Project leadership revisited:
A critique and notes toward a post-heroic perspective

by

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1. Introduction: On the need to (re)visit project leadership.

1.1 On the importance of project leadership studies

Project leadership should be of great importance to leadership studies in general for several reasons. First, it is a most common leadership assignment in contemporary organizations, implying a general need for knowledge development. Second, it is a leadership assignment which is often not based in a formal managerial position, but rather a temporary team mission – making it a special form of leadership of special interest to both practitioners and scholars alike. Third, this leadership assignment is – unlike many others - rapidly undergoing a formal process of professionalization through the standardization of knowledge bases and the increased importance of individual certification (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2007). Fourth, it is a field which – like most other sub-fields within project research – may lack a substantial critical research debate based in ongoing general theory development outside project research (cf Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Fifth, it is also a field suffering from practical inadequacies in the sense that failure rates among projects are high and that many project leaders express feelings of stress, overload and lack of control (ref).

Where the stream on project leadership is concerned, it started out in 1959 when Gaddis published his seminal article that defined the new task of being a project manager and also identified some important characteristics that such an individual needed to have in order to be successful. Among those were the double ability to handle both technological research and business matters, and to advance the project process both in relation to the project team and to the external stakeholders. Already from the outset, project leadership thus was described as a new kind of leadership assignment as compared to the existing ones, a kind of assignment requiring special qualifications, methods, skills and behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that many of the important research publications on project leadership reported on empirical inquiry into this new field; questioning what qualifications that were needed for someone to become project leader, what methods that would help this leader achieve success, what skills that were most important for the leader to develop, and what behaviours that worked best in communicating with stakeholders and building the team. In order to get answers to these questions without being able to consult any existing body of literature, scholars looked up successful project leaders and simply asked them what they were doing. As the set of tools and methods for the management of projects gradually increased, it also implied that it was possible to ask informants about their use of tools and methods and relate this to project
success. During the past decade, the assumption that there are certain qualifications, methods, skills and behaviours that can be seen as predictors to project success has also become embodied into the PMBOK and the evaluation procedures for project management certifications. Project leadership started out as a practical problem to solve, and it has remained so. Often it is also suggested and argued that the continued development of project research should focus on understanding various forms of project organization as empirical phenomena (Söderlund, 2004, Kaulio, 2008).

In parallel to the development of empirically informed inductive research on what constitutes good project leadership, the theoretical development within the general leadership field has expanded in all directions. Several different schools of thought has been involved in the research debate, of which several raise serious objections to the traditional focus on what qualifications, methods, skills and behaviours of leaders that are needed for success.

1.2 Developments in the field of leadership studies in general
The field of leadership studies has traditionally been leader-centered, i.e. focused on the individual leader and his traits, abilities and actions. 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. 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.

During recent years, there has been an emerging debate in the field of leadership studies on what has been called post-heroic leadership (cf Fletcher, 2004). According to Eicher (2006), the old heroic ideal is a lone leader who feel that his leadership is based on superior knowledge and information (omnipotence), who fears failure more than anything (rightness), who keep up his appearances at any cost including blaming others (face-saving), and who views his subordinates as inferior creatures in constant need for assistance and rescue (co-dependency). Against this, Eicher pose the post-heroic ideal, where the leader wants other to take responsibility and gain knowledge (empowerment), encourage 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). In terms of theoretical development, the post-heroic perspective also points at the need to study leadership in terms of activities rather than individuals – i.e. viewing leadership as something that is co-constructed in a team rather than exercised by one single person (Gronn, 2002, Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

1.3 Aim of the paper
Given this rough characterisation of the project leadership literature on one hand, and the general leadership literature on the other, it should be of importance to analyse how and to what extent the project leadership literature has benefited from the rapid developments of the general leadership field. In such an analysis, we hold a special interest in contemporary leadership thoughts that emphasize less traditional views on leadership and therefore should be suitable for research and practice in project-based settings – such as the post-heroic perspective. The aim of this paper is thus threefold. First, we will review the existing research on project leadership. Second, the problems and insufficiencies of the current research will be summarised and discussed in detail. Third, we will make some notes towards a new research agenda, built on the current debate in leadership studies on post-heroic leadership.

