

Leadership as a collective construction
- Re-conceptualizing leadership in knowledge-intensive firms

by

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1. Introduction: On the relations between leaders and leadership

Leaders and leadership are much needed phenomena in modern society. They are always called for as remedies to almost any existing problem – in business, in politics, in families. At the same time, there are few – if any – organizations in which people are entirely happy with the quality of the perceived leadership that is exercised. Consequently, the field of leadership – in theory and practice – has been a fast-growing part of management knowledge since the beginning of the 20th century. In all theories of management and organization, leadership has a given and central place in enforcing principles, motivating employees and communicating future goals and visions to strive for. Leadership is assumed to make a special, significant and positive contribution to action processes in most organizations, and leadership studies as an academic field has thus been preoccupied with the task of identifying the most successful leadership practices. In analogy with Jones & Spicer's (2005) analysis of entrepreneurship, one may thus claim that the leadership research field is driven by its eternal failure to identify successful leaders and leadership positively, beforehand – a failure that will keep the field moving as long as it is seen as a failure.

The field of leadership studies has traditionally been leader-centered, i.e. focused on the individual leader and his traits, abilities and actions (Bryman, 1996). This was a part of the general modernism introduced in the management sciences during the early 20th century, where the best leaders were to be identified and chosen out from their suitability and formal merits rather than from pre-modern bases such as kinship or charisma. The problem was still to determine what constituted a suitable leader, and this question gave rise to a series of different theoretical schools. One stream of thought was psychological, trying to identify personality traits that distinguished successful leaders from other people. Against this, others claimed that leadership was about interaction between leaders and followers, and that different interaction styles (e.g. autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire) implied different group atmospheres and hence different group productivity levels.

Yet another stream of research instead advocated a situational perspective, according to which leaders are only effective if they adapt their style to the situation at hand; very simple or very complicated situations are best handled through task-oriented leadership, while most other situations are better handled through socio-emotional leadership styles. The situational

perspective became very influential, but it has also been subject to recent criticism for focusing too much on the leader and not enough on the group interaction. It is today instead emphasised that the leader is a member of a group, albeit with specific possibilities to influence the group, and that leadership is actually a series of interaction processes rather than acts performed by a single individual in relation to a collective of followers. For example, the old concept of charisma has been revisited from this perspective. At the same time, as noted by Bryman (1996), there is a tendency of leadership becoming increasingly exemplified by reference to members of the global top executive elite – in contrast to the earlier empirical interest in supervisors, team leaders and middle managers. In that sense, the leadership field is moving in several directions at the same time.

During recent years, there have thus indeed been several theoretical attempts at problematizing this taken-for-granted idea that the phenomenon of leadership is to be found in what single managers do and think. Usually, this has been done through the introduction of new conceptualizations of leadership intended to capture a de-personalized view of the phenomenon. For example, there is a growing literature focusing on *shared leadership*, i.e. empirical cases where people actually share leadership duties and responsibilities rather than allocating them to a single person (Bradford and Cohen, 1998, Lambert, 2002, Sally, 2002, Pearce and Conger, 2003, Wilhelmson, 2006). The taken-for-granted idea of unitary command has been questioned (Crevani et al, 2007a, 2007b) and the dissolvment of the leader-follower dichotomy has been suggested (Vanderslice, 1988, Reicher et al, 2005, Küpers, 2007). In the same vein, so called *post-heroic leadership ideals* have been suggested in order to emphasise the relational, collectivist and non-authoritarian nature of leadership practices in contemporary organizations (Fletcher, 2004). Bryman (1999) use the term *dispersed leadership*, pointing at several contemporary streams of research that emphasise leadership as processes, activities and skills that involves several people. Gronn (2002) use the similar term *distributed leadership* in his plea for leadership studies that focus on collective interaction processes rather than on single leaders (cf also Uhl-Bien, 2006). In this paper, we will discuss this emerging notion of leadership as collectively constructed rather than as emanating from a single leader – with the intention of identifying theoretical and conceptual consequences of dissolving the leadership-leader relation.

From our point of view, it is not enough to say that leadership is about interaction between leaders and followers. If we want to take leadership research beyond the leader-centered tradition, we must also try to find ways to study this interaction without becoming too preoccupied with what formal leaders do and think. The institutionalized expectation that single, formal leaders are the source of leadership activities is indeed an important part of all organizational processes, but it should be treated as a common expectation that is constructed and reconstructed in social interaction rather than as a given fact. The conceptualizations and discursive repertoires we use to describe leadership are also based on these common expectations, portraying shared, dispersed or distributed leadership as curious deviations from the rational and moral imperative of unitary command (cf Crevani et al, 2007b, Koivunen, 2007).

A particularly interesting context in which to study leadership is knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs), where instances of non-unitary command organizations could be supposed to be more evident. KIFs are, in fact, characterised by being organizations where professionals, and their tacit and local knowledge, are the key factors for achieving success. In KIFs professionals have often academic education and their creativity is of extreme importance. In such a context not only freedom and discretion are a prerogative to be able to do a good, but the professional norms and culture do not encourage subordination to managers and hierarchies (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) while at the same time providing a leading function in themselves (Czarniawska, 2005). The complexity of the tasks KIFs work with means that ambiguity becomes a central feature of working in and leading such organizations, which also can make it difficult to lead in a “traditional” way (ibid). Heroic actions of few individuals at the top have no great impact, while collaborative practices distributed in the organization are of greatest importance (Fletcher, 2004). Moreover, KIFs are often looked upon as modern organizations where modern ideas of leadership take form and are tried. In Alvesson and Sveningsson’s (2003) study in a KIF, grandiose ideals of leadership were drawn on when constructing what leadership is about, while the leadership done in practice was of a much more operational and managerial character. While this can be interpreted as an indication that leadership as stable and coherent - as “something that matter” - can be questioned and might not be found in (some) organizations (ibid), it makes it also interesting to see if adopting a new perspective on leadership in such a context might enable us to avoid focus on grandiose achievements and to instead appreciate more “trivial”, but important, accomplishments.

