Shared Leadership: A Postheroic Perspective on Leadership as a Collective Construction

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Within the field of leadership practices, there is an emergent movement towards viewing leadership in terms of collaboration between two or more persons. At the same time, traditional literature on leadership and organization theory has been dominated almost exclusively by the perspective that leadership is something that is exercised by a single person—the idea of unitary command (Pearce & Manz, 2005). This has been challenged by the theoretical perspective of postheroic leadership, of which one practical consequence is to view leadership activities as collective rather than individual. In this paper, we argue that by shifting perspective from viewing leadership as a single-person activity to viewing it as collective construction processes, we will see new patterns in how leadership is exercised in practice. Thematic data from four qualitative case studies of organizations are presented. A discussion towards future research agendas where the articulation and questioning of the foundations of leadership practices and leadership research are central to the development of postheroic leadership ideals concludes the paper.

Within the field of leadership practices, there is an emergent movement towards viewing leadership in terms of collaboration between two or more persons. Increasingly, the public debate recognizes states, corporations, and organizations as led by several persons rather than by a single charismatic person, a "Great Man" (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005, p. 550). What seems to be the claimed reason for this is that organizational leadership is a complex and exhausting job that demands too much of single individuals and that shared leadership is a way to broaden the competence and personality bases of management and relieve each other from time to time. It is a search for leadership perspectives that enable people in modern society to actually work with leadership without sacrificing everything else in life, perspectives that may also enhance the legitimacy of leadership in a society that raises serious moral doubts concerning the content and consequences of modern management practices.

Leadership has always been discussed both in terms of (a) what leaders do or should do to lead and (b) what makes others follow them. Therefore, new leadership ideals must include

more reflecting issues where leaders themselves find it possible to go on with their current way of living despite vast responsibilities and where leaders and followers share a view of leadership practices as legitimate both in terms of effectiveness and morality. In our own earlier studies, we have seen examples of both dual and collective leadership in several enterprises, and we have also seen how individuals may go beyond taken-for-granted identity bases in society (such as the single hero entrepreneur) through articulation and reflection (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2003).

At the same time, traditional literature on leadership and organization theory has been dominated almost exclusively by the perspective that leadership is something that is exercised by a single person—the idea of unitary command (Pearce & Manz, 2005). Later developments in these fields have emphasized cultural values, visions, and leadership as interactions between leaders and led (Bryman, 1996; Küpers, 2007; Meindl, 1995; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). What still has been rarely challenged is the notion of leaders as one single person or the notion of leadership as something that is exercised by a single person, notions that also shape leader's identities in society. The idea of unitary command, thus, is still strongly contributing to the ongoing construction of leadership in society and the ongoing construction of leaders' and followers' selves. Leaders as well as followers (terms that in themselves represent dualistic and dichotomous identity constructions) incorporate such taken-for-granted assumptions and make them a part of themselves and their ongoing interaction with others. For example, Hatch, Kostera, and Kozminski (2006) have studied interviews with influential CEOs published in *Harvard Business Review*, a journal with a significant impact on managerial culture. Analyzing what kind of stories are told by the leaders, they found out that the large majority were epic stories, stories where a heroic individual succeeds in achieving a desirable goal despite all the obstacles along the way. Therefore, both in the literature and in organizational practice, it seems to be impossible to speak of leadership without speaking of leaders. The question of whether leadership functions really need to be performed by leaders seems to be unexplored. Accepting the need for leadership has meant accepting the need for one leader, directly implying a differentiation between leaders and followers on a power dimension (Vanderslice, 1988). As Gronn (2002) pointed out, the main difficulty with the taken-for-granted dichotomies leader–follower and leadership–followership in organization theory is that "they *pre*scribe, rather than *de*scribe, a division of labor" (p. 428). Using dichotomies helps us to make sense of the world, but problems arise if this means excessively simplifying complex relations and interdependent processes to simple binary opposition (Collinson, 2005). One has almost automatically assumed unitary command as a natural perspective on leadership, in the same way entrepreneurship research has assumed the notion of single individuals as the natural perspective on entrepreneurship.

Several of the most acknowledged studies on leadership have explicitly had this perspective, such as Carlson (1951) and Mintzberg (1973) who both followed single CEOs in order to understand what leaders do and what leadership is all about. The same perspective can also be found in formal and informal regulations and practices in society in the notion that only a single person can be held accountable for a defined economic area of responsibility—a notion with far-reaching consequences for those seen as leaders and what is seen as leadership in the modern corporate world. Such a notion is also supported, at least in Sweden, by the legislation concerning different business areas. Even if, in most of the cases, these rules do not represent an absolute ban on two persons sharing, for example, a managerial position, it appears clear that one single person is preferred. Clearly identifiable responsibilities, more uniform practices, and a simple command structure are some of the arguments used in favor of the single-person managerial position (Öman, 2005).

Insofar contemporary leadership research can be seen as an important influence in the ongoing construction of leadership ideals and practices in society, the question of what basic perspectives guide this research should be more than only a theoretical interest.

In this paper, we will start out by discussing the theoretical roots of the unitary command perspective. Following that, we will argue that all leadership can be seen as processes of interaction between several individuals. By shifting perspective from leadership as a single-person activity to collective construction processes, we will see new patterns in how decisions are made, how issues are raised and handled, how crises are responded to, and so forth.

We will then present qualitative data from four case studies of organizations which, on the surface, are organized by unitary command but where the everyday construction of leadership and leader identity is a collective one. The leadership in these organizations is seen as ongoing construction processes where leaders, expectations on leaders, idea generation, decision making, and arenas for leadership are continuously negotiated and reformulated over time (cf. Smircich & Morgan, 1982). In the four organizations (two independent schools, a private theater company, and a nonprofit music industry), we find different processes of construction of leaders and leadership. A discussion towards future research agendas where the articulation and questioning of the moral and ideological foundations of leadership practices and leadership research are central to the development of postheroic leadership ideals concludes the paper.

Beyond the Unitary Command Perspective

Historical Overview of Leadership Theory

Looking for the origins of the scientific study of leadership, we can see that modern leadership theory started to emerge during the decades of the Industrial Revolution when leadership was first given attention by economists (Pearce & Manz, 2005). At that time, the concept of leadership was centered on command and control. With the beginning of the new century, the principles of scientific management (Taylor, 1911) became dominant in the management and leadership field. The idea of distinguishing between managerial and worker responsibilities implied that the command-and-control idea was reinforced with management giving orders and providing instructions and workers following them.

Reviewing leadership theory, Bryman (1996) broke down its history into four main approaches that have been dominating at different times: the trait approach, the style approach, the contingency approach, and the new leadership approach. The main focus of leadership research has thus shifted during the years, partly due to inconsistency in research results within each approach and the consequent need to find better models.

Early researchers focused on finding those personal characteristics and qualities that differentiate leaders from nonleaders—the trait approach. Such an approach was prevalent until the late 1940s and regained importance in the 1980s in a revisited form. The focus was then put on the follower's expectations of the ideal leader's traits—implicit leadership theories (Lord, De Vader, & Allinger, 1986). People were recognized as leaders depending on how well they fit the follower's conceptualization of an ideal leader.

