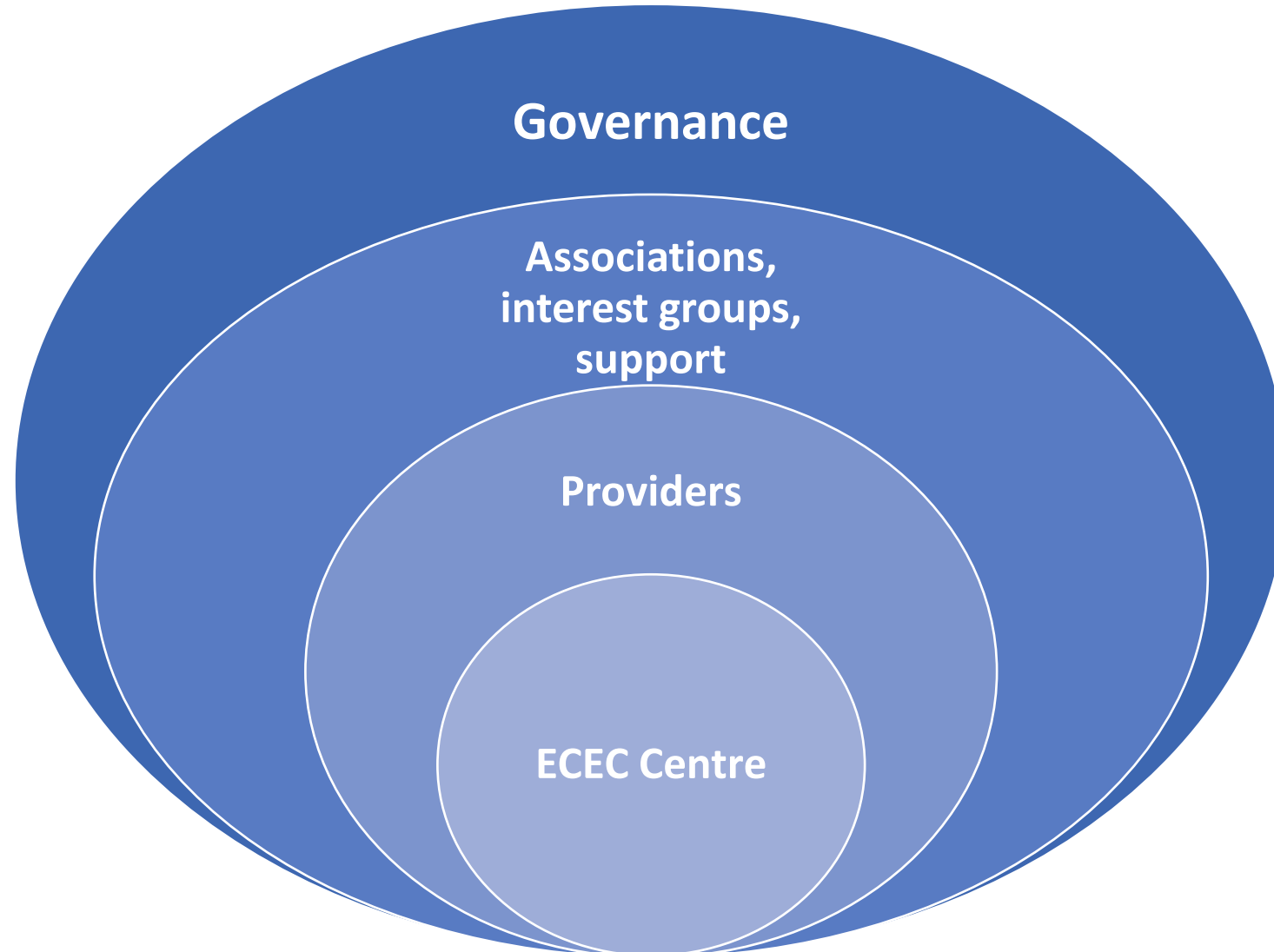
structures and levels

The purpose of ECEC leadership



(own illustration, based on Strehmel & Ulber, 2024a, 327)

Levels of the systems of ECEC



(own illustration, based on
Strehmel & Overmann, 2018)