The paper starts out by a discussion on the leadership-leader relation as it has been practised in different schools of thought within leadership studies over the years. There are authors making a distinction between leadership and management (for example Kotter, 2003), while there are others problematizing such a distinction (for example Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). In this paper we will not consider leadership as separated from management since most of the academic as well as the societal discourse on leadership in organizations is based on research on/expectations on/construction of formal leaders or managers. Moreover, even though it could sound appealing to distinguish between the handling of change, leadership, and the handling of complexity, management, (Kotter, 2003), at the practice level these two aspects are often intertwined. Then an empirical study on discourses of leadership in a small biotech company is presented and we identify central themes from these interviews that pertains to the notion of leadership and leaders. The paper ends by a discussion on boundary work, responsibility and identity as conceptual ways out of the current leader-centered conceptual apparatus within leadership research.

2. Leadership as embodied in the leader

The Industrial Revolution made the ground for modernity and scientific studies of leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2005). First researchers focused on finding those personal characteristics and qualities that differentiate leaders from non-leaders, the *trait approach*. Such an approach was prevalent until the late 1940s and regained importance later in the 1980s but in a revised form. The focus was then put on the follower's expectations on the ideal leader's traits, what has been called implicit leadership theories (Lord et al, 1986). People are recognised as leaders depending on how well they fit the follower's conceptualisation of an ideal leader.

The *style approach*, prominent until the late 1960s, moved the focus to leaders' behaviour, for example by defining two components of leadership behaviour, one characterised by concern with people and the other characterised by the clear specification of what followers are expected to do (Bryman, 1999). 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 are still undertaken at the same time as these ideas play 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 recognised the importance of the context by focusing on the relation between situational variables and leaders' 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. Still, the same underlying assumption applies: leadership is a phenomenon that is embodied in a person, the leader, and should be scientifically studied as such. Even though both influence and meaning management can be seen as interactive processes enabling organizing, the focus has nevertheless mostly remained on single individuals.

In fact, as we have seen, 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 also be considered important for strengthening the image of

an individual leader granted top-down authority based on command-and-control (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p 5).

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, and so did leadership theory. 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, and they thereby supported the general taken-for-granted assumption that leadership is a single-person task.

As described above, later developments came to emphasise effective leadership as a question of leadership behaviour in relation to specific situations. Moving focus from individual characteristics to what leaders actually did in different contexts and situations, new insights were gained that pointed at the importance of identifying the right leadership behaviour for the situation at hand (Van de Weide & Wilderom, 2004). Thereby, researchers could also distinguish between different leadership styles in terms of effectiveness. Nevertheless, such approaches are still often focused on formal leaders, 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 (Koivunen, 2007), 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. A processual view of leadership is thus 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 seem 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) puts it, “we seem to be moving beyond leaders who merely lead; today heroes save. Soon heroes will only save;

then gods will redeem”. As a consequence, most research is concerned with senior leaders rather than with the study of the organizing processes going on in the whole organization.

Pearce and Manz (2005) describe 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 to solve complex organizational problems means that also 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 are often depicted as heroes also in the mass media, even though some researchers have started to question the real impact of such leaders on organizations and on their success (Czarniawska, 2005). Writing about major corporations as Apple or American Express, which have been identified with their leaders, Mintzberg (1999) uses 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.”

To sum up, the idea that leadership is always embodied in individual leaders lives on in good health. 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 seem to incorporate the new environment for leadership activities through re-using 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 is 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 scepticism and contempt, and where young talents pursue other career forms than the managerial ladder.

During recent years, there have been several theoretical attempts at questioning the assumption that leadership is always embodied in a single leader. Usually, this is done

through departing from an explicit counter-assumption that leadership emerges in social interaction between people. Such an assumption is not very controversial; viewing leadership in terms of leader-follower interaction has been a recurrent theme in leadership research since the early 1900's. What is more controversial is the recent theoretical developments in which the division of organisational members into leaders and followers is seen as unnecessary and as a hindrance to the development of new practical and theoretical perspectives on leadership (cf Küpers, 2007). The reasons why this is controversial should arguably be sought for in the often implicit foundations of the leadership field, of which individualism, unitary command and the identification of the 'special individual' by means of hierarchisation and segregation are important parts. The link between the foundations of leadership research and the problems of dissolving the conceptual relation where the study of leadership requires the study of single leaders is further described in Table 1.

Basic assumption in leadership research	Description	Implications for research	Consequences for the leadership-leader relation
Individualism	Leadership is assumed to be embodied in single individuals. Leadership activities emanates from these individuals.	Individual leaders are always expected as mediators of leadership and thus sought for as operationalisations of leadership.	Leadership does not exist outside the individual leader. Leadership must be studied through single individuals.
Unitary command	There can only be one responsible leader for one area of responsibility.	Leadership for a certain area of responsibility will always have to be studied through the responsible leader.	Only individual leadership is seen as effective and legitimate. Shared and dispersed forms are seen as exceptions for special situations.r
Hierarchisation and segregation	Leaders are a special kind, segregated from other people. Leaders are also – naturally – above others.	Leadership is portrayed as something that can only be taken care of by exceptional, superior individuals. Leadership studies is not about the study of the mundane.	Leadership can only involve a few individuals in almost any population, in most cases only one individual. The rest are followers, implying a subject/object relationship.
Heroism	Leadership is about hard work, being tough and rational, making sacrifices and doing the right thing despite the consequences.	Leadership research tend to focus on exciting, history-making activities involving large values and serious conflicts.	Leadership become manifest in extraordinary situations and critical incidents. Heroes and individual agency are expected, not teams or collectives.
Performativity	Leadership is a set of normative assumptions on what leadership is and how leaders shall behave.	Focus on leadership activities that are good and successful, and factors leading to goodness and success.	The senders and recipients of advice on good and successful leadership are all individuals. Leaders are expected to behave as individuals, both by themselves and by leadership scholars.
Masculinity	Leadership is about individualism, autonomy, (self-)control, confidence, assertiveness, domination, advocacy, toughness.	Leadership research tend to put forward desirable masculine attitudes to management, thereby reinforcing masculinity as the prime source of leadership performativity.	Leadership behaviours not reinforcing traditional masculine norms (such as behaviours emphasising collectives, relations and emotions) are not interpreted as leadership, they “disappear”.
Psychologisation	Given its interest in individuals, leadership research is primarily about understanding the individuals that exercise leadership.	Focus on psychological traits, or on repeated behaviours or expressed values that can be connected to success.	Psychologisation implies a preoccupation with the individual, not with interaction characteristics.
Morality	Leadership is needed and matters. Leadership affects organizational performance in a positive way. People want to be lead. Leadership is a morally good activity.	Researchers almost never question if there is leadership, if there are leaders and if leadership matters.	Leaders have a moral function that followers do not have. Followers need leaders in order to get guidance and meaning.