The style approach, prominent until the late 1960s, moved the focus to leaders' behavior, for example, by defining two components of leadership behavior, one characterized by concern with people and the other characterized by the clear specification of what followers are expected to do (Bryman, 1996). Not even this approach to the study of leadership died with the advent of

the next approach—the contingency approach. On the contrary, studies searching for the best style or traits were still performed at the same time as these ideas played an important role in the education of future leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The contingency approach, popular until the early 1980s, abandoned the idea of a best way of being a leader and recognized the importance of the context by focusing on the relationship between situational variables and leader effectiveness. Finally, in the more recent new leadership approach, the leader is seen as the manager of meaning, the one who defines organizational reality by means of articulating a vision for the organization (Bryman, 1996; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, and visionary leadership are some of the terms used to describe this new leadership ideal.

The Institutionalization of the Unitary Command Perspective

Leadership has been conceptualized as a matter of influence exercised by a leader on a group towards a specific goal (Bryman, 1996). Such a one-way process has been enlarged to a more diffuse activity with leadership being defined as management of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Even though both influence and meaning management can be seen as interactive processes enabling organizing, the focus has remained mostly on single individuals.

In fact, at the beginning of modern leadership theory, the emphasis was on a vertical leadership, in other words, leadership as command and control. The contribution of Fayol and Weber in Europe can be considered important for strengthening the image of an individual leader granted top-down authority based on command and control (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

General management theory then expanded from its base in scientific management through inclusion of psychological and sociological theory and through new understandings of the environment in which managerial activities were performed; leadership theory expanded as well. As in the trait approach, early explanations of leadership effectiveness were based on the notion that leaders possess certain psychological traits and personal characteristics that distinguish them from ordinary people. These theories are all individualistic in the sense that they focus on the individual leader, thereby supporting the general taken-for-granted assumption that leadership is a single-person task.

As described, later developments came to emphasize effective leadership as a question of leadership behavior in relation to specific situations. Moving the focus from individual characteristics to what leaders actually did in different contexts and situations, new insights were gained that pointed at the importance of choosing the right leader for the situation at hand. Thereby, researchers could also distinguish between different leadership styles in terms of effectiveness. Nevertheless, such approaches often are focused on formal leaders still, excluding the study of informal processes going on in organizations.

During recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in viewing leadership as a social process where leaders emerge from groups over time as they come to personify what it means to be a member of that group at that point of time. As is often the case in management theory, this development is both based on theoretical advancements and on changed values and practices in organizations. Thus, a processual view of leadership is not only a consequence of a search for new and better conceptual and methodological tools for the understanding of leadership but also of the new knowledge-intensive economy where neither people nor information can or should be controlled in the way they used to be. But, even in this new brave world of visionary, idea-based, or charismatic leadership, the notion of individual leaders still

seems to persist. The leader is now not only the one who leads and give orders but also a symbol and source of inspiration. As Mintzberg (1999) put it, "We seem to be moving beyond leaders who merely lead; today heroes save. Soon heroes will only save; then gods will redeem" (p. 4). As a consequence, most research has been concerned with senior leaders rather than with the study of the organizing processes going on in the whole organization.

Pearce and Conger (2003) listed some quite recent theoretical contributions that have in some way paved the way for a new model of leadership, what they have called shared leadership. Some of the contributions are team–member exchange theory, leader–member exchange theory, self-leadership, followership, and empowerment. These contributions give the possibility to enlarge the study of leadership and involve more people in it. But, even when the focus is moved from formal leaders to their coworkers and the latter ones are recognized as important actors for the emergence of leadership (e.g., when implicit leadership theories are considered), there is still little research on the leadership processes or collective acts of leadership that are not performed by formal leaders alone. Such research would focus not only on individuals' perception of leadership but also on the process itself. Leadership processes could be defined as processes in which emergent coordination and change are constructed (Uhl-Bien, 2006). There is a need also for more research on how these processes are made sense of through social interactions, not only in the followers' minds, and on how they contribute to the construction or reconstruction of the leadership ideal and the organizational context.

If leadership theory seems to take the unitary command perspective for granted, the same can be said where general organization theory is concerned. Despite the search for new, postbureaucratic organizational forms that acknowledge both the pace of change in the marketplace and the new values held by the young generations, still, managerial posts are treated as singe-person assignments. People must know who is in charge and who to hold accountable.

To sum up, the unitary command perspective lives on in good health, although it has never been scientifically proved that it is always the most effective form. Individual leaders are still used to personify companies and countries, and most new management books treat leadership as something that is exercised by single individuals. In the same vein, the theoretical language of the field seems to incorporate the new environment for leadership activities through reusing old concepts rather than inventing new ones, thereby affirming the notion of heroic, individualist leadership. One prominent example of this is the recent stream of literature on charismatic leadership (Conger, 1999) where an old Weberian concept for exceptional, radiant leaders has been used to portray today's relational, democratic, and trustful leadership styles. At the same time, in the practical world, we can see a development where leaders in all sectors are met with skepticism and contempt, and where young talents pursue other career forms than the managerial ladder.

Sharing Leadership in Practice: Why and How?

Looking back at Western history, the fact that leadership is shared is not something new. Rome had two consuls in ancient times and, during a period, also a triumvirate (Lambert-Olsson, 2004; Sally, 2002). The main reason for these collective institutions was to avoid concentrating power in only one person's hands. In the same way, in some countries (e.g., the United States), the legislative, executive, and judiciary powers are divided and assigned to different institutions. However, this is not necessarily the main reason for sharing leadership in an organization. The main arguments presented by both researchers and practitioners are summarized in Table 1.

Before discussing them, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that an idea (that of sharing leadership) that most of us almost spontaneously tend to reject has indeed already been applied in different historical contexts.

From an individual perspective, concepts like heroic leadership are used to discuss the romantic conception of leaders as heroes who positively transform organizations and individuals (Pearce & Manz, 2005) and the consequent inhumane workload for the modern manager. Sharing leadership can fulfill the need to enable him or her to live a balanced life (Döös, Hanson, Backström, Wilhelmson, & Hemborg, 2005). From a coworker perspective, modern decentralized ways of organizing—through high-performing teams rather than through bureaucratic command structures—is one of the arguments used (Lambert, 2002; Pearce, 2004; Walker, 2001).

From an organizational perspective, referring to established theories on group composition and role complementarity, it is also usual to describe managerial tasks as requiring several different individual roles or functions at one and the same time (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001; Miles & Watkins, 2007; Yang & Shao, 1996). For example, two different personalities or competence areas completing each other are common for those forms of leadership that are not formally regulated but that are shared in practice. It can be the case of tight collaboration between a CEO and the chairman of the board or the CEO and the COO or of a coach and his collaborator in a football team, as with the Swedish couple Sven-Göran Eriksson and Tord Grip. Likewise, the cultural and media sectors are full of dual leadership models (de Voogt, 2005; Lambert-Olsson, 2004). The format of having an emotional leader and a task leader has been an arrangement used in famous international corporations such as Microsoft, HP, Boeing, and Intel (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2003). Shared leadership also has been described as a better alternative than a single leader when an increasingly complex world requires top management competence profiles broader than what can be expected to be found in one single person or when companies are dealing with very complex technologies that make the communication between technical and nontechnical persons difficult (O'Toole et al.; Pearce, 2004; Waldersee & Ealgeson, 2002). If two coleaders would work together for a period of time, they could develop a common language and understanding (Sally, 2002). Teamwork in projects and discourses of team members' empowerment seem also to set the premises for sharing leadership within groups. Some research (quantitative) has been done on particular types of teams, as product development or change management teams and the degree of shared leadership has been claimed to be related to team effectiveness (Pearce & Sims, 2002).