Levels of the ECEC system

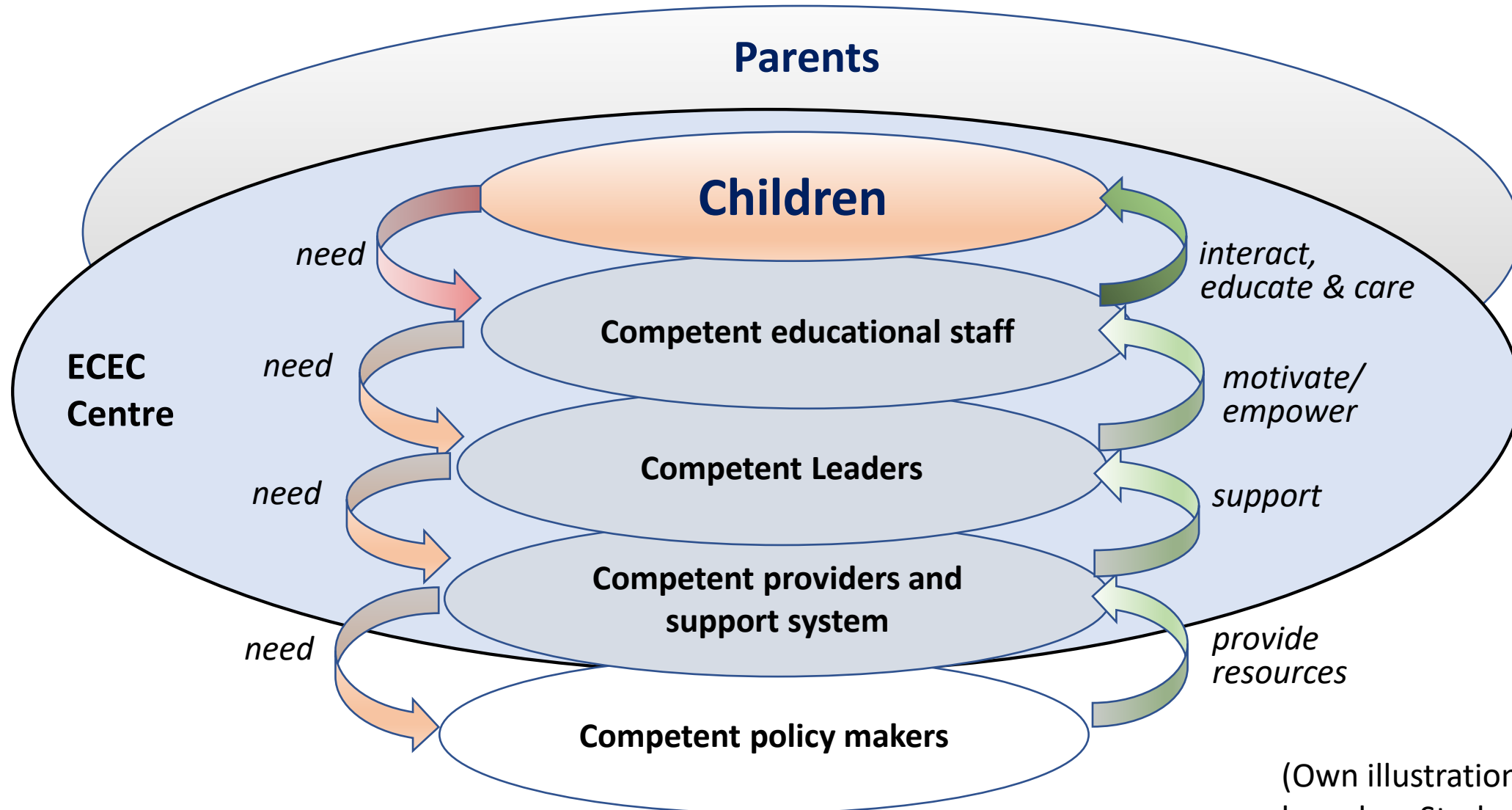
(cf. EU 2011)

SYSTEM LEVELS	Primay task	Organisational units	Actors
Individual	pedagogical work	pedagogical units	children, parents, educators
Institutional	leadership and management	ECEC centres, provider organisations	pedagogical teams, directors and providers
Inter-institutional	leadership, management, support and lobbying	Provider organisations, associations and consulting enterprises	Leaders, providers, professional experts, lobbyists
Governance	decision making on structures and resources in ECEC	interest groups, political administration, parliaments	lobbyists, political experts, policy makers