Table 1. Basic assumptions in leadership research related to the possibilities of dissolving the leadership-leader paradigm.

Hierchisation and segregation are evident in the early doctrine of Social Darwinism popular in the USA which could be summarized in the idea that “success entitled a man to command” (Perrow, 1986). While different schools of thought and theories have followed one another during the years, the distinction between workers and leaders has survived, justified by new reasons each time. And leadership has been elevated to a kind of moral activity, based on harmony and shared interest; an activity that is moreover needed and that has an important

impact on organizational performance (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). Leadership is inherently positive (Calas and Smircich, 1991), leadership is a solution, lack of leadership a problem. The assumptions of individualism, unitary command and heroism are all well rooted both in practical and theoretical traditions that have developed over thousands of years. Leadership in politics and in the military forces has almost always been equated with extraordinary actions taken by single individuals, and that notion was later brought over also to leadership in commercial ventures. With the exception of Taylor's (1911) suggestion of functional foremanship, early management writers always departed from the view that leadership was embodied in single individuals that should be able to exercise a unitary command over an area of responsibility and the resources allocated. With the power, the responsibilities and the often devastating consequences for the followers of mistakes and misjudgements also came the heroic notion of leaders – as the people sacrificing themselves for the good of the rest. In traditional research this caused two interrelated problems; first the need to segregate these special individuals from the rest of the population, and second, the need to understand what made them so special (psychologisation). To us, all this has implied institutional conceptions of leadership in society that are (1) highly performative by nature, and (2) reinforcing traditional masculinities in all forms of organization.

Leadership has been traditionally presented as a gender-neutral concept, but researchers have questioned this assumption and analysed how leadership is a gendered construction in masculine terms (see for example Wahl et al, 2001, Alvesson and Billing, 1999, Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993, Kark, 2005, Calas and Smircich, 1991). 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, 1999). Doing leadership, doing gender, and also doing power are thus analysed as interrelated processes (Fletcher, 2004).

3. Towards a constructionist perspective for the inquiry into leadership in knowledge-intensive firms

The natural question is then what theoretical streams of thought that can be used in order to advance the dissolution of the leadership-leader perspective beyond the often taken-for-granted assumptions outlined in Table 1. The notion of leadership itself is not a problem since some of the most common and cited definitions do not necessarily imply the existence of *a leader*. Moreover, while the definition found in a dictionary could suggest that someone is leading, directing someone else ‘by going on in advance’ (see for example the Oxford English Dictionary), the concept of leadership has been constructed over the years to include a much wider meaning. For example, looking back at early days in leadership studies, one typical and influential definition of leadership has been:

“Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement” (Stogdill, 1950, p 3 as in (Bryman, 1996))

A more recent definition includes, as earlier discussed, subtler mechanism of management of meaning:

“Leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others.” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982)

These definitions of leadership are in no way precluding the possibility of other persons involved in doing leadership and of leadership being accomplished in interactions. On the other hand, what might happen is that certain actions/interactions are interpreted as leadership if a formal leader is involved. This is not a problem, but a reason to critically question the notion of leadership. What is common to the two definitions is, moreover, the idea of leadership as enhancing the organizing activities/interactions taking place within an organization by giving a sense of order and direction.

As mentioned in the first section of this paper, there is an ongoing development where several concepts and metaphors have been suggested in order to escape the inherent leader-centered performativity of leadership texts.

- *Shared leadership, dual leadership or co-leadership* literature (Bradford and Cohen, 1998, Döös et al, 2005, Lambert, 2002, Sally, 2002, Pearce and Conger, 2003, de Voogt, 2005, Wilhelmson, 2006) acknowledges that leadership is not necessarily an individual matter and describes two or more individuals sharing leadership functions in organizations in a formal or informal manner. The focus is often on analysing the possible forms, advantages, challenges, and drawbacks of this new form of leadership and on giving advice on how to make it work.
- *Unitary command critique* (Crevani et al, 2007b) where we have discussed the theoretical and moral assumptions behind the unitary command perspective and their consequences – i.e. an excessive focus on individuals and a lack of sustainability.
- *Dissolving leader-follower dichotomy* has been attempted by studying leaderless (or better leaderful) organizations where leadership functions are rotated (Vanderslice, 1988), or by conceptualizing leadership as “a vehicle for social identity-based collective agency in which leaders and followers are partners” (Reicher et al, 2005, p 547), or by proposing a framework aimed at integrating leadership and followership (Küpers, 2007)
- *Post-heroic leadership ideals* (Fletcher, 2004, Huey, 1994) are characterised by the acknowledgement that the visible “heroes” are supported by a collaborative subtext that is dispersed throughout the organization and leadership becomes then conceptualized as “a set of shared practices that can and should be enacted by people at all levels” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 648)
- *Distributed leadership* (Gronn, 2002) means a unit of analysis that “encompasses patterns or varieties of distributed leadership” (p 424). Leadership is then defined as “status ascribed to one individual, an aggregate of separated individuals, sets of small numbers of individuals acting in concert or larger plural-member organizational units” and this ascription is based on “the influence attributed voluntarily by organization members” (p 428)
- *Relational leadership* (Dachler & Hosking, 1995, Uhl-Bien, 2006) is a way of conceptualizing leadership where the focus is on relations and interaction. Leadership is then defined as ‘a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, ideologies) are constructed and produced’ (p 654).