2. Project leadership literature: A brief review and analysis

2.1 The antecedents of project leadership studies
In a sense, reflecting over project leadership can be seen as an unnecessary waste of time:

“Since a temporary system operates over a limited period of time, there is not much motivation to investigate the management problem in itself; instead the focus is on the task problem, so that one learns little about how to manage temporary systems from actually running them, as compared to what one might learn from running a more stable, functionally organized system.” (Goodman & Goodman, 1976: 494)

In the early project literature, the notion of project leadership mainly departed from a task-oriented perspective. Leadership was often seen as a ”soft” or ”human” phenomenon that was needed in order to make the project team deliver according to plan (Packendorff, 1995). At the same time, it was already from the start acknowledged that the management of projects and temporary systems had its own specific problems and characteristics (Gaddis, 1959, Miles, 1964).

The basis of project management is the need for the rational handling of temporary tasks, tasks that could not be handled through permanent organizational arrangements. This points at project leadership as mainly a task-oriented phenomenon where relations could (temporarily) be set aside for the efficient execution of the project plan (Bryman et al, 1987, Goodman, 1981). At the same time, both projects and the people in them belong to a surrounding permanent organizational context that must be handled. Consequently, the traditional project leadership literature has focused on leadership as the simultaneous task of project-internal team management of technical specialists and project-external management of business managers and clients, often in the structural setting of matrix organizations. This does not make project leadership a unique phenomenon as compared to other forms of leadership; it neither implies special practical tools or tricks, nor does it imply a special theoretical body clearly separated from general leadership theory. But it is still a special sub-field of leadership, not least because it is socially constructed as such through the general differentiation of project management from other managerial fields (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2007).

When presenting the new leader category - the project manager - to the world, Gaddis (1959) depicted a boundary-crossing Jack-of-all-trades able to handle both advanced technological issues and complicated business matters. It was not expected from this individual to be the
best engineer or the best businessman in the organization, but the double abilities and the
double set of experiences was. In project leadership literature, this reasoning has been
extended to a specific interest in the individuals that are actually able to perform such a role.
Among the traits, abilities and tasks mentioned (and often mixed with each other) is the
ability to motivate and make people enthusiastic about the project (Archibald, 1992; Fabi &
Pettersen, 1992; Jessen, 1992; Owens & Martin, 1986; Roman, 1986; Verma, 1996), to lead
through ideas and visions (Briner, Geddes & Hastings, 1990; Christensen & Kreiner, 1989),
participative leadership (Barker, Tjosvold & Andrews, 1988; Goodman & Goodman, 1976;
Jessen, 1992; Silverman, 1987; Thamhain, 1987; Thamhain & Gemmill, 1974), creating a
good organizational climate (Barczak & Wilemon, 1989; Jabri, Payne & Pearson, 1986;
Jessen, 1992), handling external contacts and stakeholders (Barczak & Wilemon, 1989; Briner,
Geddes & Hastings, 1990; Christensen & Kreiner, 1991; Fabi & Pettersen, 1992; Jessen, 1992;
Katz & Tushman, 1981; Slevin, 1983, Verma, 1996), coordination and integration (Fabi &
Pettersen, 1992; Pinto & Prescott, 1988; Silverman, 1987; Thamhain, 1987), facilitating
internal communication (Barczak & Wilemon, 1989; Tushman, 1978, Verma, 1996), solving
conflicts (Briner, Geddes & Hastings, 1990; Fabi & Pettersen, 1992; Owens & Martin, 1986;
Thamhain, 1987), be able to handle stress (Verma, 1996) and searching for adequate
information (Fabi & Pettersen, 1992; Roberts & Fusfeld, 1981; Slevin, 1983). The project
manager shall be more task oriented than the average leader, but at the same time there are
studies indicating that increased relation orientation is positively correlate with project
effectiveness (Bryman et al, 1987). All this while the traditional tasks to plan, make decisions,
maintain discipline and control performance remains (Woodward, 1986). A pro-active
“firelighter” is what is needed, not a reactive “firefighter” constantly preoccupied with
handling chaotic situations (Barber & Warn, 2005)

Behind this view of the project manager as a Jack-of-all-trades, as both generalist and
specialist, as both strategist and technician with eye for details, we find a theoretical
conception of project leadership that is equally wide, drawing from several sources of
inspiration. This conception can be found in several of the leading textbooks and professional
publications in the field.