From a societal perspective, one of the arguments is that shared leadership can help prevent immoral actions since the coleaders can control each other and discuss the appropriateness of their actions (Lambert-Olsson, 2004).

Table 1: Summary of Arguments in the Literature in Favor of Shared Leadership Practices

Perspective	Arguments found in the literature	References
Individual perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing the lives of those who work in managerial positions)	• Solo leadership consumes people, and there is a risk for high level of stress and anxiety. • Enhanced balance of work requirements and personal responsibilities/private life. • Better sense of security and stability in decision making and implementation. • Enhanced possibility to learn having the coleader as an example and as a feedback giver. • More enjoyable work.	Döös, Hanson, et al. (2005); Fletcher (2004); Holmberg & Söderlind (2004); Sally (2002); Wilhelmson (2006)
Coworker perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing the correspondence between employee expectations and actual organizational practices)	• Young people are used to working in teams with some degree of shared leadership. When they rise to higher organizational levels, they are more likely to want to continue sharing leadership and resist traditional solo command. • Expectation for coleadership created by the experience of living in modern (at least Western) family models where both parents participate in decision making, reinforced by experiences of working in teams. • Young employees expect more democratic leadership in modern organizations.	Bradford & Cohen (1998); Lambert (2002); Pearce (2004); Sally (2002); Walker (2001)
Organizational perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing leadership effectiveness)	• Single-person leadership cannot reflect and handle the environmental complexity facing most organizations. Several different competences, skills, and roles are required. • Communication between professions can be enhanced through mutual leadership. • Shared leadership means that more parts of the organization and different interests can be represented at the same time at a managerial level. One consequence can be facilitation of change processes. • Both stability and change can be represented by a dual leadership, thereby facilitating organizational change. • Lower risk for suboptimal solutions if the leadership of an organization is truly shared by the management team. • Less vulnerability in the case of leader absence or resignation. • Coleaders can have a larger span of control together and more time for their coworkers and for reflecting on the strategy and the basic values for their unit. • Organizations can avoid losing young interesting leader candidates because of stress associated with leader posts. • Organizations can benefit from the cognitive and behavioral capabilities of a larger number of individuals.	Bradford & Cohen (1998); de Voogt (2005); Denis et al. (2001); Holmberg & Söderlind (2004); Miles & Watkins (2007); O'Toole et al. (2003); Pearce (2004); Pearce & Conger (2003); Pearce & Sims (2002); Sally (2002); Waldersee & Ealgeson (2002); Wilhelmson (2006); Yang & Shao (1996)
Societal perspective (shared leadership as a way of maintaining and increasing the legitimacy of leadership and management)	• When power is too concentrated, it may result in immoral and/or illegal actions taken by individual leaders struck by hubris. • Shared leadership increases the possibility of including minorities into managerial positions, thereby increasing the legitimacy of leadership.	Lambert-Olsson (2004)

When this literature refers to actual empirical experiences, it is usually in the form of successful instances of shared leadership (usually from top management settings) and practical advice on how the coworking leaders shall distribute tasks, roles, and information amongst each other, as well as which premises are necessary in order to make things work (e.g., O'Toole el al., 2003; Wilhelmson, 2006). Researchers have searched for which elements may contribute to the occurrence of shared leadership (Wood, 2005). Some authors have maintained the continued need for traditional vertical unitary command in many situations; shared leadership is primarily suitable for tasks characterized by reciprocal interaction, creativity, and complexity (i.e., advanced teamwork situations) (Pearce & Manz, 2005).

Despite the presented promising premises, there are not many organizations explicitly implementing forms of shared leadership today (e.g., O'Toole et al., 2003). On the other hand, there is evidence that this form of leadership is informally already in use in companies. This is, for example, the indication provided by recent surveys made in Sweden among managers that showed that most of them were positive to introducing shared leadership and that approximately 40% of them already shared leadership in some way (Döös, Hanson, et al., 2005; Holmberg & Söderlind, 2004). Despite the large interest, the number of formal coleaders is still very limited, and the new model has not had the big impact researchers expected it to have. One possible reason could be that the understanding of leadership as an individual trait and activity is well rooted in our culture. We speak of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as great leaders, but we tend to forget the team of people on which they relied (O'Toole et al.). Large corporations are personified by their formal leaders; the focus is on them. Moreover, people in Western cultures seem to need to identify one single individual to be responsible for the performance of a group. We are instinctively reluctant to accept that two persons can share this responsibility, in the same way as we can be skeptical of the capability of two or more persons to make quick and clear decisions together when necessary. Even those practitioners who have shared a leadership position seem to point out that not all situations are appropriate for sharing leadership. For example, leading an army or coaching a football team are tasks for a single person, according to Lambert-Olsson (2004). On the other hand, there are also coleaders witnessing to the decision-making benefits from shared leadership. Having the coleaders seriously and deeply discuss visions for their group, basic understandings of their role, and the approach to their activity, decisions can be made quicker and are better grounded (Döös, Wilhelmson, & Hemborg, 2003; Holmberg & Söderlind, 2004). Leaders' confidence in the decision made is also increased. In summary, positive experiences of sharing leadership are not missing, but explicit forms of shared leadership are not widespread in organizations.

Postheroic Perspectives as a Foundation for Shared Leadership

During recent years, there has been an emerging debate on what has been called postheroic leadership. Table 2 summarizes the main points of discussion.

Table 2: Main Aspects of the Heroic Leadership Conception vs. Postheroic Leadership

Traditional heroic leadership	Postheroic leadership	Supporters
• One single accountable leader • Focus on visible positional heroes • Subordinates are seen as inferiors, interchangeable drones • All wisdom is concentrated in the leader • Leader needs to keep up his or her appearance • Vulnerability for the organization if the leader leaves • Individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination are important for leadership • Dominant logic of effectiveness: how to produce things • Doing masculinity • Focus on individuals • Static roles	• Participation of coworkers to leadership is recognized • Coworkers take responsibility and gain knowledge • Leaders encourage innovation and participation • Consensus in decision making • Leader becomes dispensable • Empathy, vulnerability, and skills of inquiry and collaboration become important for leadership • Dominant logic of effectiveness: how to grow people • Doing femininity • Focus on actions and interactions • Dynamic collective construction processes	Collinson (2005); Eicher (2006); Fletcher (2004); Huey (1994); Knights & Willmott (1992); Pearce & Manz (2005); Vanderslice (1988)