- *Co-workership* has been the focus of a stream of contribution focusing on the usually forgot side of leadership: followership. Meindl (1995) has proposed to study how leadership is constructed by organizational members as part of their social experience, thus focusing on followers' interpretations and the context in which they take place; Tengblad (2003) has recognised the role played by co-workers in modern organizations and focused his study on co-workership, i. e. how co-workers handle their relations to the organizations and their own work; finally, Eriksson-Zetterquist (forthcoming) has problematized the concept of subordination in relation to power and to gender, race, age, etc.
- *Collaborative leadership* (Collinson, 2007) can also be linked to new ideals of leadership where collaboration rather than competition is at the centre and where more collective practices become appropriate for the learning and skill sector. Collinson also mentions the possible negative aspects of collaboration, as for example collusion or the disadvantage suffered from women in homosocial contexts.
- *Attention to the practices of leadership* (Knights and Willmott, 1992) is also a call for studies that are more concerned with the micro-level analysis of leadership as a social practice.
- *Dispersed leadership* (Bryman, 1996) is also a term used to label several of the concepts discussed above.

Our analysis of the existing literature on new models and ideals of leadership portrayed above is that it can, roughly, be divided in two related streams; (1) one that focus on the practicalities of why and how managerial duties and positions should be assigned to more than one person, the *shared leadership* literature, and (2) one that assumes a basic perspective on all leadership as being collective construction processes with several people involved, what we call *leadership as collectively constructed*. Although these two traditions do not exclude each other, they imply quite different research agendas.

In the first tradition, which has been described above, we find several reasons why and how managerial tasks shall be divided between several individuals (see also Crevani et al, 2007a, 2007b, for a summary of the arguments for shared leadership practices). One problem of this perspective is that it views shared leadership as an exception to “usual” leadership, an

exception to be practiced in special situations (Pearce, 2004). Shared leadership is also defined from the number of involved individuals, rather than from the individuals' experiences on 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, Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Gronn discuss this in terms of level of analysis, i.e. that the level of analysis should be the exercised leadership rather than the single individual leader. Similarly, Vanderslice (1988) explicitly challenges us to separate the concept of leadership from that of leaders. Collinson (2005) suggests that a dialectical perspective going beyond the dualistic understanding of, for example, the leader-follower couple should help to better understand the complex and shifting dynamics of leadership, by acknowledging interdependences and asymmetries between leaders and followers (cf also Küpers, 2007). Meindl (1995) and Reicher et al (2005) claim 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) takes this line of reasoning one step further in her discussion of post-heroic leadership in terms of collective, interactive learning processes. She does think that such a theoretic development will run into difficulties, difficulties that may better be understood from a gender perspective. The traditional image of leadership is strongly masculinized, she says, and the feminization that is inherent in the post-heroic perspective will challenge several deeply rooted notions of leadership. Among these Fletcher find 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/feminization as constantly constructed and re-constructed (cf Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006) should thus be central to advance both leadership theory and leadership practices in the direction of post-heroic leadership. In Table 2, we summarize our constructionist perspective in relation to the traditional assumptions on leadership:

Basic assumption in traditional leadership research	Basic assumption in emergent leadership perspective	Description	Implications for research
Individualism	collectivism	Leadership is assumed to be collective activities between people	Leadership exists outside the individual leader. Leadership must be studied through what happens in interactions
Unitary command	Responsibility assumed in social interaction	The social construction of responsibility, accountabilities and responsibilities are constructed and assumed in interaction.	All situations of control and command should be analysed in terms of shared and dispersed forms
Hierarchisation and segregation	Everybody as potential co constructors of leadership activities	Everybody has potential to be part of constructions of leadership activities	Leadership is portrayed as something that people do together.
Heroism	Post heroism	Rejection of singular image of leadership as being about hard work, being tough and rational, making sacrifices and doing the right thing despite the consequences.	Focus on everyday interactions, processes of common learning and decision making etc.
Performativity	Problematizing performativity	The normative claims of leadership research are seen as problematic as they heavily influence the views of leadership in society and provide a basis for segregation and hierarchisation.	The contents and consequences of the existing dominating conceptions of leadership must be subject to exposure and analysis.
Masculinity	Problematizing gender constructions	Dominating leadership norms contribute to a reconstruction of traditional masculinities in work life and society.	Problematizing taken-for-granted masculine attitudes to management, thereby challenging masculinity as the prime source of leadership performativity.
Psychologisation	Understanding social interaction and social identity	Given its interest in social interaction, leadership research is primarily about understanding the activities as processes of interaction and identity construction.	Focus on activities and how, why these are constructed as they are. Also focus on the identity construction of involved inter-actors.
Morality	Problematizing grandiose conceptualization of leadership.	Leadership is not a higher moral function reserved to leaders and co-workers do not necessarily need a leader in order to be able to be worthy.	Researchers should be more open-minded and not take leadership for granted. Everyone in an organization deserves to be studied when leadership is studied. It can become more interesting to study "trivial" leadership interactions.

Table 1. Basic assumptions in an emergent leadership perspective.

5. Leaders and leadership in a small knowledge-intensive firm: An empirical example

In this paper we have used a case study of a small bio-tech company in order to analyse the empirical consequences of viewing leadership as a collective construction rather than as a leader-centric construction. Bio-tech companies are knowledge-intensive working places, and the employees are well-educated and the work are built on a huge amount of networking in project teams (Newell et al, 2008). An alternative approach would have been to apply the perspective to a more traditional hierarchic setting, but we came to the conclusion that such an empirical context would be less beneficial to our aim of developing the new perspective. We do intend to make such future studies, however.

Leadership could be studied in many different ways. For us it was important to understand how the involved actors constructed leadership in practice. It implies analyses and conclusions descriptive by character – with a social constructionist perspective it is more interesting to develop perspectives and understandings of leadership processes than to identify personality traits and/or success factors in single companies. The study is based on recurrent interviews, participant observation and documentation (cf Boje, 2001). From the narratives we understand where problems appear, where obstacles have emerged, why some ideas are realised and others not. Since we view leadership processes as collective interaction, it is also important to speak to several of the interactors. The interviewees were asked to speak openly about the development of their operations, how they had worked together, what problems they had experienced. We thus collected stories about traditional leadership activities, such as decision making, definition of areas of responsibility, management accounting & control, accountability, strategy work, formal and informal influence etc – but with the focus on these activities as organized collectively rather than emanating from the CEO.