→ „Community of responsibility“

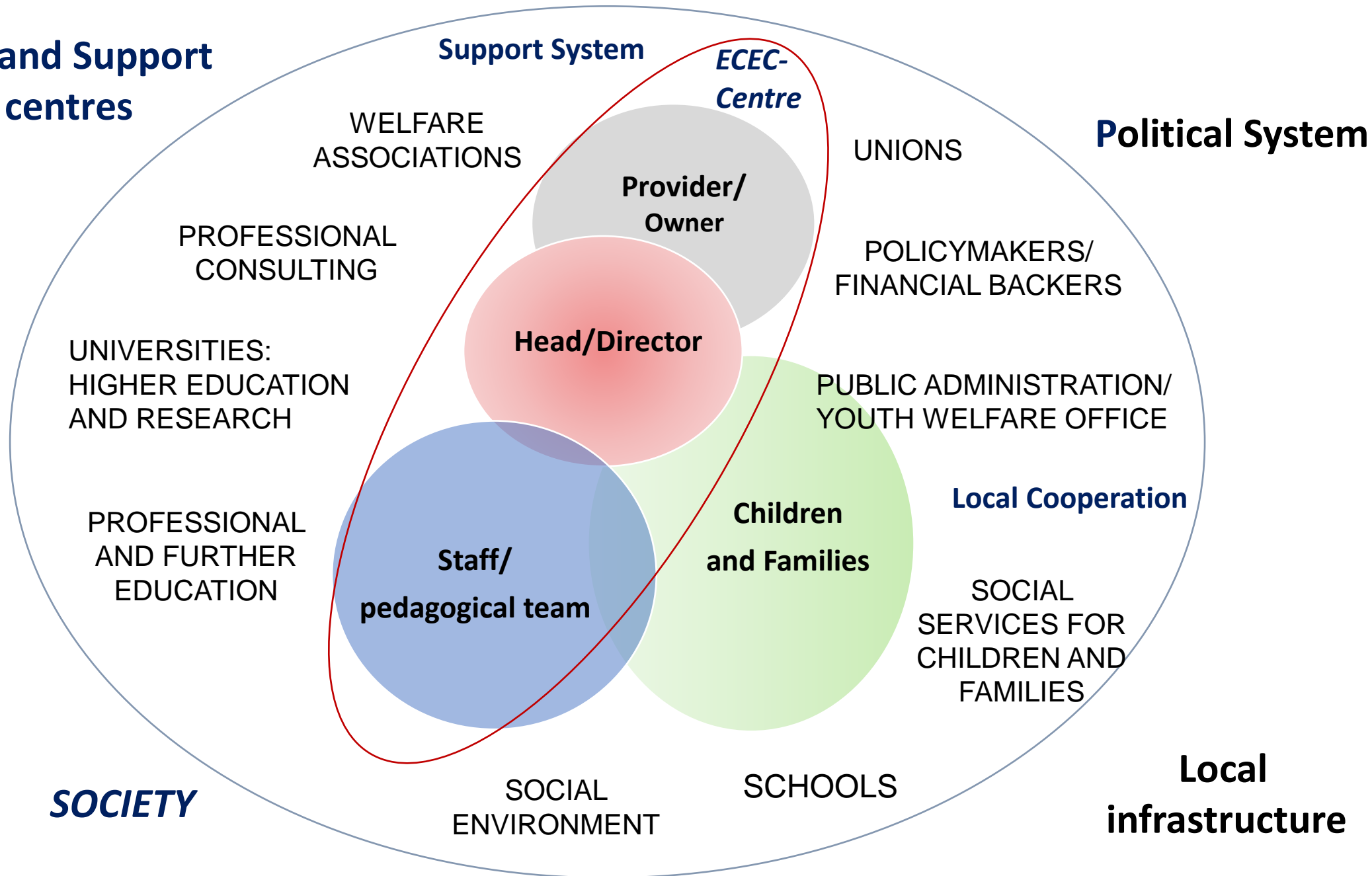
ECEC as a Competent System: Focus on Children

(cf. EU, 2011)



(Own illustration, Cascade Model, based on Strehmel, 2024a, p.403)

Cooperation and Support for ECEC centres

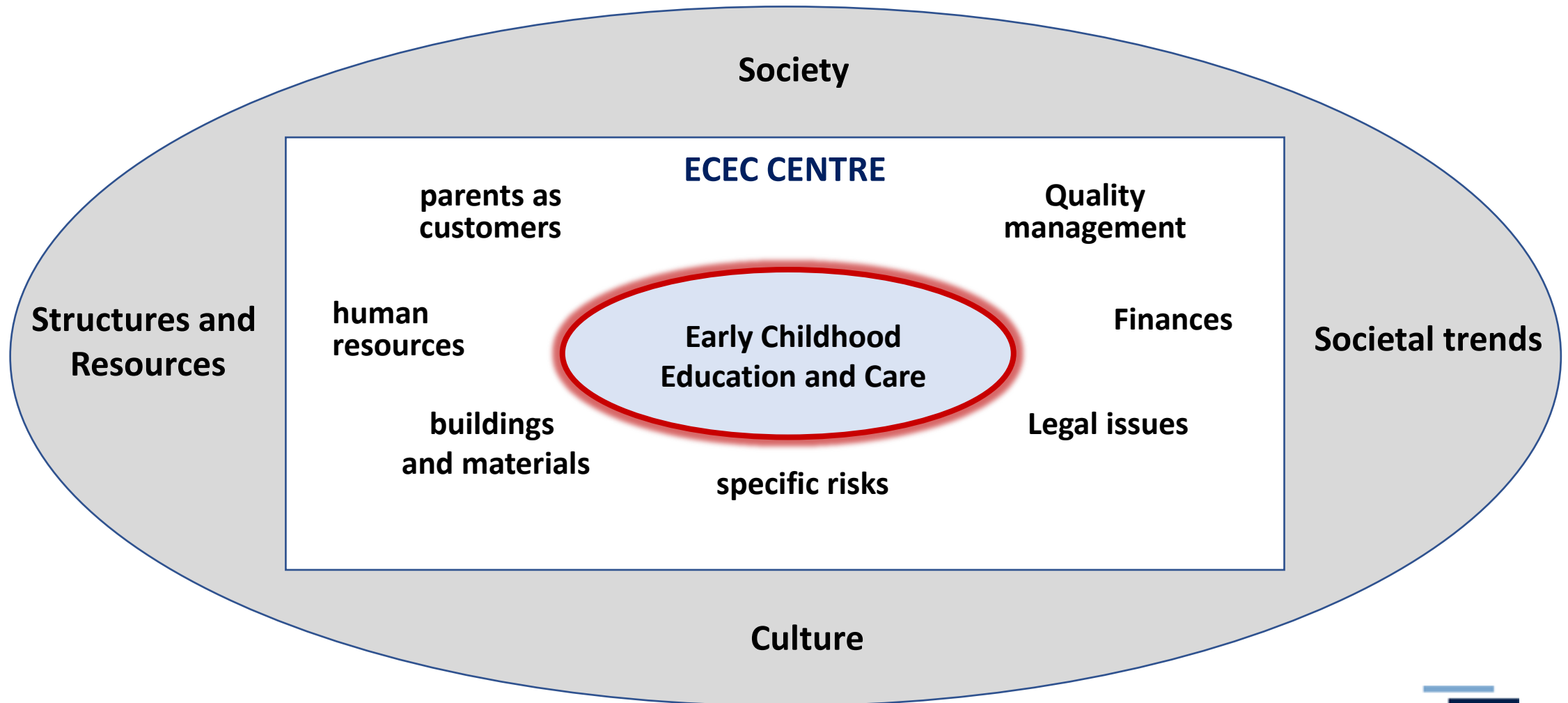


(based on Strehmel 2016; p.139)