According to Eicher (2006), the old heroic ideal is a lone leader who feels that his or her leadership is based on superior knowledge and information (omnipotence), fears failure more than anything (rightness), keeps up appearances at any cost including blaming others (face saving), and views subordinates as inferior creatures in constant need for assistance and rescue (codependency). Pearce and Manz (2005) described the romantic conception of leaders as heroes in similar terms: heroes "who single-handedly save followers—who are largely viewed as interchangeable drones—from their own incompetence" (p. 130). But, leaders are not only heroes. Assuming that leaders alone are responsible for solving complex organizational problems means that the leader-as-villain image is quite common, even more after cases of corporate corruption as the Enron case in the US (Collinson, 2005). Leaders have been depicted as heroes in the mass media as well, even though some researchers have started to question the real impact of such leaders on organizations (Czarniawska, 2005). Writing about major corporations such as Apple or American Express, which have been identified with their leaders, Mintzberg (1999) used these words:

> Then consider this proposition: maybe really good management is boring. Maybe the press is the problem, alongside the so-called gurus, since they are the ones who personalize success and deify leaders (before they defile them). After all, corporations are large and complicated; it takes a lot of effort to find out what has really been going on. It is so much easier to assume that the great one did it all. Makes for better stories too. (p. 1)

Against this, Eicher (2006) posed the postheroic ideal, where the leader wants other to take responsibility and gain knowledge (empowerment), encourages innovation and participation

even in ambiguous situations (risk taking), seeks input and aims for consensus in decision making (participation), and wants others to grow and learn even at the expense of himself becoming dispensable (development). Postheroic leadership has thus become a concept used to describe a new conceptualization of leadership that refuses the top-down focus on the leader typical of most leadership literature and discourse (e.g., Fletcher, 2004; Huey, 1994). To us, the heroic ideal creates both unhappy and stressed leaders and also problems of legitimating leaders and leadership in the eyes of employees and citizens, while the postheroic ideal represents both individual situations and societal norms that enable people, organizations, and societies to live on and develop.

Fletcher (2004) examined also the power and gender implications of this new understanding of leadership. In fact, even if leadership has been traditionally presented as a gender-neutral concept, researchers have questioned this assumption and analyzed how leadership is a gendered construction in masculine terms (e.g., Alvesson & Billing, 1999; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; Wahl, Holgersson, Höök, & Linghag, 2001). For example, in the charismatic leader, we can see the image of a patriarchal hero (Calas, 1993). What we think is of interest is not to promote a feminine leadership as a counterpoint to the conventional masculine leadership (Billing & Alvesson, 2000) but to study how the processes that construct gender in organizations and the leadership processes are related (Alvesson & Billing). Doing leadership, doing gender, and also doing power are thus analyzed as interrelated processes (Fletcher). Not being aware of these relations means a risk for not understanding completely the challenges inherent in the postheroic concept and failing in introducing shared leadership models in organizations. Shared leadership means recognizing that formal leaders are supported by a collaborative subtext throughout the organization; leading and following become "two sides of the same set of relational skills that everyone in an organization needs in order to work in a context of interdependence" (Fletcher, p. 648). In this way, the new model of shared leadership has been described by traits that have been traditionally seen as feminine or socially ascribed to women: "empathy, vulnerability, and skills of inquiry and collaboration" (Fletcher, p. 650). Such traits have been traditionally associated to powerlessness. On the contrary, traditional leadership ideals have been characterized by masculine traits: "individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination" (Fletcher, p. 650). Masculinity and femininity are not used in a biological sense here, they are social constructions that influence our identities and that are continuously reconstructed/deconstructed. Fletcher also spoke of the "logic of effectiveness" (p. 350) that underlies heroic vs. postheroic leadership. Heroic leadership relies on a masculine logic of effectiveness on how to produce things in working life, while postheroic leadership relies on feminine logic of effectiveness on how to grow people in domestic life. The two spheres are socially constructed as dichotomies, associated to men respectively to women, and evaluated in different ways, a skilled and complex activity the former, a question of innate nature the latter.

Here we could find one possible explanation to why postheroic leadership is mostly invisible in companies. When leaders tell about their leadership, they still use the classical hero individual-focused narrative. Moreover, when they narrate about themselves, they are also constructing their own identity, and the gender identity is a part of it. Traditionally, as explained, such narrations have been characterized by masculine terms. But, since practices related to postheroic leadership are unconsciously associated with femininity and powerlessness, this new concept of leadership violates the traditional gender and power assumptions about leadership. This means that if an organization adopts a shared leadership model based on postheroic

leadership conceptions, such a change is not only an organizational issue; it will also affect the gender identity construction and the power conceptions of the individuals in the organization.

In such a new context, a different conception of the self could also help. Instead of the classical notion of the self as an independent entity, the self-in-relation notion could be more appropriate (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003). Traditionally, growth has been seen as a process of separation from others and of achieving autonomy. Instead, growth could be seen as a process of connection. Interdependence becomes the basis for the notion of the self as a relational entity.

Collective Construction of Leadership: From Emerging Practice to Research Perspective

Our analysis of the existing literature on new models and ideals of leadership is that it can be roughly divided in two related streams: (a) one that focuses on the practicalities of why and how managerial duties and positions should be assigned to more than one person, shared leadership, and (b) one that assumes a basic perspective on all leadership as being collective construction processes with several people involved, postheroic leadership. Although these two traditions do not exclude each other, they imply quite different research agendas.

In the first tradition, we find several reasons why and how managerial tasks should be divided between several individuals. One problem in this perspective is that it views shared leadership as an exception to more typical leadership, an exception to be practiced in special situations. Shared leadership is also defined by the number of involved individuals rather than the individuals' experiences regarding if the exercised leadership was actually shared or not (i.e., a focus on formal organizational arrangements rather than on practical everyday organizing). The alternative, as we see it, is to apply a basic perspective on leadership as something that individuals construct together in social interaction (Gronn, 2002; Küper, 2007; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Gronn discussed this in terms of level of analysis, that the level of analysis should be the exercised leadership rather than the single individual leader. Similarly, Vanderslice (1988) explicitly challenged us to separate the concept of leadership from that of leaders. Collinson (2005) suggested that a dialectical perspective going beyond the dualistic understanding of, for example, the leader–follower couple should help to better explain the complex and shifting dynamics of leadership, by acknowledging interdependences and asymmetries between leaders and followers. Meindl (1995) and Reicher et al. (2005) claimed that traditional leadership models contribute to the institutionalization of a dualism of identity between leaders and followers in society—a dualism that may be challenged through studies of leadership identity construction. Fletcher (2004) took this line of reasoning one step further in her discussion of postheroic leadership in terms of collective, interactive learning processes. She did think that such a theoretic development will run into difficulties, difficulties that may better be understood from a gender perspective. She claimed that the traditional image of leadership is strongly masculinized and that the femininization that is inherent in the postheroic perspective will challenge several deeply rooted notions of leadership. Among these, Fletcher found the taken-for-granted individualization of society (reinforcing unitary command as the only viable solution), to which we can add the contemporary idea that problems of gender inequality are finally being solved (implying that any basic redefinition of leadership would be unnecessary since we have already found the most suitable forms) (cf. Vecchio, 2002). A social constructionist research agenda where leadership, leader identities, and masculinization/femininization are constantly constructed and reconstructed (cf. Lindgren &

Packendorff, 2006) should be central in order to advance both leadership theory and leadership practices in the direction of postheroic leadership.