The company that we studied is a small, entrepreneurial biotech company – here called BioCorp – that is publicly listed at one of the small electronic stock markets in Sweden. It was initiated by the current CEO in the late 1990s in order to exploit new knowledge on infection mechanisms that had been developed at the nearby Celltown University. If substances preventing the infection mechanisms from working could be developed, cures for several

diseases should be possible to develop. The CEO had long experience from various positions in the biotech industry, and through his contacts he was able to raise some seed corn capital in order to initiate a few development projects. He set out to do this in close collaboration with university researchers, using BioCorp as a network node formally responsible for product development. After an IPO in 2003, BioCorp received additional funding and could start to recruit the people necessary to manage the development projects and the relations to a number of collaborating universities. During the year of the empirical study, the company did a second round of financing outside the current shareholders and attracted a listed investment company to become its main shareholder.

BioCorp now has a small headquarters in Celltown where the CEO and the three main managers (a research manager, a product development manager and an administrative manager) have their offices. In addition, BioCorp also has a laboratory located at the university campus business incubator. The laboratory is the main responsibility of the research manager, but the daily work there is led by a laboratory manager. In this paper, we draw on narratives of the following people in BioCorp:

- Stephen – CEO, co-founder and one of the major shareholders. Long experience from the biotech industry, both nationally and internationally, both management and research positions. BioCorp, started four years ago, is his last professional project before retirement.
- Pat – Research Manager. Holds a PhD in molecular biology from Celltown University, BioCorp employee since three years after spending her entire career in academic research.
- Matthew – Product Development Manager. Holds a BSc in molecular biology from Celltown University, 15 years of managerial experience from the life science industry, especially within clinical testing. Had a previous work episode in one of Stephen's companies. BioCorp employee since one year.
- Barbara – Administrative Manager. Background in engineering, worked with administration in one of Stephen's previous ventures before becoming a BioCorp employee four years ago.
- Claire – Laboratory Manager. Holds a PhD in molecular biology from Celltown University. BioCorp employee since three years.

Other persons referred to in the narratives:

- Howard – professor of molecular biology at Celltown University, co-founder and large shareholder of BioCorp, leader of the research group that discovered the infection mechanism and supervisor of Pat's and Barbara's PhD theses.
- Mike – chief chemist at BioCorp and part-time researcher in organic chemistry at Celltown University.

6. Empirical themes

The empirical material on leadership activities will here be presented in terms of a number of themes, each evolving around an aspect of leadership activities.

6.1 The company as “we” – discussions, collective decision-making and professionalism

The daily conversations between the members of the company are in many ways the construction of leadership activities and processes – and the construction of the company as such. People have “small talks” and more sometimes even formal meetings when they want to negotiate and construct decisions. At the core of these discussions, we find the ongoing product development projects – the main concern of all BioCorp employees:

We have a project plan and a project goal, which is to find something that does not yet exist. We are building this secondary library of substances through our creativity. We always ask ourselves if we are creative enough to find the final substance, if we have the right selection methods, if we have the right test methods. Our method development allows us to take short-cuts now and then, but we often refrain from taking short-cuts; we really want to test our way through the secondary library, we do not want to go the same path once. In that sense we are still learning. In the next project we can move much faster. We have figured out how to work, we have developed new routines. We know how to work as a company and a team. If we would have a third project, we could theoretically move even faster, but on the other hand we would have resource prioritisation problems. (Pat)

The daily work in the projects is currently focused on substance testing, which requires continuous decision making regarding priority setting:

One of our main issues at the research team meetings is how to prioritise between different lines of testing. The board of directors sends some signals on this, but we also have an internal scientific council and some annual meetings with external experts. In all these fora, we discuss prioritisation. Even if everyone knows the big, long-term target, we must still decide what has to be done in order to get there. We always discuss that in all our meetings. Then, daily laboratory work involves a lot of decision-making too. Always these practical problems – how do we solve this, shall we test another stem, shall we order new raw material, shall we make five or ten repetitions in a test? What is our assessment of a new class of substances, is it worth testing, is it a top candidate or just interesting. And so forth. I could make such decisions myself, we have agreed upon criteria for what constitutes an interesting substance. But we are aiming at moving targets here, and I am not the one who will change these criteria myself. We need new

discussions, right now we are in a situation where we have to sit down and do a thorough analysis of where we actually are. (Pat)

We decide most things about our daily work here at the laboratory. We also discuss how to prioritise together, sometimes also with Pat. Pat is here quite often, and you can always give her a call. We all know the main priorities, within them we decide ourselves. Sometimes we have some time left and can test some wild ideas. Since we are all in the same project we always talk about everything we do. We have research meetings once a month with Pat and Matthew, where we also invite our consultants Howard and Mike. We present our views from the laboratory and is given feedback. Occasionally, I also sit down with Pat, Matthew and Stephen to discuss prioritisations. (Claire)

While there is always decision-making and meetings going on, the actors have realized that they still need more formal interaction and documentation to guarantee that necessary information are actually transferred:

I and Pat meet quite often at the office, we speak a lot about things. We have discussed for some time to create a weekly meeting just for the two of us, just in order to keep the other one informed on what is going on. You see, if it is very easy to get in contact, you might never sit down and transfer important, serious information. It is very easy to believe that you share all important information and that you always tell the other one everything, just because you work in the same office. But it is not true. (Matthew)

It is not often we take things directly to Stephen, most things are sorted out at the research meetings. It feels like we decide most things here by ourselves. We always write a protocol from the research meetings, there is always a document saying what shall be done and in what order. Of course some issues always end up not being done, but that's life (laugh). They become sort of standing issues, there's never any time for them but they still need to be done. I guess it is important to still acknowledge such issues. In our daily work it is less formal, we can make our priorities over a cup of coffee and allocate work between us. (Claire)

The formal leader of BioCorp share this view of a never-ending collective decision-making, arguing that it has to be that way:

From my point of view, we are a team. I do not think I have power myself, but others can of course think that I do. I come from the industry while all my co-workers are academians, and that is something we have to deal with. I feel that we have open discussions and that I delegate almost everything to them, and they often come to me spontaneously with suggestions and reports. Very few people seem to write Swedish in a good manner nowadays, so I often do corrections, which they usually accept. Otherwise we

have no problems, we have a lot of meetings and a long-term target which they are all supposed to know about. You may ask them about that if you want. We shall start clinical testing [testing a substance on human beings] during the next year, that is not a secret to anyone. How we are supposed to achieve that target, that is something we always discuss. Everybody gives input to that discussion and I am open to anything. (Stephen)

Behind the collective decision-making ideals there are an academic ideal where good ideas and good arguments are always listened to, even in a hierarchic organizational form:

We are all specialists in our respective fields. You take care of your own matters, the rest we discuss. We are not a big bunch of people and everybody come up with ideas all the time. Some of us are more sceptical, we even have an outright pessimist, but that is needed in order to be able to have balanced discussion. To be able to see things both ways is important, so that you do not exaggerate the importance of a set of test data in either direction. Everybody can not be sceptical researchers, and everybody can not come up with crazy ideas. I remember when I was a PhD student, you came up with some crazy ideas and was met by scepticism by the supervisor. So you went to the laboratory, did some tests and were able to show some interesting regularities. Suddenly the supervisor became obsessed with the idea and even described it as his own (laugh). And then you had to tell him that it had only been tested once and that further tests was necessary before moving any further (laugh). So it is very important that you can work together as a team, we really do that here at the laboratory! (Claire)

Besides the ideal of collective decision-making, there are also other issues involved in the construction of BioCorp. All employees had very strong opinions on the future need to merge the administrative office and the laboratory into one physical location:

I think a common physical location for the whole company would be a good thing. It is about the spirit of the company, but it is also about communication – we often have to await formal meetings since we seldom meet spontaneously in the corridors. Stephen lives in Stockholm, but that is a minor problem. The major problem is that we are separated here in Celltown, Pat has a small work desk up at the laboratory, but I think we could move faster as a company if we all were at the same place. You could resolve issues over a coffee or lunch and save a lot of time and energy. (Matthew)

Another ideal that is maintained in the narratives is freedom – i.e. freedom for teams or sub-teams to decide themselves about their own matters:

Of course you do not turn off work at five o'clock in the afternoon. Stephen tries to teach us how to do that, but it is not easy. We actually have a lot of freedom. The people at the laboratory are free to organize

their work in the way that suits them best, for example. If they go there Sunday evening and start up a culture of test bacteriae, then they can use it the whole next day and thus a work day has been saved. They can do what they want with the time they save, just like at the university. As long as it works, as long as we have good co-workers, we'll continue with this policy. (Pat)

We have quite a lot of freedom; we plan the tests ourselves, so we control our own work hours with full responsibility. I trust my co-workers, we work very good together and if you have a problem we discuss it. We were all recruited together; I was picked by Howard who was my PhD supervisor and the others had him as their master thesis supervisor. We are a small company, so it is important that everyone is very good at what they do. Everybody are hand-picked on the basis of personal knowledge of previous performance. Matthew had also worked with Stephen before. (Claire)

Stephen is here three days a week, sometimes less than that. He works a lot from Stockholm and we communicate through telephone and e-mail. It works just fine, I do not think it is necessary for him to be here all the time. This company pretty much runs itself. Everybody has so much knowledge, we fix most things ourselves. (Barbara)

Under the next subtitle we have gathered some sentences on how they have discussed about making things happens in practice – the construction of rules and areas of responsibility in leadership activities and processes.

6.2 Construction of rules and areas of responsibility

Another major narrative theme among BioCorp employees is the constant search for organizational order. Collective and delegated decision-making on product development matters seem to evoke a need for identifying who actually does what – as if professionalism could not entirely be trusted to do the job. There is a widespread conception that rules and clearly defined areas of responsibility are needed, and that there is not enough as it is. In fact, there are both confusion and discontent concerning this matter:

I am not sure if we actually have a formal management team. I meet regularly with Pat and Stephen, but not in a formal sense with set dates and so on, rather when someone feel that there is a need to meet. We also have an extended management team, involving Claire and Mike at the lab. They are testing thousands of substances and Mike is a very skilled chemist who is very important in the process of selecting among all those. So Mike participates when there is a need for such competence. That's the way I look at it.

Someone else might have a different view of if we have a formal management team or not. One of the others may give you a different answer. (Matthew)

We have formed a management team. It is me, Claire, Matthew, Stephen and Barbara – almost the whole company. Mike is part of it also. We formed the team almost a year ago, I think, but we have probably not had any meeting since then, a real planning meeting, I mean. It would be good if it continued as intended. (Pat)

One emerging issue is how to draw the line between the research manager and the product development manager – following the recruitment of the latter. In the narratives, there are several examples of this issue being retold as a constant and unsolved problem. Still, no one can identify any practical incidents following this lack of administrative rigour:

In BioCorp we have two main processes. One is to develop drug candidates, that is Pat's responsibility. We have not invested in an in-house R&D department; most of the work is done in collaboration with research groups at various universities, and it is quite natural that she takes care of that as she has a scientific background. The other process is to prepare and manage the clinical tests, which is the job I am starting up at the moment. Pat takes care of all contacts with our partner universities, while I handle the contacts with authorities and with other companies doing some of the clinical testing job for us. It is a logical division of responsibility. But in reality it is not that simple, there is a 'grey zone' in which we work much together. So our division of responsibility and work is constantly evolving. (Matthew)

I spoke quite a lot with Stephen on my relation to Matthew before he came, and I continued speaking directly to Matthew about it afterwards. Stephen said that we were going to have many discussions over money, opting for the same resources and so on, but we have not had any such problems so far. When we started those discussions I did not anticipate that things would work out this good. I have never worked with clinical testing, so I really wondered if there was a need for a full-time product development manager, But now I've seen that it is definitely a full-time job! (laugh) (Pat)

Areas of responsibility is also often seen as something that the CEO shall issue standing orders about (an expectation strongly deviating from the ideals of collective decision making and professional autonomy):