2.2 Project leadership studies in textbooks
In order to analyze the theoretical foundation for project leadership as it is summarised in literature, we have selected three different textbooks where this field is dealt with. The three books are Vijay K Verma’s *Human Resource Skills for the Project Manager*, published by PMI, Jack Meredith and Samuel Mantel’s textbook *Project Management: A Managerial Approach*, and Börre Nyhlen’s Norwegian textbook *Prosjektorganisering: Teorigrunnlag og implikasjoner*. In each case, we have looked (1) for the general theoretical foundation within leadership research, and (2) for theoretical foundations linked directly to project research.

Verma devotes the entire book to project leadership, and concentrates on the issues of communication, motivation, conflict, negotiation, stress management and the management of project environments. Each issue is treated out from a number of theoretical models, and as the book is published by one of the leading professional associations, it is also full of practical advice to the project manager. All sections of the book appear to be based on general models in each field, models adapted from other textbooks or from state-of-the-art knowledge. For example, the section on motivation makes the well-known tour from Maslow and Hertzberg to Expectancy Theory, Reinforcement Theory and Equity Theory. Likewise, the section actually connected to the field of leadership studies starts out with describing the traits approach to leadership, then drawing upon the behavioural approach, the situational/contingency approach, and the attributional and charismatic theories of leadership. Well-known models on group development stages are also introduced as basis for the advice. Among the few models and theories actually based on empirical research on projects we find references to Slevin & Pinto (1988) on motivation, Hill (1977) and Thamhain & Wilemon (1975) on conflict management, and Wilemon & Gemmill (1970) and Posner (1987) on project manager traits and abilities. Different theoretical perspectives are rarely contrasted to each other, they are rather used as complementary sources of inspiration to practical advice.

Meredith & Mantel starts out their short section on leadership by stating that the project manager needs both technical and administrative credibility, and moves on to list recommendable traits and abilities of the project manager. Among the most important is a diplomatic sensitivity, stress handling, a sense of ethics and intercultural skills. With reference to Shenhar (1998) it is noted that different projects may require different leadership styles, otherwise the advice is general. Meredith & Mantel refers almost exclusively to different papers and reports produced within the project management community, of which the most notable research references are Slevin & Pinto (1991) on leadership and Thamhain &
Wilemons (1975) “definitive” article on conflict in project teams. Almost no reference is made to any general leadership theories or perspectives, other than to popular books on management and leadership.

Nyhlen takes more of an organizational behaviour perspective on project management, emphasizing that projects are institutionalised processes of organizing in which several different actors are involved. In his view, the project leader is a person who is responsible for orchestrating task development, social interaction in the team and functioning relations to the organizational context. Nyhlen also claims that there are specific issues within project leadership that cannot be automatically treated by reference to general leadership theory, and mention boundary regulation, organizational structuring and process management as three equally important tasks for the project leaders. Nyhlen does not make reference to any specific leadership theory or perspective other than the general presentations provided in Jessen (2001) and Strand (2001), and the project literature used is limited to Christensen & Kreiner (1994).

2.3 The research frontiers: Project leadership studies today

As a third part of our brief review of project leadership literature, we have looked into the publication activities of the *International Journal of Project Management* during the past two decades. The aim of this reading was to analyse the extent to which project leadership is actively inquired into in the project research community and also to identify any current themes and/or trends in this research. It appeared that the number of articles explicitly dealing with any aspect of project leadership was actually very small. Kangis & Lee-Kelley (2000) makes a similar observation:

“Despite the plethora of leadership studies in diverse situations, relatively little attention seems to have been given to examining the variables involved in the context of managing the operations of temporary, small groups […] . Project management is a powerful tool for operational management as well as for strategic change. It is also useful for the implementation of initiatives such as business process re-engineering and total quality management, hence its increasing use. Projects are goal-oriented, budget-driven, timeline specific and generally operate outside the conventional organisation structure of a firm. Such characteristics can create interesting challenges for the project manager, who has to cut across
established lines of control. However, despite its increased adoption, not much is known on the relationship between leadership behaviour and managing these structures.” (Kangis & Lee-Kelley, 2007: 393f).