Empirical Study: Collective Constructions of Leadership

The empirical study reported here was made with a narrative approach through individuals' stories about processes of leadership. During the last decade, the narrative approach has been taken far beyond its origins within the field of literary analysis (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1997; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). Human beings have been exposed to numerous different, sometimes contradictory and competing, discourses. Thus, the narrative on the personal work life episodes can fill a sense-making function for both individuals and their social contexts. Recent developments in the use of narrative methods have stressed the importance of making a distinction between narratives and stories and taking into consideration what happens before a narrative (Boje). A story can be seen as an account of incidents or events, and a narrative comes after. "Story is an 'ante' state of affairs existing previously to narrative; it is in advance of narrative. Used as an adverb, 'ante' combined with narrative means earlier than narrative" (Boje, p. 1).

This implied that individuals were asked for the spontaneous story of their life including both work and life in general within the current organization. These interviews were recurring in the sense that we revisited the organizations several times, and they lasted for about 1 - 2 hours with each person. At the end of every interview, we spent some time clarifying details and critical incidents in their stories. Out from our theoretical preconceptions, we had identified some themes to be covered by their stories: their view of how organizational leadership has developed, by who and how leadership was exercised, how leadership activities involved several people, how leaders in the organization lived their life both at and outside work, and how their leadership was regarded both inside and outside the organization. After transcribing the recorded material, we extracted different narratives linked to the ongoing production and reproduction of leadership in project-based work by means of thematic analysis. Boje (2001) described thematic analysis out from deductive and inductive approaches; in this case, it has been a combination of these two approaches where a number of general theoretical themes have formed a framework for the inductive extractment of specific narratives. Inspired by Martin's (2001) method, we have emphasized narratives concerning the production and reproduction of leaders and leadership. We took a special interest in contradictions, competing discourses, and critical incidents in the interviews (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1999; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). The empirical material is organized along different narrative themes that were extracted given this interest.

The empirical material of this paper was taken from four different organizations that were studied as examples of new leadership practices in emerging industries in Sweden. Two of them are independent schools (schools financed by municipalities but run by private organizations or individuals), one is a private theater, and one is a rock festival that has grown into a small music industry corporation. The cases, all made anonymous for this presentation, are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of the Empirical Case Organizations

Organization	The Svensson School (TSS)	Louis High School (LHS)	Rocktown Forest Festival (RFF)	The Here and Now Theatre (HNT)
Operations	Independent school in medium-sized town for children 12-15 years old.	Group of four schools in a large city of which three are high schools.	Rock festival, restaurants, education, production, marketing, venture capital.	Private theater company specializing in improvised theater. Plays, company gigs, course programs.
History	Founded 1994 as a company. Coowned by founders until 2003. Now owned by a private person.	Founded 1993. Operates as a private trust, no individual owners.	Founded 1981 as an open music club. Today, the club owns several companies (The First Act Group).	Founded 1989 as a theater club. Restarted in 2002 as a company after bankruptcy.
No. of employees	60	100	50	7 (+ 30 freelancers)
Managerial structure	Two married founders of which one is the headmaster.	Two founders who work with strategic development.	Collaborative structure with boards, management groups, networks. Informal core of founders.	Five owners of which one is theater manager. Groups and committees.
Study focus	Leadership work by founders.	Leadership work by founders.	Leadership work in all managerial positions and tasks.	Leadership work in all managerial positions and tasks.
People interviewed and cited here	Roger (founder, CEO, owner) Angela (founder, headmaster, owner)	Camilla (founder) Nancy (founder)	Vladimir (founder, group chairman) Caroline (subsidiary CEO) Pete (founder, group CEO) Owen (subsidiary CEO)	Nathan (owner, theater manager) John (owner, director, actor) Patrick (owner, director, actor) Naomi (owner, actor) Ursula (actor)

Note. The names of the involved organizations and interviewed individuals are all fictitious.

Empirical Themes

All four organizations are rather new, still more or less in the hands of their founders. The relationship between foundership, ownership, and the actual managerial structure is not straightforward, however. In each of the organizations, special conditions have implied special solutions. What is common for them all is that leadership is practiced as a shared task and constructed collectively in the sense that many people inside and outside take active part in discussing, formulating, and reformulating what leadership means locally. We have extracted different themes from the stories concerning important dimensions of leadership constructions. However, we also want to emphasize the ongoing social construction of leadership as a continuous process over time, manifesting itself in different discursive themes. We will now discuss them more in detail with reference to all four organizations. The themes that emerged from this thematic analysis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Empirical Themes From the Four Case Organizations

Theme	Theme summary
Leadership as a task in need for professionalization	Lacking professional leadership. Professionalization requires rationality, impersonality, and action orientation.
Leadership may gain legitimacy through representativity and extension	By having more organizational subgroups and different people represented in leadership activities, the internal legitimacy of leadership is enhanced.
Individualism vs. collectivism as a problem in leadership	Problem of handling expectations on leaders to be single outstanding individuals while most of the decisions are handled collectively.
Role complementarity important in leadership work	Different individuals have different strengths. When sharing leadership, it is important to develop role structures that make use of strengths without losing role flexibility.
Heroes expected	The environment still expects single, heroic leaders. That expectation must be met without losing internal collectivity.
Patterns of cooperation	Sharing leadership requires a sense of what the others think. Cooperation must not be stifled by an exaggerated focus on consensus and informality.
Leadership as network construction	Internal relational views of leadership are also extended to the view of the environment. It is important that all have other social arenas outside the organization.
Managerial work as consuming	Managerial work tends to create a high workload that is not always relieved by sharing leadership tasks.

Leadership as a Task in Need for Professionalization

One general theme from the interviews in the four organizations was that leadership and management must be handled professionally. The idea of professionality was described in several ways. One way was to claim that friendship and personal relationships may imply less rational decisions and that some people are treated better than they deserve, giving an image of leadership as making tough and unpopular decisions.

We are a bunch of old friends. We were always together in the beginning. If there was a party, we were there together, and other friends came along. But, I think it was an initial strength that we were a quite small gang that were behind a lot of things. Today, it is not really the same thing; people have families and want to get away from work sometimes. This has meant difficulties in handling budget overruns or layoffs. We have not been professional in such occasions since we are all old friends. This is a sensitive thing; we must be professional but it shall also be fun to work here. (Vladimir, RFF)

Everyone who worked here was a member of the board, and board work was not seen as a difficult thing. After the bankruptcy, we realized that it is indeed a difficult thing to be a member of the board. We were very naïve. I think that the idealistic heritage made us blind to the fact that we made decisions on large sums of money and could lose our own jobs if these decisions went wrong. (John, HNT)

Professionality is also something that is derived from educations and other sources of occupational legitimacy. For example, a professional school manager is not the same thing as a professional pedagogical leader.

I am interested in pedagogy, but I do realize that I am not professional. I have stepped in from time to time when there was an urgent need, and I like it. But, I don't feel knowledgeable. The most fun was physics, and, if I had started in a teacher role, maybe I could have become a good teacher. Now, my respect for the job grows for each time I step in. I have appreciated the hands-on character of school work. Intellectually, the financial job was very stimulating, where different parties could sit and work on a deal. But, that is not emotionally rewarding as this one is. You look at the children, and this warms you inside. But, in my relation to Angela, it is our education, roles, and knowledge that limit what each of us does. (Roger, TSS)

To be professional was also described as being skilled in creating action out of decisions. In that sense, leadership that does not result in changes and development is not sufficient.