Leadership and management in ECEC

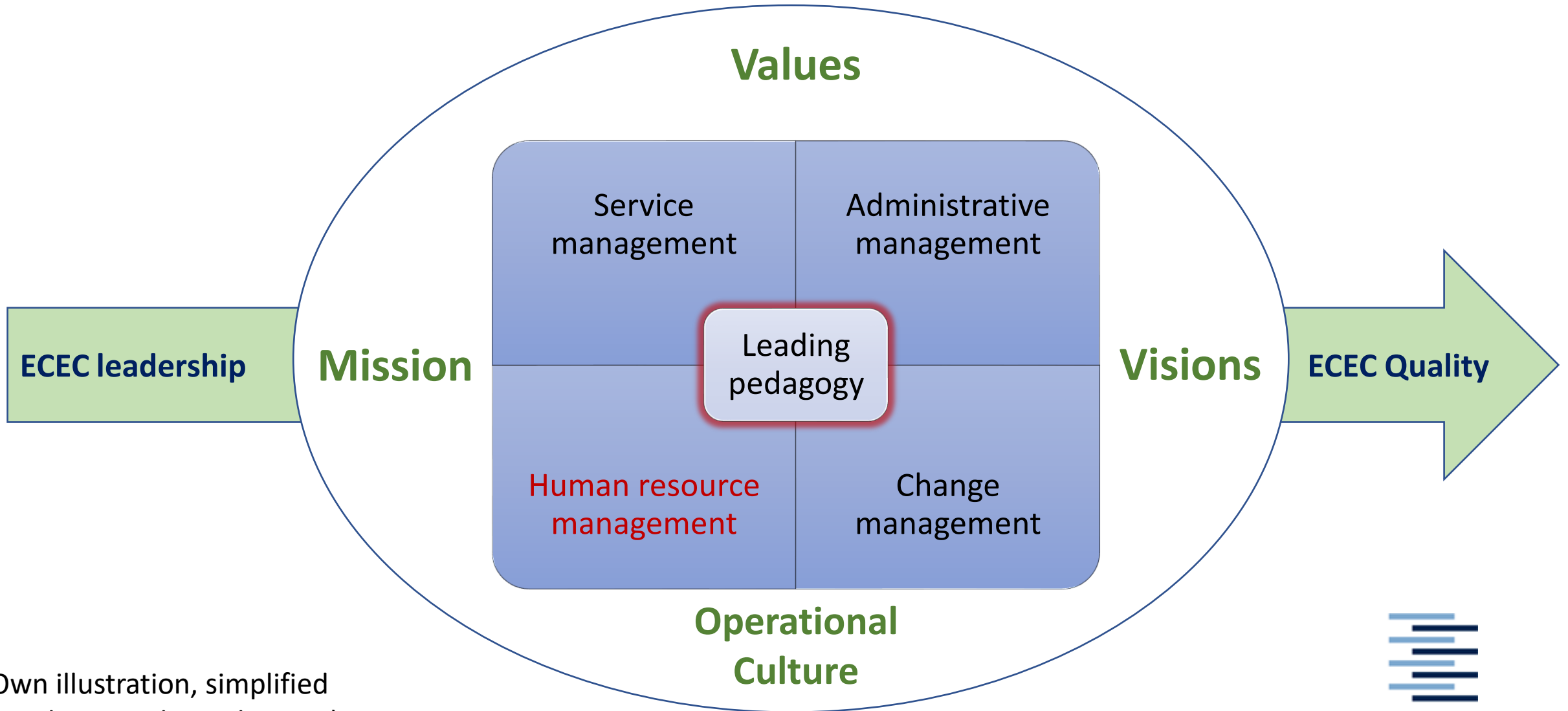
- primary task and operational environment
- an integrative framework for ECEC leadership and management

ECEC centres as small enterprises



(own illustration, based on Köhl, 2015)

Integrative framework for leadership and management functions in ECEC (Hujala et al., 2023)



(Own illustration, simplified based on Hujala et al., 2023)

Leadership and Management: Definitions

Human resource management in ECEC

- Pedagogical quality
- quality of work:
 - continuous professional development and learning
 - job satisfaction, well-being and health

Leadership means to motivate, inspire and persuade others to realize shared goals (Rodd, 2013, p.36).

Management focuses on smooth running of day-to-day work: to plan, to organize, to coordinate, to monitor and to control functions, processes and people (Rodd, 2013, p.20).

→ Management is possible without leadership (ibd.).

→ Pedagogical quality and staff retention require leadership.

