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Examination paper
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Introduction

Whether or not it is possible to define leadership is a question that has been asked throughout this course. The terms "leaders" and "followers" have occurred frequently throughout the course literature, and historically these two opposites have been used in leadership research in an effort to differentiate and categorise what separates the leaders from the followers. I will return to these two notions in my final discussion.

I have worked as prefect/Head of department in four different areas of Malmö University; Engineering, Teacher training for recreation instructors and pre-school teachers, Play-Leisure-Health and Sport Sciences. I have been director of the Department of Sport Sciences since 2001 and will resign from my position during the summer of 2010.

Naturally, there are risks linked to writing about one's own experiences as a director and leader, since one might be inclined to select parts that show a distorted or overly positive image of reality. For this reason I very much look forward to receiving feedback on this text. Unfortunately the title "Bordering on a fiasco"¹ has already been taken, otherwise I feel this name is quite representative of the feeling I have often had during the more than 10 years I have worked in academic middle management.

Does a physical education, Phy's eds, teacher need to be able to do a somersault? Which decisions does a director need to make when the organisational climate changes and the staff expect clarity and decisiveness from their superior? Can one draw general conclusions about specific cases based on "empirics, experience or science"?²

By reflecting on my own leadership and linking this to the course literature and use the implementation of a new education for Phy's ed. teacher as a case-study I hope to be able to further problematise the role as leader/director in the university world.

¹ Tyrstrup, Mats. På gränsen till fiasko. Om ledarskapets vardag och det improviserande inflytandet. Studentlitteratur 2005.

² Termen "beprövat erfarenhet och vetenskaplig grund" är hämtat från Högskolelagen och all högre utbildning i Sverige förväntas bygga på dessa pillars.

Leadership theories & models

Leadership research is a multi-disciplinary field of study which often builds on the academic traditions of anthropology and sociology, and these two are in turn often posed compared to or complemented by psychology and social psychology.

Another main point of discussion is whether leadership is a social construction. Does leadership exist exclusively in people's minds, determined by a subjective idea of what constitutes leadership, or is it something substantial that can be objectively located?

In Sweden, leadership research is relatively new, but internationally there has been work in this field for several decades. In leadership research, there has been much focus on the question of where to start when trying to understand leadership.³ Grint writes that defining leadership is nearly impossible, and states that leadership is some kind of social setting that makes things happen. Leadership is an aspect of the group-dynamic processes between leaders and followers in a dynamic of shared action. The Swedish scholar Mats Alvesson asks himself the question: Is leadership important and does it exist?⁴ And in his book *Tomhetens Triumf* (The Triumph of Emptiness) he emphasises a fact that is perhaps self-evident, but nonetheless worth considering, namely that as the leader's power grows, other people's influence decreases.⁵

There are some researchers who are of the opinion that “the more, the better” when it comes to optimising results and making sensible decisions.

In the book “The Wisdom of the Masses: How it is possible that many people are cleverer than few, and how collective wisdom is formed”, author James Surowiecki⁶ presents a deceptively simple idea: Large groups of people are always smarter than a small number of experts, and no matter how knowledgeable the experts are the bigger group will

³ Grint.K. Leadership: Limits and possibilities. N.Y. Palgrave. 2005

⁴ Alvesson, M. & Svenningsson,S. The great disappering act: Difficulties in doing “leadership”. The Leadership Quartely, 14, 359-381. Här hämtat från Bryman, a.a.

⁵ Alvesson. M. Tomhetens Triumf.

⁶ Surowiecki.J.”Massans vishet

always come up with the better solution. The large group is more innovative, will make wiser choices and is even better at predicting the future, states James Surowiecki.

During the course several different models of leadership has been discussed.

Big 5 is a leadership model which focuses on the qualities a leader should aspire to. This model has been very popular and is often referred to.

Surgeency (extroversion)

Agreeableness (optimism and positivity)

Conscientiousness (dependability and integrity)

Adjustment (personal and emotional stability)

Intellectance (open-mindedness and curiosity)

Another way of understanding and explaining the concept of leadership is to highlight four dominating interpretations:

1. **PERSONAL:** Leadership exists in the personalities of people who are leaders. The personal factor is what makes a difference (as in the case of, for example, Barack Obama). Characteristics, visionary leadership, what is going to happen?
2. **RESULT-ORIENTED:** Leadership is manifested in the result, i.e. what and how something happened as well as the final outcome.
3. **POSITIONAL.** Leadership is an aspect of a position. Formal organisation, positions that grant a person a certain status, the leadership position.
4. Leadership lies in the Process of how leadership is exercised.

It seems that the following six quality-related discussions can be found in most leadership theories.

1. The location of leadership. Where do we find it? In a person, as an idea, as an aspect of interpersonal interaction or only in certain people.