We had 1 week when the whole gang worked together last summer, and we really got united about the future. On the other hand, you get very often stuck in the old expression, "Last night, I had hundreds of good ideas; and, this morning, I did like I always do." It can really be like that here. We have lots of good ideas, but the everyday activities take a lot of energy. You think of so many things, but . . . It's about planning and structuring, and now it feels like we are getting better than ever at it. (Nathan, HNT)

Leadership May Gain Legitimacy Through Representativity and Extension of Management

In one of the organizations, Rocktown Forest, there have been periods when the leaders of the organizations have been seen as far from legitimate. The organization has a history of clashes between cultural and commercial norms, which has affected the ongoing construction of leadership. Those acting as leaders must inevitably handle these clashes.

> There is a history here governing what you can do and not, a conflict between cultural and commercial values. The festival culture is still around, and some people have had rough times when trying to deviate from that. There have been a lot of discussions about the festival brand, and we are not through that at all after 10 years. I think that it is important to stick to the original foundations for what we do. Rocktown Forest is the cultural part, and the First Act companies are the commercial part. (Caroline, RFF)

Often, the solution to a lack of legitimacy is to extend the managerial group in order to make more subgroups represented.

> I became a member of the First Act board although I was newly employed and also a woman. Pete got more and more to do outside, and he was our face outwards. The First Act Group is his baby, and he wanted someone he trusted there. I became the one everyone came to. I did that in parallel while my job was to work with public relations. After my maternal leave, I started to work full-time, and then I became CEO of First Act. The old gang can't be involved in everything; it was really a pretty clear signal to the whole organization when Pete wanted me to take First Act. (Caroline, RFF)

Extending the managerial group is not easy as some people expect a certain individual to represent the organization at all occasions. One way of handling this is to consciously construct a multiface organization to outsiders.

> My strategy is not to be seen locally. I might be on the cover page of *Entrepreneur Magazine* and looked upon as the great businessman and all that. But, at home, I'm not seen at all. Instead, it is always the one that has been responsible or actually did the job that is to be seen. It's important that you always try to put the others in the light, and I've tried to do that for 5 or 6 years now. (Pete, RFF)

Similar reasoning can be found in the theater case, even though it is mixed in that they also want some kind of leadership at least in the field of administration. In the two schools, leadership legitimacy rests mainly upon the teacher profession as formal competence base.

Individualism vs. Collectivism as a Problem in Leadership

In the general understanding of leadership, the notion of individuals and collectives is problematic. As previously noted, leaders have been expected to be individuals and individualists (e.g., Fletcher, 2004). But, at the same time, many decisions and actions are collective by nature. For example, leadership is usually constructed in terms of loneliness and power distance which affect how people behave in relation to each other.

> I don't drink coffee in the teachers' room. I take it with me to the office, mostly because I realize that if I sit down maybe I will kill the conversation. We have a trustful atmosphere in the staff room, but I feel like one of the managers. It is impossible to be a manager. Things you say are interpreted on the basis that you are a manager. This is, of course, worse for Angela. But, this has led us to avoid participating in certain situations in order not to dictate the meetings; just being there creates problems. (Roger, TSS)

The problems of individualism in leadership are also linked to different forms of material benefits and advantages such as high salaries and large offices. In that sense, the local construction of what leadership means also affects the organizational norms on what is desirable and unwanted behavior and attitudes.

> We were 30 shareholders when we formed the first company in the First Act Group, but we have all sold our shares back to Rocktown Forest. We earn decent salaries, but nobody has become rich. We run big business and have vast responsibilities, but I usually do not think about it; if I did, I might have a hard time sleeping in the night. Some people in this town have earned a lot of money, like those owning the festival grounds, coffee shops, restaurants, and so forth. But, we are not among them. It is a good thing that we haven't owned this ourselves, even though that could have made some difficult decisions easier to implement. On the other hand, the spirit in this building might not have been the same. In the end, this whole organization is about daring to test ideas. (Pete, RFF)

Role Complementarity as Important in Leadership Work

Among the interviewees, the construction of leadership has generally centered around reasoning on that different people with different personalities may complement each other in the ongoing management of the organization. Some may even take psychometric tests in order to understand their interaction better.

> We were helped by a personnel consultant that mapped out the personality type for potential personnel when we started the school, even our types. Angela and I were very different. But, this helped us. Angela is economical; I am an economist. (Roger, TSS)

Often, the actors have been well aware of what their respective strengths are and how they should interact in order to perform at their best.

> I have a theory on why we have been since 1997 on this journey that speeded up our operations outside the festival. Donald comes first. He is the one that finds everything. He really finds everything in a project. He comes to me and Pete, "We can do this, and we can do this, send in this application for EU-financing," etc. And, suddenly there is a click in Pete's head. And so, he says that "I want this; we shall do this." And so, he jumps onto the barricades and gets the people to follow him; he gets them going. I come in at the third stage. I know you have to filter the talk; if Pete says that it gives 35 million then it gives maybe 5 million, etc. It was the rule of the game in order to convince people about impossible projects. I take over his grand projects and make them happen. The last link in the chain that made it possible for us to take things to the national level was Sean who worked at Major Records in Stockholm. He is born in the next town and wanted to move home. And, during the same period, they established a regional government here. They became responsible for entrepreneurship and business development, and we suggested that they should employ Sean as a regional business developer. Our national music industry center here is the result of a collaboration between Sean and Pete. (Owen, RFF)

We now have different roles. You always know exactly who to ask about different things. John is extremely good at inventing funny concepts and funny names to put diverse ideas together. If you need that, you go to him; he is very smart. Nathan is our face outwards, good at networking. He became friends with all customers and course participants; he is our safety net. I am important because I try to communicate and delegate responsibilities, and I also work a lot to make us better improvisators. I want to put forward emotions and artistry, and I often become an important speaking partner to Patrick who always presents new ideas on everything. (Naomi, HNT)

This view of different actors playing different roles in managerial processes can also be found in the other cases. Usually, the actors have reflected upon this and have established practical ways of using this in the best way possible.

A cooperation often begins with a common idea and then you have a meeting and then each one does what's needed to meet again. When I draw our organization, I draw a circle for myself that overlaps Roger's circle. Overlapping issues are recruitment, wages; we work together on the budget even if Roger prepares it, both of us participate in management team meetings, marketing meetings together. Then, we have distinct own areas. I have the contact with parents. Roger has the contact with banks, etc. When banks invite us to dinner, I go, however. At the board meeting, I am the secretary and also present issues within my areas. (Angela, TSS)

Our organization is a little special in that our principals are pedagogical leaders, and we take care of everything else regarding premises, administration; and, we are discussion partners for the principal. The principal takes care of everything that has to do with the personnel, nothing that has to do with rebuilding premises and similar matters. You can think of a newspaper with a CEO and a chief editor; then, we are the CEO, and the principal is the chief editor. We work with marketing, strategy, and lobbying; it's our tasks. (Nancy, LHS)

What is also evident is that the construction of complementary managerial roles is something that develops over time. Initially, people are not aware of their roles and often try to do everything together.