Leadership dimensions

LEADERSHIP DIMENSION	FOCUS	EFFECTS
Initiating structure	organisational goals, efficiency, quality, evaluation and control	moderate positive effects on job performance
Consideration	employees' well-being, communication, appreciation, caring	job satisfaction
Participation	collaboration, inclusion of staff into decision-making processes	identification with the organisation, motivation, preparedness for learning and innovation

(cf. Rosenstiel & Nerdinger, 2020, pp.31-33)

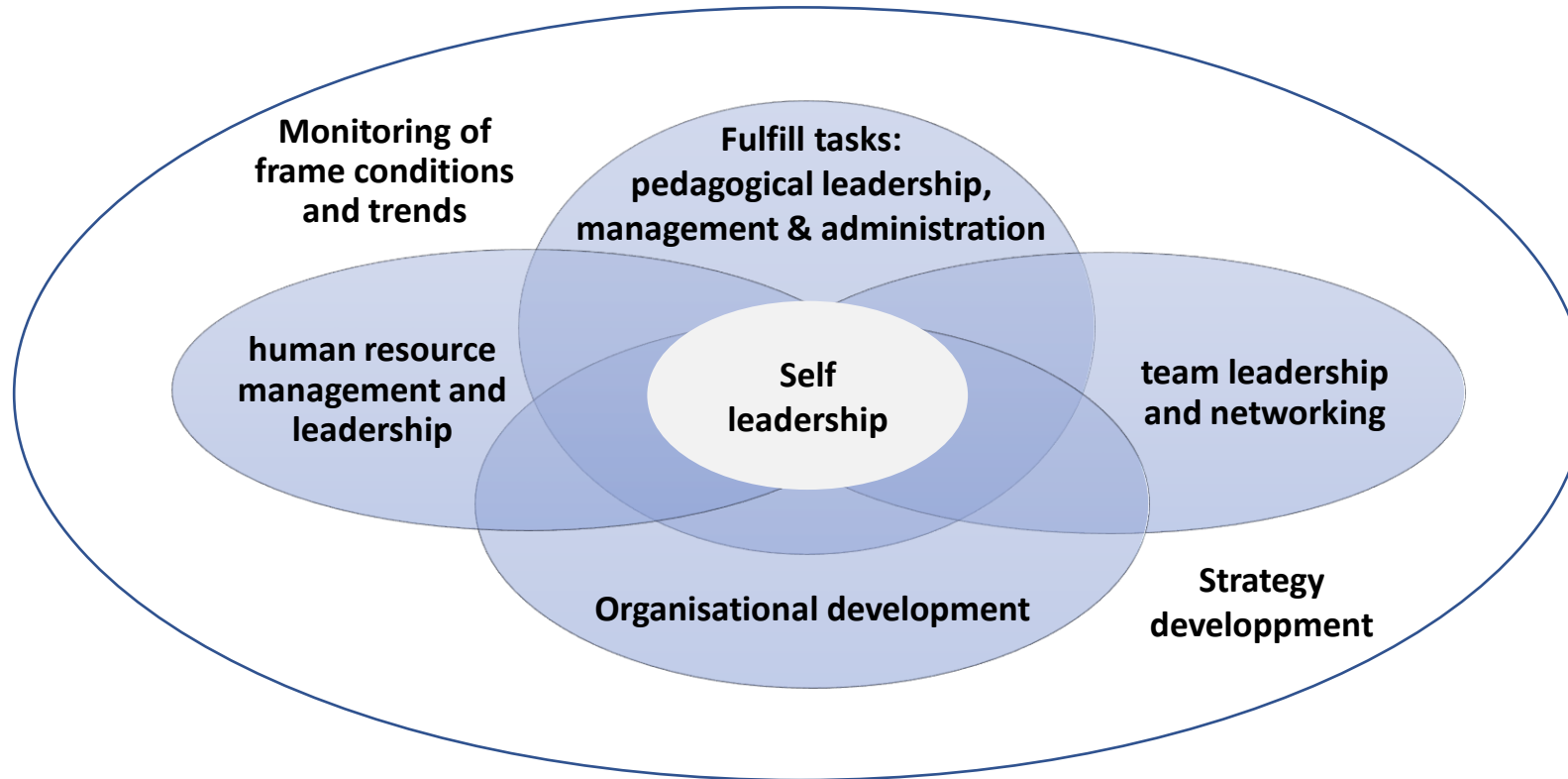
→ **Dimensions independent from each other**

→ **Qualification and experience of the staff** have to be considered

Leadership approaches in ECEC to develop pedagogical quality

- Leadership domains in ECEC
- Effective and Caring Leadership
- Distributed leadership

Leadership domains in ECEC



(own illustration cf. Strehmel & Ulber, 2024b, based Simsa & Patak, 2016)

Effective and caring leadership

(Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014)

- **Directional leadership:**
 - developing a shared vision
 - effective communication
- **Collaborative leadership:**
 - promoting a team culture
 - promoting parental collaboration
- **Empowering leadership:**
 - promoting agency in others
 - the process of change
- **Pedagogical leadership:**
 - leading learning
 - leading reflective learning

Distributed leadership

Vague concept (cf. Heikka et al., 2012, Halttunen, 2016, Tian et al., 2016)

- non-hierarchical
- including multiple persons into leadership
- interaction and collaboration
- empowerment, democracy, participation and autonomy
- work division, co-construction and shared responsibility
- learning and development



→ **Collaboration, participation, negotiations, agreements**

Definitions:

- To give others, who are motivated to, the opportunity to act, to decide, to create on the basis of trust
- brokering, facilitating and supporting the leadership of others trust (Tian et al., 2016, p.158)

Distributed leadership

- assumes the **leaders' readiness** to relinquishing some control, open up choice and share responsibility on the basis of trust
- requires **shared values** and a **trustful organizational culture**
- requires **clear structures, communication and reliable agreements**
- **needs frames**, which are present to all employees involved, e.g.:
 - laws, curricula, guidelines, contracts (e.g. with parents)
 - financial resources
 - the provider's mission etc.
- is **in charge of the leaders/directors**, e.g.
 - to **decide** on areas suitable for distributed leadership
 - to **delegate** management tasks to appropriate persons
 - to **encourage** collaboration and self-determination
 - to **provide resources and support** for those, who take responsibility
 - To **monitor** decisions and processes as well as team dynamics with new roles and responsibilities

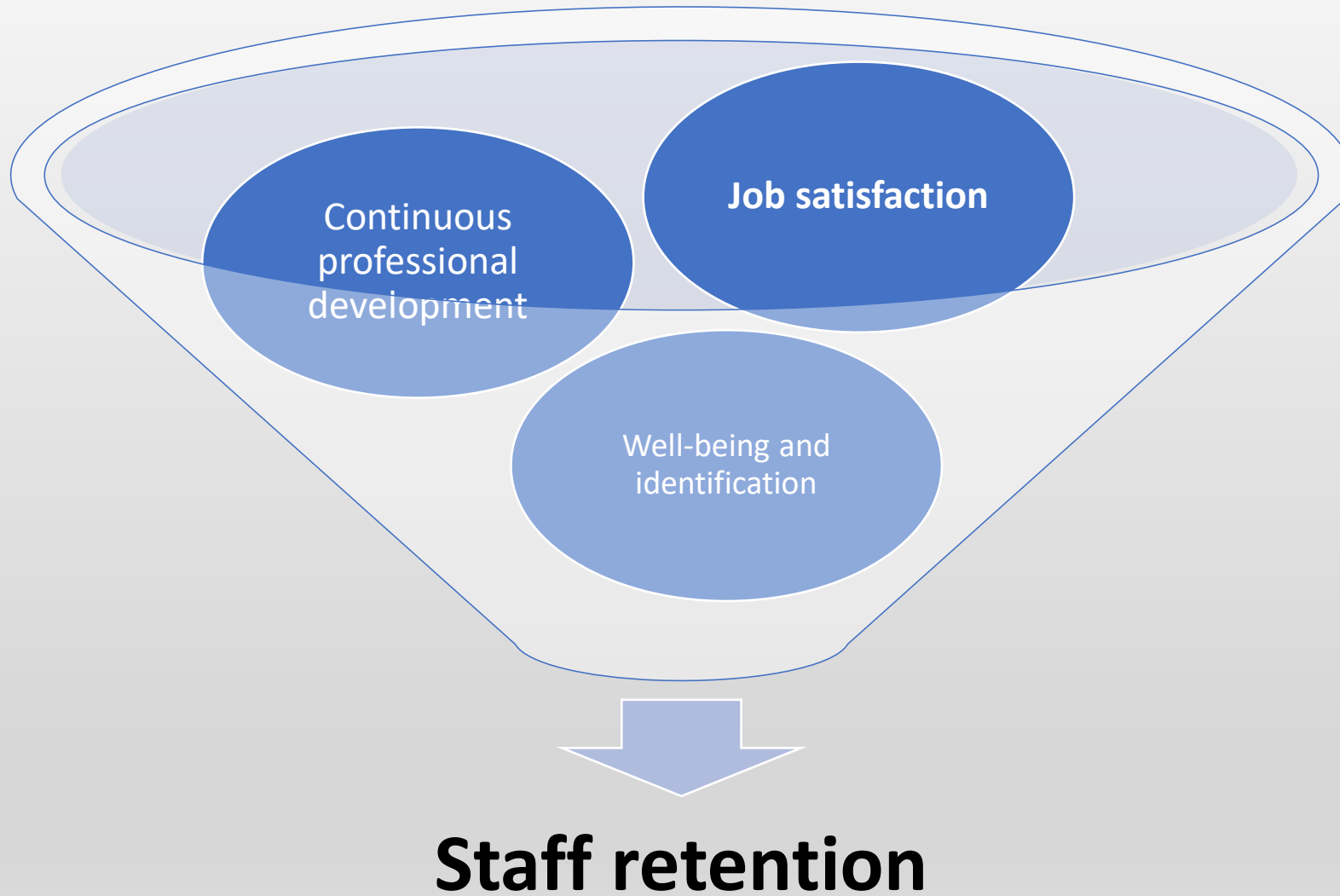
Research findings

- Distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership work hand in hand (cf. Heikka et al., 2012, p.37)
 - With more opportunities for participation employees
 - show more engagement in collaborative projects
 - experience self-efficacy and a higher job satisfaction
 - enjoy working in the centre
 - recommend the centre as a good place to work
 - With more experience of self-efficacy, the educators
 - adapt better to the needs of children
 - feel more responsible for the children's development, well-being and learning
- **Pedagogical quality** (OECD, 2020)