In our sample of articles, the main stream of research on project leadership deals with the relation between the project manager’s leadership style and the situational requirements of specific types of projects. Most of this research draws upon the seminal work by Fielder (1967), which formed the situational/contingency approach to leadership. In short, this approach states that team effectiveness are dependent upon the leader’s personality as related to the perceived environment. In very difficult or very simple situations, task-oriented leaders are preferable, while relationship-oriented leaders are better at handing situations with moderate difficulties. Over the past years, this has been studied in IT services projects (Thite, 2000, Lee-Kelley & Leong, Loong, 2003), construction projects in Thailand (Ogunlana et al, 2002), design consulting projects (Cheung et al, 2001) and in clinical research projects (Kangis & Lee-Kelley, 2000). In general, the research supports Fielder’s hypotheses and identifies certain leadership abilities and traits that are recommendable given the project situation at hand. There are also related research (departing from other conceptual sources) generalizing similar findings to all project managers from a certain national culture (Mäkilouko, 2004), to project managers in relation to line managers (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2004) and to the relation between project managers and project types in general (Müller & Turner, 2007). Common for this research is the assumption that different individuals represent different leadership styles and that they are consequently suitable for different project tasks, types or environments. In all cases, this was investigated by means of quantitative analyses of survey data.

In addition, there are also some minor streams of research related to project leadership, again investigating individuals. El-Sabaa (2001) investigated the relation between skill profiles and career paths of project managers, concluding that the continuous broadening of functional and technical skills was necessary for a project management career. Aitken & Crawford (2007) investigated stress coping strategies of project managers, and Gällstedt (2003) made a qualitative study on critical incidents in projects and their relation to perceptions of motivation and stress. Based on a large survey, Dolfi & Andrews (2007) concluded that project leaders were better to be optimists in order to be able to handle the sometimes hard
working conditions. None of these texts did explicitly relate to the general body of leadership research, however.

2.4 Summary

From our brief and selective review above, our general conclusion is that the existing project leadership literature mainly borrows concepts and models from general leadership research, often without project-specific empirical studies and often not distinguishing between different research perspectives in leadership studies. The few actually existing empirical studies made are almost exclusively focusing on the project leader’s suitability for a certain project situation, and they are almost exclusively based in the contingency approach to leadership presented by Fielder (1967). In addition, there is a clear tendency to rely on a set of earlier studies on project leaders made in the 1970’s and 1980’s, studies that can be characterised as exploratory studies aiming at finding empirical patterns of leadership traits, abilities, competences and tasks.

3. Project leadership studies: A critique

Given the brief review above, we will now turn to what issues we see as problematic and in need for debate in the field of project leadership.

Individual focus. Almost all empirical and theoretical studies of project leadership implicitly assumes a perspective of leadership as synonymous with a single individual, a leader. There is a tradition in the project management field of viewing the project manager as an individual, a tradition which is strengthened by the current wave of individual project management certifications sweeping over the world. At the same time, current developments in leadership research emphasise teamwork and views of teamleaders as facilitators, implying that important knowledge on leadership are to be found in the relation between team members rather than in the leader as an individual.

Traits and “pseudo-trait” focus. In accordance with the interest in project managers as individuals, there is also an interest in their personalities. If a project is led by one person, and that person is of vital importance to project success, then it is of course most interesting to
find out what individuals that are suited for such a task. Individuals are therefore mostly treated as if they possessed certain traits, and some of the existing research does also explicitly use psychological methods to investigate traits in successful project managers. But there is also several examples of “pseudo-traits” in the literature, in the form of what good project managers should be able to do, or even what good project managers are supposed to do (cf Barber & Warn, 2005). The danger of an un-reflexive “pseudo-traits” approach is of course that people are seen as bearers of a simplified set of unchangeable qualities rather than as active and developing actors. Confusing what people are with what they do is rarely recommendable.