2. What makes leadership different from other forms of social influence? Leadership is compared to parenting, love, violence, Hitler, the establishing and finding of boundaries.
3. The time aspect. When does leadership happen? Is it continuous or can it be said to occur at a specific moment?
4. How is leadership manifested? Speeches, written texts, documents et cetera are studied.
5. Why is leadership necessary?
6. Who gets to define leadership?

I will try to connect to these different models in my case.

The academic world

Describing the university milieu as a world of its own may be somewhat excessive. When general questions of management and leadership are applied to a university setting one might ask whether there is really any substantial difference between leadership in the academic milieu and in other areas of organisation. In an overview of qualitative research about leadership, Bryman⁷ demonstrates in "Nature of Key Findings" or in "Leadership Style and Leader Behaviour Emphasised" that there do not appear to be any differences between leadership in academic settings and that which exists in organisations in the private sector. This work is a thorough survey of 76 scientific publications, but I would still claim that academic work takes place under certain organisational circumstances that are not as strong in other areas. In his book "Homo Academicus",⁸ French cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out that what is special about academic production is that it is mostly consumed and judged by competitors. "Symbolic capital" is one of Bourdieu's key concepts, and this type of capital is the sum of economic, social and cultural capital – other concepts also used by Bourdieu. Bearing in mind Bourdieu's notions "taste" and "field", one can distinguish certain differences between a university

⁷ Bryman, Alan. Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004) 729-769

⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Homo Academicus*, 1984.

department and a smaller business in, say, the commercial industry. Scientific recognition and cultural capital are essential to the university department, which for this reason is dependant what scholars from other universities think. The department's scientific credibility also affects the respect researchers get as individuals. By extension, this determines what level of respect the department gets as an institution, since the institution is the sum of its scientific and pedagogical human capital. The commercial business needs a well-balanced group of employees to optimise the economic capital, which is this organisation's most important resource. As director of a university department one needs to analyse and reflect on Bourdieu's various types of capital and try to find a way of following the built-in logic of each. Every year when the previous year's activities are reviewed, cultural capital such as international publication in peer-review periodicals is as important as the department's annual financial accounts.

In 1977, British social anthropologist F.G. Bailey published a book about British university politics, in which he, among other things, discussed the phenomenal importance of being highly thought of in the academic world. He expressed his own surprise at the vast amount of gossiping about other scholars' shortcomings and eccentricities such as unpredictability, aggressiveness and tactlessness. He viewed these issues as resulting from the fact that university employees must navigate two worlds with separate rules and values: the university as a bureaucratic organisation, and as an academic fellowship.⁹ In their book "How To Make Sense of University" the ethnologists Ehn and Löfgren¹⁰ observe that despite continuously striving for value-neutrality, researchers are not value-neutral towards one another. Scholarly antagonisms are governed by reason as well as passion, resulting in academic feuds resembling those between ideological and religious sects. Conflicts can arise when idealism and careerism go hand in hand.¹¹

Sport Sciences as an example

⁹ Östergren, Petra. Vår tids call-girls. Universitetsvärlden – rädslans kultur, utpressning, konflikter och prestige. Voltaire. Mars/april. 2010.

¹⁰ Ehns, Billy. Löfgren, Orvar. Hur man blir klok på universitetet. 2004.

¹¹ Östergren. A.a.

Now I will try to connect the leadership discussion with the case of Phy's eds.

At Malmö University, the department of Sports Sciences is part of the school of education. The department has around 40 staff members and 700 students. When the department was founded it had 4 employees and 60 students. In other words, the number of people connected to the department has multiplied ten-fold, and this growth is connected to all three areas of work: education, research and cooperation.

Challenges and difficulties that are unique to the university sector can be identified if one problematises the built-in logic of the university world, and studies firstly how a school of education is organised, and secondly how a Sports Sciences department defines its core values when it comes to education and research. This is partly because of the difference between a "regular" faculty and school of education, with its mixture of hierarchies where practicalists and theorists both claim to be superior to each other where some, usually subject teachers, point to their professional experience and claim it to be of higher value than traditional academic experience, while others, mostly lecturers and professors, value scholarship higher than professional capability. In a traditional department the hierarchy is clear; academic capital gives higher status and, by extension, more power.

Sport Sciences and the part of this field of knowledge which relates to "physical education" in schools houses further complications because the subject is defined as practical-aesthetic. Thus, the dimension of physical literacy can provide additional nuances and discussions about power struggles and hierarchy.

Lena Larsson¹² writes that "at university, scientific merit is the greatest asset when competing for positions and interpretational priority. In a school of education, however, teacher educators are an important group and researchers do not have a monopoly on interpretation."

Is it sufficient to be able to theorise the somersault through, say, anatomical and physiological explanations, or should the teacher/student have the physical literacy to perform this specific physical exercise?