Seen as a whole, I think the company would benefit from a more precise definition of areas of responsibility. I assume that Stephen wants us to bring this up ourselves, but in our current situation I think we need to sit down and sort out who is responsible for what and who can make decisions about what. Otherwise I appreciate that we have a very open and tolerant climate, you can always propose

anything, everything can be discussed. In that way, Stephen is a very good leader, but some clear demarcations of what each employee is supposed to do would definitely be needed. (Pat)

The CEO, on his hand, rejects this expectation and refers the issue back to the existing for collective decision making:

There are no formal work orders, the research manager can do that if she wants. Some people in BioCorp want a work description, I have not written any. The work is all about starting clinical testing during the next year, that's what it is all about. We do have meetings. We had nine meetings with the board of directors last year, unusually many as we raised new capital and got a new main owner. There are management team meetings every week, I am not part of them, though. I have daily meetings with the administrative manager and then bigger meetings every second week. You must not think that you speak about everything just because you work together every day, you need formal meetings. (Stephen)

6.3 Construction of relations between professional identities: Research and business

Another theme in the narratives is the issue of professional identity – i.e. what images of themselves that the employees hold and how those images are related to expectations on how a commercial company should work in order to reach its goals. In BioCorp, leadership is (partly) narratively constructed as a meeting between two professional identity bases; the academic scientist and the 'company man' in pharmaceutical industry.

Pat and Claire has left the academic life to work with corporate R&D. For them it is a mental adjustment, as a researcher you always expand your horizons and go for the most interesting and promising ideas. In a company like this one, we have decided what we are going to achieve. Everything we do here is done with that final aim in mind, and we continue in that direction until we are told to do something else. But it works well, I think. If you want freedom, you go for Academia, but remember that you may end up 45 years old with a house and children, still making your living out of temporary research grants. But no one ever tells you exactly what to do. (Matthew)

I feel very strongly about this company. We are on our way towards a fantastic product that will save the world. It is quite an idealistic thing for me, Stephen tries to raise me to become a businesswoman, but my ideals are still there. I'm not stupid of course, we are here to make money, but it is important that we develop products that are important. It is not a substance that will prevent my hair from becoming gray, it is a substance intended to save lives. But I want to earn money, I want the company to earn money. But

money can never justify unethical behaviour. Stephen is very definite about that – you must always, always follow rules, regulations and laws. (Pat)

As the main focus in the daily work is still in research rather than in clinical testing, there seem to be a tendency of the employees referring back to their scientific background rather than to the pharmaceutical industry:

We have a group, a research council giving us feedback. Some of Stephen's old friends, really experienced guys, and Howard and Mike. Pat's there too. There, we discuss research strategy. The ones who have long experience from the pharmaceutical industry, they always ask if there is a commercial potential – yes or no. As a scientist, you tend to think that all results are interesting, that all data are good. In that sense, it makes our company more focused. Stephen is very firm on that, you need to think about the market. That's very good, that we have a focus. I know that Stephen did research himself long ago, I don't know on what, but he understands what we are doing and is getting increasingly literate in our field. (Claire)

The scientific identity is also often presented in terms of idea-driven entrepreneurship, while the industrial identity is one of order, rules and administration. Hence, the two identity bases are often constructed as dichotomous, as opposites:

We try to be somewhere in between research and a commercial company. I have friends working at AstraZeneca, which is a very big company and something completely different. We just have one and a half project going right now, we don't have to discuss what project to shut down, how to allocate budgets and stuff like that. Big questions in the big companies, my friends say. But what we need is to focus on the product and the market – that is the next step for us, visualising a final product. That suits me very well, I have no problem seeing that product in front of me. I don't think my co-workers have a problem either, they are quite focused. The problem is our partner universities – they always see a lot of things that they want to test while they work on our problems. So I try to keep them happy by saying that they can do some testing out of pure curiosity, which means that our own researchers must focus even more on our product in order to keep up with the time schedule. Our own laboratory staff does only product development, at least they should (laugh) (Pat)

I don't think you can control and lead researchers in the traditional way. In an ordinary company you have a boss telling you what to do. If you are in a project-based organisation you might have both a project leader and a department manager, then they will have to speak to each other first before telling you what to do. But if you are working with scientists, the collaboration must build upon a shared interest in getting things done. We use their research when they test our substances, and they can use those tests in

collecting data for upcoming publications. There must be such a reciprocal interest or exchange.
(Matthew)

On a personal level, an aspect contributing to the dichotomization is the expectation that what you achieve as a scientist is not always worth so much for you as a pharmaceutical industry worker – and vice versa:

Academia seems so focused on money nowadays, it's a sad thing that money is more important than research. If you want to do interesting research you need grants in order to employ people, and if you are not famous you don't get any grants. Academic life can be so exciting if you have interesting projects going on! It is exciting in BioCorp too. We can not do what we want, but we have an infection that we want to block out from the human body – that is exciting! Some say that you can never go back to Academia once you have left it. But we are not far from basic research, we work with them. Sometimes my name is on a publication, that feels good from my personal perspective. We don't have time to write publications and that is anyway not a priority in BioCorp. I think it should be a valuable experience to have worked in a small biotech firm, but I'm not sure that it is so much worth in Academia. (Claire)

As we have seen in this section there is no either/or relation between business and research, there are different ways of doing both at the same time. In the last theme we will discuss what leadership identities can be about if we make a complex and practice-oriented interpretation of the concept.