We were more together at the beginning. And, now, we have more clearly separated tasks. We inform each other, but we don't need to consult each other on everything. I think this is mostly positive since it gives us some tranquility; we feel more confident in our roles. When needed, we are there for each other; but we do not sit on each other's laps. It felt a little like that at the beginning, the sea in storm, the others against us, from time to time. We are not needed in the same way now either, and they don't confuse our roles anymore, which makes it easier. Still people do anyway believe that I also know what they said to Roger because it was like that at the beginning. We did also commute to a distant town, so we had a few hours during trips that we used to exchange information. It is just a little funny sometimes now when we find out that we don't know. (Angela, TSS)

The role construction processes are not always harmonic. However, some actors may feel stuck in a certain role while others find it hard to assume new roles while maintaining the already existing ones.

> I'm a big critic and always ask who is going to pay for all this and who is going to make it happen. It's a pity that I always assume that role. But, I can live with that. In the end, it's always better not to let the visionaries run ahead all the time. I also have visions myself. But, mostly, I keep things together. (Vladimir, RFF)

> I think that I work about the same amount of hours as before the bankruptcy. But, I think that it is even more funny and rewarding now if I have done a good performance at a company gig, and we get new orders. I also feel that I have made some money for the theater and for our survival. It was like that before as well, but it is different now when we own the theater ourselves. That is important; it is a kind of [our] identity, a mixed identity. Sometimes you think that you became an entrepreneur when you actually wanted to be an actor. And then, we are also employers. It is important to think about yourself in all these terms. (John, HNT)

Heroes Expected: Individuals as Uniting Symbols

While the actors in their daily managerial work lead their organizations together by means of role complementarity, they still adhere to the outside expectations of their leadership to be embodied into single persons. Furthermore, sometimes, there are also internal reasons to put forward charismatic and heroic persons as symbols and change agents.

> Pete had decided to do what other rock music clubs had not been able to do, to create spinoffs from the festival. The person that decides to do such a thing must be able to handle the reactions from the rest of the organization. When he declared that we were going to do other things using the festival brand, a gigantic conflict broke out. If it had not been Pete, he had been thrown out at once. They wrote angry letters to each other and called me to meetings where they told me that I destroyed the festival brand and so on. (Owen, RFF)

> I went myself in a school where everyone knew who the person that started and ran the school was, and her ideas lived in the school. It's easy for the students to understand the idea with the school when persons are visible because people personify ideas. (Camilla, LHS)

> And then, we decided that to be successful, we needed one face outwards. And then, I should become that face. So, we decided that I should symbolize Rocktown Forest. (Pete, RFF)

Patterns of Cooperation

Practical leadership in the studied organizations implies close cooperation and an ability to sense what the other coleaders may think of different matters.

I remember when a consultant that was going to work on our website came with the first proposal where there was a picture with young people and cell phones. Nancy was not there then. The pictures were so much spaced out. I had an image in my mind—a tree and the sky in order to symbolize knowledge. The consultant thought that we were so modern with IT and everything. But, we didn't understand each other at all. Then, Nancy came, and I showed her the pictures without saying anything. "Oh no," Nancy said, "I had imagined some oaks." We had the same opinion without having talked to each other about it; and, still, we are different. Nancy is good at numbers, and she likes that. I have studied business administration; it is true, but I don't like it. I love to write while Nancy doesn't. So, it works so well. (Camilla, LHS)

But then, one develops one's roles. Now, after 9 years, we know which roles we have. (Nancy, LHS)

We do write a lot now. But, before we write, so we always review what we should write, and Nancy has a lot of comments; and then, we look at that together, the same with numbers. When Nancy is away, I feel very lost. To be single manager, as many men are, is really tough. (Camilla, LHS)

But, I don't think that 9 years and two schools and one company have worn us out. Of course, we have worked a lot, but just because we are two persons, there is some relief. We strive a lot to have fun and to laugh all the time, because this results in that you have more energy. If you are alone, everything becomes heavier and more serious and that makes it more difficult to get things moving. We are very aware that it is said that women are more cautious, so we try to push and incite ourselves. If we had been men, we had been bigger as an organization. (Nancy, LHS)

No matter how close and integrated the actors are, societal structures such as gender differences still find their way into the practical everyday situations.

I am the only woman here among the owners. And, sometimes, I regret that there are not more women. I feel that. We all communicate in a masculine fashion, and it is not easy to be too much of a feminist in our meetings. It works all right, but there is a macho attitude among us that becomes a part of our culture. I speak openly about this because I want all people to be attracted to this theater, not just tough guys. If one of the guys is in a bad mood, everyone tips around on their toes; people yell at each other and so forth. (Naomi, HNT)

What is also problematic is the tendency that actors may get stuck in modes of working and that the shared leadership practices cause stagnation since all changes depend on consensus.

I have followed this theater for a decade, and it has both developed and stagnated at the same time. We have the same discussions year after year: how to behave outwards, how to guarantee a certain quality, how open are we to be to others, what is secret and what is not, are we too tough on each other and so forth. We are dealing with some delicate

people here, and it is very important who communicates things, how information spreads—eternal dilemmas. We tend to discuss new issues all the time; first, we decide on principles. But, suddenly, a new issue appears that make us abandon the principle. So, I try to decide on my own instead. (Ursula, HNT)

Another aspect of shared leadership practices that might become problematic in some situations is the relative informality and lack of clarity that follows when organizational roles are not clearly assigned.

What fascinates me is that you need each other. So, I could go to someone and they came to me when they wanted to learn. Different people but the entrepreneurial spirit is the same in all of us. We meet at breakfast in different constellations. People come up with things; that's why it is good to exchange ideas with people. It is not necessary to have Pete sitting at a table in order to have ideas coming up. It is different people that take ideas that came up with them. There are informal ways to get people on one's side, Pete and the other founders, if it has to go quickly. It was even more in this way before because then we were not so many people. (Caroline, RFF)

Leadership as Network Construction

Among all interviewees, network building is a central aspect of leadership. Networking is both an internal activity by which an increasing number of employees are attracted to participate in leadership and an external activity where relations to different actors are seen as essential to organizational survival and success. In the social construction of leadership, many individuals have a larger common network than a single person, and their intention is often to increase the total number of relations by exchanging contacts.

Since a couple of years, we try to see what kind of networks people have. And, we try to reinforce the networks of those who have some gaps. Networks are really important, and the larger the network, the better it is. It becomes much easier to do business. Eighty percent of all the businesses are based on personal relationships. The day after tomorrow, there will be a meeting on public procurement at the municipality, and we don't give a damn about public procurement. But, at that meeting, there are 10 companies that we want to work with, so we are there anyway in order to support them in the discussions with the municipality; we are in the same gang. And, next time we meet those companies, so we have something in common, a belonging. It is about building trust at the end. It is also one of the rules we have; you can't get something without giving something. And if it is about new contacts, so you almost always have to start by giving. (Pete, RFF)

The opposite thing (i.e., a lack of broad networks) is usually seen as a problem.

I work a lot. I have no children. When I do not work here, I work with other projects. I write; I read; I travel; I see people. Many of my friends are from the theater world and from this town; and, as an outsider, I am stuck with them. I think it is a drawback for me that I have no other social arenas. No natural relations. (Patrick, SIT)

Managerial Work as Consuming the Individual

A last theme in the narratives on leadership is that managerial work often tends to become the central thing in life.