¹² Larsson, Lena. Idrott- och helst lite mer idrott. Idrottslärostudenters möte med utbildningen. Avhandling, Stoccholms universitet 2009.s.128

Which role should I as a leader assume in shaping the new physical education teacher training?

How to approach this process of change in teacher training? One way of operationalising the process is through an “indirect leadership model”.¹³

Indirect leadership and the case of “Phy’s eds”.

On a **higher institutional level**, leadership is about ideas and methods of thought. The key areas of interest on this level are: who are we? What to do? How to do it?

The idea and visionary goal of the department of Sport Sciences is to be among the foremost in Scandinavia when it comes to education, research and cooperation within its field of knowledge, and the top institution in Scandinavia in the areas of social science and cultural science research.

“Sport and Leisure. Tradition in Transition” is the department motto, and this signature is meant to communicate the idea that holds the organisation together, internally as well as externally. The aim is that everyone should feel involved, and to invoke the sense in each staff member that they are the one who is holding the department together and that the organisation is successful because they themselves are part of the whole.

Over the course of the past year, the discussion about physical education teacher training has eroded this idea, not to mention the sense of fellowship and shared spirit. This debate has created a stressful situation where direct and indirect power is exercised, and where the rules are vague. Some aspects are reminiscent of what Larsson among others describe in international military leadership as the stress created by *“unclear missions or missions that are subject to changes, unclear rules of engagement, and unclear command or leadership structure”*¹⁴

The next level is the **intermediate level**, on which the actual contents of the new teacher education are designed. This is done by means of action-oriented influence and image-oriented influence. People need to be appointed who each are responsible for certain

¹³ Larsson, Gerry. Föreläsning KI, 100309.

¹⁴ Nilsson, Wallenius, Johansson & Larsson. When the going gets tough, the tough get going-stressors and challenges working in a multinational environment.

areas of the process, which must nonetheless be democratic and keep students involved and engaged in the future of the programme. There is a challenge in distributing responsibility so that the end result, the new teacher training programme, will have as high quality as possible within the department's limits, the faculty's total combined competence as well as material resources. In the end, the Board of Education gets to decide whether or not the final product is acceptable, by electing whether or not to give it examination rights.

On the **lower organisational level**, trust (commitment to WHAT, participation) is emphasised and posed against lack of trust (redefinition of WHAT, obedience necessary). In his lecture "Implementation of Organisational Change. Challenges of Management", psychologist Magnus Sverke refers to Hersovitch and Meyer, van Knippenberg et al, Sverke et al and Tyler and De Cremer.

Sverke discusses the challenges that appear on an organisational level and their implications for individuals. He distinguishes between two types of change strategies:

- Reactive. Responding to a certain event and characterised by a lack of vision, not relating to any clear goals and being built on ad hoc-solutions. These strategies are not designed to be functional long-term and are often formulated for financial reasons.
- Proactive. Part of the organisation's general strategy, functional long-term. This type of strategy exists for other reasons than the purely financial, is part of a larger vision, is aimed at a clear goal and is linked to the organisation's general purpose.

I would again like to return to the case of a new teacher training programme by relating this to Sverke and his ideas about "challenges for organisations" and give my comments to each of Sverkes statements.

1) Do more with less

Absolutely. This means making do with fewer resources while maintaining higher standards.

2) Develop competitive advantages in increased competition.

Yes, certainly. Years ago, only two universities in Sweden held courses in sports, today there are seventeen, not to mention the multiple private actors that offer vocationally oriented training programmes in, for example, Sport Management.

1) Re-evaluate traditional working conditions.

Definitely. The traditional working conditions in the academic world are now making way for new work hour agreements where, among other things, “the right to individual research time” is a key question.

5) Motivate people to take on more complex tasks

Yes and no. One example of this is the increased academisation for subject teachers. This requires greater complexity, but the important challenge lies in motivating staff to take on simpler, but more stimulating tasks in areas such as course administration, reports and questionnaires for lecturers and professors.

2) Motivate everyone, regardless of education or title, to develop their competencies

Yes. One aspect of this would be to encourage experienced professors to take courses in supervision.¹⁵

3) Provide a creative working environment

Well, the physical working environment has its obvious limitations in this area. The new premises of the department of Sport Sciences are completely open. In academics the main focus is on two things: communication (teaching) and concentration (research). There is undoubtedly a challenge in providing a creative working environment in an open-plan office where the researchers themselves claim that research is impossible because of the way their working environment is physically designed.

If one focuses not on organisational challenges, but the challenges that may arise on the individual level and relates these to the changes in the physical education teacher training programme, one can make the following observations:

¹⁵ Just denna fråga har varit under debatt i “Universitetsläraren” under 2010 inte minst utifrån att professor Mats Alvesson tydligt har markerat att det är slöseri med tid och inget som professorer skall ägna sig åt.