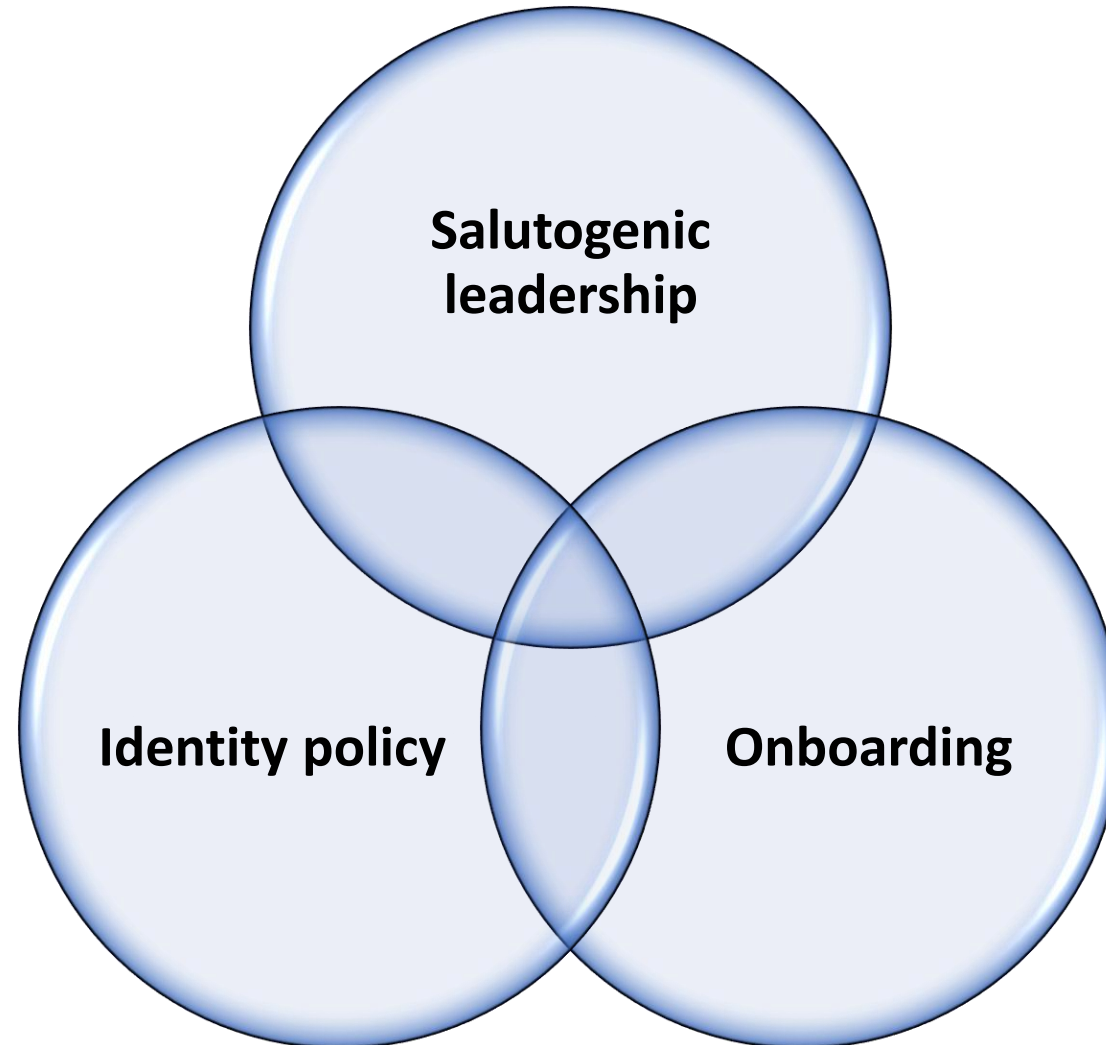
Leadership approaches in ECEC to reach staff retention

- well-being and identification with centre and provider
- Job satisfaction
- continuous professional development and career options

Staff retention



Entry points for **well-being and identification**



Salutogenic leadership

= the specific **focus of leadership** behavior on the mental, social and physical health and well-being of the employees (Strehmel, 2024a, p.180)

Basis of mental health: **Sense of coherence** (Antonovsky, 1987):

- sense of **comprehensibility**: conviction that life is structured and understandable (not chaotic)
- sense of **manageability**: Confidence to be able to cope with demands and stresses
- sense of **meaningfulness**: belief that day-to-day requirements and developmental tasks are worth to make an effort

Salutogenic Leadership Tools

- **COMPREHENSIBILITY: Clear communication**
 - talk in target group specific languages (children, parents, provider etc.)
 - use suitable media
 - promote a collaborative organisational culture
 - explain management decisions and discuss the connected scopes of action
- **MANAGEABILITY: Stress management**
 - Provide sufficient resources to perform pedagogical quality
 - analyse stressful situations
 - give support and find solutions
- **MEANINGFULNESS: Motivation and promoting job satisfaction**
 - communicate and discuss missions and visions
 - create motivating work environments
 - negotiate agreements and encourage participation (e.g. by distributed leadership)
 - promote job satisfaction

Strehmel, 2024b)

Influencing factors for job satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Satisfiers (motivators)

- Interesting work contents
- Recognition and appreciation
- autonomy, scope for action and creativity
- self-efficacy experiences
- responsibility and trust
- learning opportunities

→ **Content factors**

Dissatisfiers

- Unfavourable leadership style (unfair decisions, missing reliability and support etc.)
- Missing transparency of governance
- Missing opportunities for participation
- Unclear communication, unsolved conflicts
- negative team and organisational climate
- Insufficient work conditions (salary, child-staff-ratios, unfavourable working hours, etc.)
- work overload, chronic stressors, time pressure

→ **Context factors**

(cf. Herzberg et al., 2010, cf. Strehmel, 2024b, S. 196ff.)