> I work 50 - 55 hours a week, sometimes weekends too. I can't let go of it; I burn for it. And, I am always lagging behind. The atmosphere and all the activity here is most exciting, but it consumes me. You can never focus on anything. As soon as you are into a discussion on important stuff, someone calls or knocks at the door. (Nathan, SIT)

Although shared leadership practices may relieve individuals from heavy workloads, given that the increased managerial resources available are not fully used to raise the ambitions, they can also lead to an increasing amount of work discussions outside regular work hours.

> Patrick and I are best friends. We spent the weekend together in Italy. We do not talk work much. But, somehow, work and private gets mixed. Suddenly, you realize that you sit at a restaurant in the evening with a glass of wine and discuss work. (John, HNT)

> Angela and I follow a bad pattern as regards our relation during the day. We decide that we should meet, but everything else comes in between, and we pass each other all the time. It often feels a little presumptuous to prioritize my wife when we are at work. So, we talk a lot in the car about how it did go and so on. Of course, we talk job, but not that much anyway. (Roger, TSS)

Leadership as Collective Constructions

In the empirical themes noted, we have emphasized that leadership is something that is negotiated, reflected upon, and constructed during daily interactions between people. By focusing on stories of leadership activities rather than on stories of individual leaders, we have tried to put forward the processes of leadership and how they develop over time. In the following section, we briefly discuss the empirical themes and how they can be related to the unitary command perspective and possible future research.

Empirical Themes: Towards Collective Constructions of Leadership?

The unitary command perspective is both confirmed and reconstructed in the studied organizations. It is confirmed in the sense that unitary command norms of single-person leadership are maintained as necessary and natural features of the managerial structures, but it is also deconstructed as all four organizations strive to find leadership procedures that involve many people and make use of the diverse competences that exist.

One example of this is the discussions on individuality and collectivity where all organizations in the study noted trying to find ways to make collectivity work without moving back into individuality. That was a problem in HNT but especially in RFF where there was a huge and remaining conflict between individuals who wanted to put themselves in front, resulting in the "we-culture" of that organization being further strengthened and institutionalized.

When conflicts make values visible, there is a need for reflection upon them that may make the values even stronger than before.

It is also important to notice that people construct roles together and find patterns of interaction over time. In the beginning, the interaction is more flexible and the interacting individuals sometimes do the same thing. But, after some time, they find their roles in a more stable interaction pattern. In TSS, there was some overlapping in the beginning even if they had decided that Angela was the pedagogical expert and Roger was the economist. In the other cases, such as HNT and RFF, there have been many shifts in work roles between persons involved, implying that any established interaction pattern may change as soon as individuals leave or join the organization or when there are changes in the organization or its environment.

Sharing leadership seems to imply an ongoing interactive search for such stable arrangements, both at the organizational and individual level. We can see this in different dimensions. In HNT, they want to have a functional organization because of the problems the collective free form generated. Now, they have their roles and also have found a way to work together. In LHS, they did most things together in the beginning; but, after a while, they recognized that they were more pleased with doing separate things in the venture. They have also a strict organizational separation between themselves and the administration/pedagogical management of the school. In RFF, the continuous developments and changes have implied that they still seek for structures in a way but have managed to go through different crises by means of solidarity and hard work.

The power of individual heroes in society is also visible when they talk about how to put one single person in front. A single person is a visible symbol who may personify what the organization stands for, and a single person is also what the environment expects. Even if they do not organize themselves in that way, they still find it necessary to conform to expectations. While concluding that the postheroic perspective provides important insights that can be applied to the analysis of our case organizations, insights emphasizing and focusing on the generation of new patterns and ideals in leadership, it also reminds us of the prevalent traditional norms by which organizations are still expected to live.

Postheroic Leadership: Consequences for Practice and Theory

Postheroic leadership, both in practical and theoretical terms, is a matter of viewing leadership as collectively constructed. Practically, the notion of collective constructions would imply that leadership is created by many people in interaction and that not all responsibilities need to be placed on one single person. The consequences of holding such a perspective on leadership can be most important to many organizations. It implies that different roles—not only the outgoing, driving personalities—are seen as important to leadership and that the notion of role complementarities may become even more important in the composition of managerial teams. Moreover, single individuals may be relieved of unrealistic and harmful workloads, and the intellectual and moral qualities of important decisions may increase. In addition, the notion of collectively constructed leadership also results in new views on how the daily operations of the company can be organized. If employees are recognized as responsible and accountable coleaders rather than as untrustworthy subordinates, they should be entrusted to make decisions not only on operative matters but also on governance matters. The principle of inverted delegation (i.e., that tasks are delegated upwards rather than downwards) is one possible outcome of this, and it also may become natural that the composition and role structure in a management

team is a matter for the team to handle. This is not to say that hierarchies should not exist; rather, hierarchies should be seen as systems of relations that are open for construction and reconstruction by all of their members. This, of course, builds on the assumption that the members are responsible people who view their organization as a common interest that must be maintained into the future. By this, modern leadership practices might become both less harmful to individuals and more legitimate in the eyes of its beholders.

Theoretically, viewing leadership as collectively constructed implies several things that should be of importance to future research. Moving focus from leaders to leadership activities (Gronn, 2002) is one such important stance. Thereby, it may be possible to follow the construction processes where power, organizational roles, and definitions of reality are negotiated in social interaction (cf. Smircich & Morgan, 1982), viewing these processes as leadership even though they may not result in clear decisions, unitary action strategies, and so forth. In that way, moving focus from leaders to leadership activities is also a way to move focus from leadership outcomes to the processes of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Instead of only judging leadership activities afterwards from its perceived results, such a research agenda should also focus on what is actually done to produce these results; ends do not always justify all possible means. Leadership activities are not only interesting as processes of social constructions, they are also interesting in the sense that they are important manifestations of hidden and/or taken-for-granted ideological and moral norms in society. Like several other fields within general management research, the leadership field maintains a mainstream perspective where the object of study is essentially a positive thing with desirable outcomes. If these desirable outcomes are indeed delivered, the processes preceding them are rarely questioned. When critical researchers and/or voices in society demand ethical perspectives or humanistic perspectives or indulge in criticism of psychopathic leaders, greed, and other modern phenomena (Jackall, 1988), they actually advocate a leadership research where not only the processes and outcomes of leadership should be studied but also the hidden ideological and moral meanings on which modern leadership practices and theories are based. Postheroic leadership is to us one such way towards leadership theorizing where the articulation and questioning of moral foundations is central to theory development.

In this paper, we have focused our discussion on the theoretical issue of postheroic leadership, analyzed from the empirical phenomenon of attempts at shared leadership practices. Our empirical cases show the ambiguities and problems inherent in this development, even for organizations that strive to organize leadership collectively. While questioning the forms and consequences of unitary command and also actively promoting the perspective that leadership is something they create together, they are still not able to discard all traditions in the field. Not least because they operate in a society that expects single, powerful, hard-working, masculine leaders who deliver decisions and strategies and who can control their organizations and be held accountable for everything that happens there.

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