- All change comes from within and everyone likes change if it is in one's direction of choice. Change is a lot less popular when one feels it is moving the wrong way.
- Interpersonal change plays a significant role when the power balance of the personnel is shifted depending on whose "darlings" will be given the most space in the new teacher training programme.
- Intrapersonal change is linked to the changing programme contents. In this process one is forced to ask oneself questions such as: who am I? Am I capable and knowledgeable enough? Can subject teachers' professional experience match the scholarly skill of lecturers? Is my professional identity being undermined?
- Communication and respect are crucial.

When it comes to leader fairness in these areas, Knippenberg and De Cremer identify four dimensions of justice: distributive, procedural, interactional:informational and interpersonal.¹⁶ It is then up to the director of department to decide who gets interpretational priority and why, how the organisation should be run, inform about changes in process and be responsible for the end results.

*"And you know that as a leader you can delegate tasks, as many as you'd like to, but you can never delegate responsibility. The responsibility is and remains yours"*¹⁷

Whether or not we have succeeded in creating that which in leadership literature is described as desirable, a "shared mental model" through the concept of tradition in transition applied to the work on the new teacher training programme, remains to be seen. The problem is that there are many "judges" of this: students, the Board of Education, the staff, the educational community and many more.

Leadership

In the position as director of department/prefect, one often has to ponder questions of loyalty; who does one really represent, and to whom is one responsible? Is responsibility

¹⁶ Knippenberg, D.v & de Cremer, D. Leadership and fearness. Taken stock and looking ahead. s. 174

¹⁷ Larsson m fl. S. 17

to the staff, or the organisation? Traditionally, the prefect was elected by the personnel for a three-year period after which one was sometimes re-elected. Many called it academic military service. In later years, a growing number of universities have abandoned this democratic way of appointing directors in favour of advertising out-and-out directing positions. This means universities have been able to require other merits and qualities than the traditionally academic.

Final discussion

In the university world there is a total lack of Long Range Planning,¹⁸ unlike during the 1950's, where the plan often had a timeframe of 5 to 15 years. Despite many people's wish that the university world should be characterised by "slowness and thoughtfulness", the commitment to the quarter budget and quarter capitalism is universally prevailing. This way of thinking is often completely illogical, not to say counterproductive, if we look at the so-called competence development timeframe that by employers as well as unions should be seen in three-year-cycles, while the annual accounts do not allow for this kind of periodisation.

Apart from the course literature's lack of gender perspectives on leadership, I would also like to see a discussion about different leadership discourses. One example of this would be a discussion of how the discursive power of language works, "what we are allowed to talk about and what we not allowed to talk about" has great impact on all organisations. The difference, if there is one, between director and leader should also be problematised; is directorship a position while leadership indicates a relationship? Is directorship about doing the financially, organisationally and executively sound thing while leadership is more to do with ideas, communication, inspiration, trust and security? Is the status of leader something one has to earn and cannot be elected or promoted to?

In my opinion, the concepts of "leader" and "follower" can be problematic. This is because they are an attempt to categorise a hierarchy which is theoretically in line with each respective organisation's order of decision-making and delegation, but where the context in which the two notions appear is not considered, as if there were some kind of

¹⁸ Tystrup. A.a. s. 14

universal leadership that everyone could follow. For me, the word follower has negative connotations and makes me think of a sheepdog herding sheep. Undeniably there is sometimes something to be said for speed, the ability to cover vast distances and round up the herd and making everyone move in the same direction. Still, these are never good things if achieved through peer pressure, instrumental acting or instilling a fear of punishment. One thing that I have experienced is that ordering staff to do intellectual work is not sustainable leadership. All leadership must be contextualised and often also deconstructed through questions such as: which are the historical, scientific, pedagogical and international components of a physical education teacher training programme? The answers then need to be reconstructed in a new context.

When the Foundation for Strategic Research (Stiftelsen för strategisk forskning) wanted to pick the research leaders of the future in the project “Ingvar II”, the purpose of the project was to “place a number of especially promising researchers in the driver’s seat and give them the opportunity to form their own, independent research groups with international effectiveness”. Among equal scholars, the purpose was to select those with leader potential. To summarise, one can say that many of the qualities and personality traits that characterise a skilled researcher such as ability to focus on one specific issue, originality, innovativeness, being a lone expert, mild arrogance and competitiveness can actually be counterproductive when it comes to leading and organising others.

The lack of clear definitions of where areas of responsibility begin and end has long been an issue in the academic world, and will hopefully remain so. Creating excessively specific distinctions and overly detailed work instructions for each position would, in my opinion, limit academic freedom and defeat the purpose of enabling a beneficial working environment.