**Project focus.** While one of the most important trends in the project management field is the moving of focus from single projects to multi-project management and project portfolio management, project leadership research remains focused on the single project as if that was the most important unit to lead. Today, both project managers and project team members often work in several projects in parallel, implying that the single project is no longer the only relevant level of analysis (Söderlund, 2004). The continuing focus on single projects may also have dysfunctional consequences, such as conserving old autonomous ideas about project leadership that are not suited to modern portfolio thinking, or maintaining the traditional group dynamics view of a project team as working together face-to-face throughout the project duration (in spite of the increased use of short-term specialists and virtual teams).

**Lack of theoretical reflexivity.** Insofar different schools of thought in the general leadership research literature are indeed drawn upon, they are usually treated as complementary evidence that can be used to inform the project management community on how to improve project leadership practices. At the same time, these schools of thought actually rest upon different scientific assumptions and in several cases they are in direct conflict with each other. For example, a leadership theory explaining project success out from leadership style can hardly be seen as complementary to one emphasising personal traits in the individual leader or one viewing leadership as a process of group interaction. There is a clear need for conscious discussions on the ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations of research, instead of the usual implicit assumption that project management is a field in its own right that can formulate its own leadership theories without too much help from the outside.
Lack of empirical research. One evident consequence of the lack of thorough, theoretically informed research on project leadership, is that the empirical foundations of all the normative advice may become weak. In general, it seems that the better the theoretical foundation, the better the achieved empirical support for the conclusions. For example, the stream of research described above using Fiedler’s situational/contingency perspective contains several quantitative studies of good quality. Otherwise, the field tend to rely on exploratory research (often made decades ago) mapping empirical patterns rather than testing theoretical hypotheses or developing theory. Moreover, there are almost no existing qualitative studies of what project leaders do or what leadership processes that goes on in project teams.

To conclude this discussion, there is a need for more empirical studies on project leadership, based on thorough and well-founded theoretical reasoning. The range of theoretical schools within leadership research that can be applied to project leadership is also far wider than the current preoccupation with various aspects of contingency theory and leadership style. Moreover, a widened view and explicit discussions on the foundations of project leadership research can also contribute to a re-formulation of the project leadership ideals that fills the literature today, ideals that rather serve to re-masculinize work life than promoting new ways of working and living (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006).

Our proposed alternative is the emerging post-heroic leadership perspective, a perspective based in explicit scientific assumptions on social constructionism and alternative leadership values. It is also a critical agenda in that the construction of power relations, resistance and gender is of interest (cf Collinson, 2005).

4. A post-heroic perspective on project leadership

During recent years, there has been an emerging debate on what has been called post-heroic leadership. According to Eicher (2006), the old heroic ideal is a lone leader who feel that his leadership is based on superior knowledge and information (omnipotence), who fears failure more than anything (rightness), who keep up his appearances at any cost including blaming others (face-saving), and who views his subordinates as inferior creatures in constant need for assistance and rescue (co-dependency). Against this, Eicher pose the post-heroic ideal, where the leader wants other to take responsibility and gain knowledge (empowerment), encourage
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). To us, the heroic ideal creates both unhappy and stressed leaders and also problems of legimating leaders and leadership in the eyes of employees and citizens. While the post-heroic ideal represents both individual situations and societal norms that enable people, organizations and societies to live on and develop.

Departing from a post-heoric Fletcher (2004) examines the power and gender implications of this new understanding of leadership. According to her, “doing leadership”, “doing gender” and “doing power” are related to each other and not being aware of these connections means a risk for failing in introducing shared leadership in organisations.

The individual focused perspective is changed with a view of leading and following as “two sides of the same set of relational skills that everyone in an organisation needs in order to work in a context of interdependence” (p 648). This means that, even if formal positions remain unaltered, who will take the role of the leader depends on the situation and individuals are required to move fluidly between the two roles. In such a context, the classical notion of self as an independent entity could be replaced by the self-in-relation notion, where interdependence is instead the basis.

Therefore, the relational skills that have been identified as necessary for shared leadership can be unconsciously related to femininity. Fletcher also notices that those who have not power use relational skills in order to anticipate their superiors’ needs and requests. This can be misleading and can make us associate these skills also with powerlessness.

