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To cite this Article / Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Brito, R. (2020) Leadership in times of crisis : words from our leader Dr. Carita Prokki. TAMK-blogi, 22.4.2020.

URL: <https://blogs.tuni.fi/tamkblogi/teema2/leadership-in-times-of-crisis-words-from-our-leader-dr-carita-prokki/>

# Leadership in times of crisis: words from our leader Dr. Carita Prokki

22.4.2020 — Arja Hautala



Photo by Jehyun Sung on Unsplash

Wednesday 18.03.2020 was the day when the Finnish Government decided to close all schools in Finland due to the corona pandemic. In this last month, and probably for a couple more to come, all students and staff of Tampere University of Applied Sciences have been working remotely, or what is also called home office.

In regular, non-pandemic times, home office for an extended period of time is reality still for only a few. According to a study by Zug, Switzerland-based serviced office provider [IWG](#), 70 percent of professionals work remotely only one day a week. At TAMK, online learning is a familiar method for students, but for the staff, remote work is still mostly on a need-to basis. Our rector Markku Lahtinen has stated in an intra newsletter that "...this has been a huge instant effort for all of us, fortunately we have been preparing for these online tools and methods for years".

Our TAMK Edu's director, Dr. Carita Prokki, shared some of her thoughts on the matter: "To lead teams online is very new to us in TAMK. To connect regularly is important. It does not mean control, which some people may think. It is a normal need to be acknowledged and recognized. It is also important that the team has unformal gatherings. We have had "teams-walking" sessions. We have had virtual coffee moments. Also the sense of humor is important. Laugh binds us together."

Keeping teams together without face-to-face contact has challenges of its own, especially during a time of global scale sanitary crisis. The virus brings changes to a lot of dynamics in our daily lives; workers are generally more anxious than normal, some may have small children at home, and ultimately the lack of close human contact and activities will be impactful in motivation. This is a fierce test for a leader. Carita says “crisis unite good teams even more. In crisis we need lot of accurate information and reflection. Team members need to know the ‘chain of command’. It builds the feeling of safety. All in all the crisis situation is very peculiar situation.”

For the teachers, it’s crucial that management is ready to support and take action, because the change in demand is so drastic now. This is where educational leadership skills need to be at the strongest. An educational leader is a person with not only experience, but empathy; a person who is both inspirational and methodic. Päivi Mayor, responsible for our awarded TAMK’s *Master’s Programme in Educational Leadership*, summarizes a good leader in saying that it is about “helping others to succeed” [in this video](#).

When asked why educational leadership studies are important, Carita Prokki answered: “First of all being a leader is an own profession itself. It is a big mistake to assume that you will become a leader overnight. In these complex times leadership skills are very important and every leader should take it very seriously. Understanding that becoming a leader also means training yourself. In teacher’s profession leadership skills are crucial. It is your job as a teacher to coach the learner towards ones blooming. It is just a challenging task. What we also need is a network to reflect our work. This is how we can effectively develop ourselves.”

Text: Renata Brito, Project Worker – Brazil Expert at Tampere University of Applied Sciences