6.4 Constructing leadership as identity: Performative expectations

For some people in BioCorp, leadership itself is becoming an emerging professional identity as the organization grows and new managerial posts are created:

It's quite hard transforming myself from scientist to leader. I would like to know more about leadership. As a scientist you are used to always discuss things, but I feel that it's in my personality also to make the final decision. But I don't know about conflict management, I have never trained myself in handling conflicts. It was always the professor's job to solve conflicts, and as a researcher I could always just tell him to go to hell, it didn't matter. And to keep focused, moving on, not getting stuck, you must think about that too. And leading personnel, I think about my lack of knowledge there. I have coached junior sports, but that's all. If you need to fire someone... Well, right now everything seems to move in the right direction, everyone is doing a great job, but you cannot tell who is a good leader until there is a crisis. The

bad leaders I have seen so far have always been people that could not stand up and fight when facing a problem. (Pat)

Leadership can thus be constructed as a set of skills and behaviours that you must acquire in order to be successful. In that sense, leadership theory and practice constitutes a performative system of norms that is internalized by leadership practitioners who then maintain current leader-centric ideals notwithstanding the collectivist ideals by which the daily operations are handled:

I find it really hard to develop my leader role. I spoke a lot to Stephen before I accepted to become research manager, well at least to accept the title. It is a title, some more money to allocate, letting Claire run the lab. So I convey the directives from the board and the partner universities to her. I think you must have managers, I must have a CEO that represents the company in the board and in the external environment. Then you can always wonder how many subordinates he can have simultaneously internally. We should be able to have a flat organization, but I don't think Stephen could find the time for everyone. (Pat)

While arguing for a team-based leadership style, the CEO – when asked about leadership - still makes reference to exceptional situations where the power and determination of single individuals were needed:

I'm the coach, period. I need a team that can work and achieve the targets that we have set up. We also have a most competent board of directors, you need to feel resistance somewhere. But there can be conflicts. We had a Celltown businessman in our board, at that time we were just a bunch of scientists there so we needed him. But he turned out to be a greedy bastard, he didn't understand research, he just wanted to earn some fast money. He was supposed to help us with financial matters, and suddenly he demanded hefty consultancy fees, a private mobile phone and so forth. We didn't need that, our auditing firm did the same things much cheaper. So I decided to kick him out, and I used some really dirty tricks. In such a situation, you must do what it takes. (Stephen)

Leadership also becomes conceptually performative in the sense that it is not for everyone – it is a special job that must be taken care of by special individuals. The upcoming retirement of Stephen is a source of much worrying:

There are some drawbacks with Stephen living in Stockholm, it is harder to communicate. He is so incredibly competent, I'm not sure you can find someone like him in Celltown. I prefer a competent

person in Stockholm over a less competent one in Celltown. It is actually quite easy to commute, but you need the person to come here at least once a week and stay for at least a day each time. Finding a new CEO is a problem, we are worrying about his upcoming retirement. It is a discussion that has been going on for quite a while. (Pat)

Although leadership activities are collectively practised in the company people try to relate to the concept and categorisations that have been done in literature and popular literature – the separation of responsibility and activities that concerns leadership. In the next section we will develop this discussion and also link this to earlier research around organization of companies.

7. Doing leadership in social interaction

In this paper, we set out to discuss this emerging notion of leadership as collectively constructed rather than as emanating from a single leader – with the intention of identifying theoretical and conceptual consequences of dissolving the expectation that the phenomenon of leadership must be sought through single leaders. Instead, we want to develop a conceptual language on leadership that emphasize leadership as collectively constructed.

Our interpretation of the empirical themes in the previous section is that the collective construction of leadership is concerned with various aspects of boundary work and the search for constituting responsibility and identities. The different actors in BioCorp seem constantly to be in the process of driving the organization and its inherent processes forward through the construction, re-construction and de-construction of notions of organization, responsibilities, issues and identities – and of leadership as such. In the following, we will make these notions subject to a closer analysis as an attempt towards a conceptualization of leadership as a collective construction.

All the interviewed people talk about the definition of BioCorp as an organizational entity, and much attention is given to the notion of the firm in relation to other organizational entities. Defining where the firm starts and ends seems important, both in time and space. Also within BioCorp, the notion of organizational parts and/or areas of responsibility seems to be an eternal process of constructing, re-constructing and de-constructing boundaries. Much time in meetings and different managerial groups are spent discussing who is to do what and who is responsible for what. While such arrangements are quite stable at a formal level, they are constantly negotiated in practice due to changes in interest, ability or availability among the actors, or due to requests from external actors.

There are constantly several issues (Dutton, 1993) going on in BioCorp, and actors spend much interaction time in defining what these issues are actually about and why they unfold as they do. The issues are thus constructed not only as areas of responsibility, but also in terms of existence, content, participants and rules. Among issues in BioCorp we find decision processes, past and future events and the various development projects.

An important part of leadership activities in BioCorp is also the ongoing identity creation processes of the actors. Identity creation processes are based both in the actors' personal and professional backgrounds and in the ongoing reflection that takes place as they travel through life (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). It is constructed as others and of otherness in relation to self. Identities are thus always in the making, not least during experienced discontinuities in or around the company.

Since the very concept of leadership constitutes an important performative discourse in business life, one part of the leadership construction processes in BioCorp is also the construction of the notion of leadership itself. While the CEO has a long history of managerial positions behind him, the other managers are new to the concept and explicitly seek to improve their abilities as leaders. The general leadership discourse become the source of performative ideals, from which BioCorp managers deviate but at the same time strive towards – thereby reinforcing both Stephen's masculine patriarchy and the allowing equality of modern knowledge-intensive firms at the same time.. The boundary between the desired leadership abilities and the perceived lack of such abilities is thus also in constant construction. The socio-ideologically based work (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004) of BioCorp employees to fit into the clichés of leadership is thus a part of the collective construction of leadership.

The people in BioCorp are thus constructing these notions of leadership and responsibility, sometimes even simultaneously, since they all contain desirable and legitimate elements of leadership. The classic bureaucratic ideals are reproduced through systems of corporate governance and through the individualisation of areas of responsibility. The ideals of professional organizations are to be found in the seemingly endless negotiation of professional roles and areas of responsibility and the recurrent creation of arenas for collective decision-making. At the same time, the market-driven ideal of adhocratic leadership is always present in the guise of constant collective discussions on how to allocate resources to different projects and ideas. Last, but not least, there is also the discourse on the company as a set of highly skilled individuals with a cause – to use results from cutting-edge research in the creation of new medical treatments for the good of mankind. As we see it, most people in most organizations perceive daily leadership in terms of responsibility – but responsibility concerns both results and values, and it is seen as both individually and collectively based

(Lindkvist & Llewellyn, 2003). This multitude of notions of power, responsibility, identity construction and multi-perspectivist boundary work seems to be central to the development of a leader-less conception of leadership.

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