Identity policy

- **Corporate identity:** clear communication of the organization's mission, values and visions
- The corporate identity should be visible in the **organisational culture** of both, ECEC centre and provider, e.g. by leadership behaviour.
- The employees' identification with the provider's mission requires **active dialogue**.

Tools for leaders/directors and providers:

- Exemplary behaviour of leaders and providers
- open ear: channels to get in contact with the provider
- talks about the mission and vision in team meetings and workshops
- personal presence of the providers in the centres
- artefacts (buildings, logo, recognizable features in all centres)
- Organization of appreciative events for the entire staff (e.g. New Year's reception), shared positive experiences (Strehmel & Overmann, 2018)

Onboarding

- Why has onboarding become more important?
 - Recruiting and staff retention has become **more complex** due to the demographic situation and the labour market
 - Recruiting: more and more often few applicants, not always bringing along sufficient qualifications, knowledge and experience → requirements for intensive induction and training from the beginning on
 - Practice under pressure: newcomers are expected to function from the first day on → early fluctuation
 - new job as critical life event in the “rushhour of life”: challenges for balancing: newcomers check the fit between job, private life and career plans
- Onboarding: Welcome and induction of newcomers into
 - the centre (rooms, tools, organisation, rules)
 - the tasks
 - the team
 - the provider (Strehmel, 2024b)

Tools for Onboarding

- Tools for ECEC centre leaders/directors:
 - induction concepts (regular talks, appraisals and feedback)
 - mentoring (by leaders or team members)
 - teambuilding workshops, team training
 - welcome workshops in the provider organization (getting to know key persons and colleagues)
 - quality handbooks
 - planning further education and training to catch up missing qualifications and competencies
- Additional Tools for providers (for the onboarding of leaders):
 - Induction into the circle of leader (for providers with more than one centre)
 - opportunity to get to know the support system (associations, local players and cooperations)
 - coaching and supervision (Strehmel & Overmann, 2018)

Continuous professional development (cpd) and career planning

- Why is continuous professional development important?
 - Quality assurance and development
 - social change
 - new insights from science and research: Families, childhood, societal structures, media etc. → changing demands in early childhood education
 - Desire of employees to learn and develop (cf. EU, 2021)
- Why is career planning an issue for leaders/directors and providers?
 - young people see themselves as creators of their own career
 - young people have a choice in a employee driven labour market
 - new ECEC experts seek learning opportunities and strive for lifelong learning
 - career options are criteria for the selection of positions

Tools for leaders/directors to promote cpd and career planning for educators

- Tools for leaders/directors
 - The creation of an organizational climate open for innovation and experiments
 - Learning opportunities and reflection on the job
 - participative planning of further education and training (including team trainings)
 - talent management: open up opportunities to deepen individual professional interests and put them into practice
 - job enlargement: e.g. by passing on special knowledge and experience to colleagues, consult others (Strehmel & Overmann, 2018)
 - professional learning communities (NESET, 2017)

Tools for providers to promote cpd and career planning for leaders

- **salutogenic leadership** towards the leaders
- **collaboration and participation** in the circle of leaders:
 - meetings to exchange information,
 - Discussion of topics of corporate management
 - Finding solutions and making decisions together with the leaders (cf. distributed leadership) → opportunities for learning, professionalization and identification with the provider
- **teambuilding** in the circle of leaders → mutual trust for peer consulting (Strehmel & Overmann, 2018)
- **Individual career planning** and the facilitation of career pathways

Conclusion

Conclusion: Pedagogical Quality

- **Leadership, management and administration** were pointed out by an **integrated model** of Hujala et al. (2023). Concrete structures, work division and organizational cultures dependent on the respective structures of the ECEC system, the provider organizations and ECEC centres.
- **Human resource management** in ECEC aims at pedagogical quality on the one hand and the staff's well-being and continuous professional development on the other.
- **ECEC specific leadership concepts**, e.g. 'Effective and Caring Leadership' (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014) describe directions and orientations for leadership behaviour to reach these goals.
- The **concept of distributed leadership** is vague. Distributed leadership
 - needs frames
 - is closely connected to collaborative and participative leadership styles
 - assumes the formal leaders' openness for change and the preparedness to share responsibility
 - needs consideration which leadership tasks could be shared and which persons encouraged to take over responsibility
 - proved to be effective for the development of pedagogical quality.

Conclusions: Staff Retention

- Staff retention has become necessary due to the Europe-wide lack of qualified early childhood staff.
- Staff retention can be improved by using **professional leadership concepts**, such as *salutogenic leadership* and the *promotion of job satisfaction*.
- In addition intensive **onboarding** processes, measures to boost the **identification** of employees with the provider organization as well as the provision of **learning opportunities** and **facilitation of career pathways** can be helpful.

Thank you!

Your questions?

petra.strehmel@hamburg.de

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