Here we could find one possible explanation to why post-heroic leadership is mostly invisible in project anecdotes. When leaders tell about their leadership, they still use the classical hero individual-focused narrative. If we consider that we construct our identity each time we have an interaction with another person and that a relevant part of our identity is our gender identity, we can see that also when working we are “doing gender”. The fact that the working life has long been dominated by men suggests that “doing work” is linked to “doing masculinity”. So, since practices related to post-heroic leadership are unconsciously associated with femininity and powerlessness, this new form of leadership violates gender and
power assumptions about leadership. These gender and power related questions make the change to the new leadership model more difficult and delicate, since we are speaking of highly charged aspects.

One way of putting a post-heroic perspective into action is to use it prescriptively. It may be used to discuss the inhumane workload of the modern manager and the need to enable him (and sometimes also her) to live a balanced life (Sally, 2002, Pearce & Manz, 2005). Modern decentralized ways of organizing – through high-performing teams rather than through bureaucratic command structures – are also used as arguments (Lambert, 2002, Pearce, 2004), and also the observation that an increasingly complex world requires top management competence profiles broader than what can possibly be expected to be found in one single person (O’Toole et al, 2003, Waldersee & Ealgarson, 2002, Pearce, 2004). By reference to established theories on group composition and role complementarity it is also usual to describe managerial tasks as requiring several different individual roles at one and the same time (Yang & Shao, 1997, Denis et al, 2001). Sometimes we also meet arguments linked to the general legitimacy of leadership, such as that organizational and societal change processes may be facilitated by having several different perspectives and/or interest groups represented in the managerial function at the same time (Denis et al, 2001, Sally, 2002, Ensley et al, 2003). Some authors still also maintain the continued need for traditional leadership in many situations; shared leadership is primarily suitable for tasks characterized by reciprocal interaction, creativity and complexity (i.e. advanced teamwork situations).

One problem of this perspective is that it views post-heroic leadership as an exception to “usual” leadership, an exception to be practiced in extraordinary situations (Crevani et al, 2007). 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, Collinson, 2005). 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. 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 do think that such a theoretic development will run into difficulties, difficulties that may better be understood from a gender perspective. The traditional images of
leadership is strongly masculinized, she says, and the femininization that is inherent in the post-heroic perspective will challenge several deeply rooted notions of leadership (cf Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). Among these Fletcher find the taken-for-granted individualization of society (reinforcing unitary command as the only viable solution), and also 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 as constantly constructed and re-constructed should thus be central to advance both leadership theory and leadership practices in the direction of post-heroic leadership.

5. Post-heroic project leadership studies: Notes towards a research agenda

There are several important research implications from the post-heroic perspective. First, we can raise new questions in research when we shift focus from individual traits to social constructions of leadership. One concerns studies of exclusion of different groups of leadership for example how to handle complex forms of projects in service sector or health sector. Another important question is the influences of gender, race and class in leadership and projects. Especially interesting could be to see how power with different bases constructs in project when you have a planned schedule for the task.

Second there will, of course, be expanded theoretical fields involved when you have another epistemological view in research. Different kinds of critical theories with focus on gender, class and power can be used and this will broaden our understanding of projects and give new and another form of knowledge.

However, this will also change our way of doing research. Instead of focusing of individuals it will be more suitable to follow teams, meetings and other form of interactions between people. This also means that we give activities and practices in projects attention instead of traits of individuals. If we study how processes proceed we will focus on what is happen between people instead of people’s individual behaviour.
We will therefore prefer qualitative field studies and more anthropological inspired methods, which has been almost absent within the project management field. This will also lead to other forms of results where different kinds of discourse analyses and narratives will be put in front instead of normative models with four fields.

These changes of theory are directly interacting with the field of project practices. Most of the researchers in the field are also involved in consultancies and most of the recent research are translated into the bodies of knowledge shaping certifications. Instead of giving all responsibility of the project to one person it can be developed a more collective form of responsibility that can lead to more creative and constructive organising processes. The collective responsibility will probably also lead to more democratic and reflexive project processes and more involved people in making decisions.

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