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School of Economics and Management

# Leadership

from the followers' point of view

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# ABSTRACT

- Title:** Leadership – from the followers’ point of view
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- Key words:** Leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, mundane leadership
- Purpose:** The main purpose of this thesis is to show how leadership in practice can be different from what is approached in popular theories but yet can be a good way of practicing leadership through the follower’s perspective.
- Methodology:** The research methodology is a qualitative study inspired by critical theory in which empirical data is collected by semi-structured interviews.
- Theoretical perspectives:** We review different theories about the popular leadership notions i.e. transformational leadership and charismatic leadership. Then we review these popular leadership theories in a more critical perspective. In the end we use theories about mundane leadership and non-leadership which we discuss to support our case study.
- Empirical foundation:** 8 semi-structured interviews with employees and 1 interview with the manager of these employees in a multinational company.
- Conclusions:** There are mainly three conclusions from our thesis: First, we have concluded that the popular notions of

leadership such as transformational leadership and charismatic leadership are not the only way to conduct good leadership. Second, we have found that mundane leadership can also be a good way in practice. Third, in our case, the mundane activities in this kind of leadership such as listening and informal talk were highly appreciated among the employees. Furthermore, the metaphors for leader as a gardener or cosy crafter have shown to create better relations with followers and motivate followers to do better in our case.

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# 1 Introduction

*In this first chapter, we will give an introduction to our research topic, including the background and our research problem. Then the main purpose of our research will be formulated. The limitation and the structure of our thesis will also be discussed.*

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## 1.1 Background

“A flock of sheep led by a lion will defeat a pride of lions led by a sheep”. A leader plays a vital role for the employees’ work performance. On one hand, a leader with right strategy, insight and good foresee ability can be a key success factor for an organization. On the other hand, leaders can also bring some problems. The need for a leader who can make a difference in the global competitive environment is critical to the organization.

US psychologist Hogan, who took a survey about leadership, found what staff perceived as the most stressful aspects of their job: “60% to 75% of the employees in any organization--- no matter when or where the survey was completed and no matter what occupational group was involved---report that the worst or most stressful aspect of their job is their immediate supervisor” (Hogan *et al*, 1994:494). Also in this research article, Hogan pointed out that the rate of incompetent leaders in American company is between 60% and 75% (Hogan *et al*, 1994:494). It has been shown that 25% of a company’s profit is based on the leadership. Many successful leaders such as Bill Gates, Jack Welch, Warren Buffet and Steve Jobs have often been seen as the success factor of their companies. That is why when we google leadership, thousands of results will be found. But at the same time, there is a high demand of books, workshops, lectures about leadership. Leadership becomes a more and more popular

topic nowadays.

It is challenging to give a clear definition to leadership. Stodgill (1974 cited in Yukl,1989:252) concluded that “*there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept*”. It has been defined in terms of individual traits, leader behavior, influence over followers, influence on culture, interaction patterns and so on (Stodgill, 1974 cited in Yukl, 1989). Most definitions emphasize the process of influence. For example, “*leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it*” (Hughes *et al*, 2006:405). But numerous definitions differ in many aspects. Yukl (1989) proposed some deep disagreements about identification of leaders and leadership process which are reflected by the differences of leadership definitions. This leads to different approaches in the studies of leadership.

There are mainly five approaches in the development of leadership (Yukl, 2006). The first approach is trait theory. It aims to find what kind of personality good leaders should have. This theory is based on a premise, i.e. there are some differences between leaders and non-leaders. The second approach is behavior theory, which is to find what kind of leader behavior and leader style can improve the performance. It focuses on leader behavior instead of traits. The third approach is power-influence approach. It aims to find how leaders use power to influence the followers. The fourth approach is contingency or situational theory. This theory assumes that being a good leader and having effective performance is not only based on a leaders’ skills, personality or behavior, but also based on the relation between the leaders and followers and different situations. The last approach can be seen as a new genre of leadership theories, i.e. integrative approach. It involves several leadership types. (Yukl, 2006)

As Dvir *et al*. (2003) concluded, although in the past two decades, there are different emphases in each theory, “*there is a strong convergence of the findings from studies*



*with charismatic leadership and those concerned with transformational and visionary leadership*” (Dvir *et al*, 2003:735). We can see that transformational leadership and charismatic leadership are the popular leadership theories nowadays. Within transformational leadership, leaders motivate followers’ motivation by means of creating an inspiring vision of the future (Bass, 1997). Leaders are often described as heroic and visionary.

But little attention is put on the more mundane aspects of leadership. (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). This kind of leadership is clearly different from the popular leadership notions. The leaders wouldn’t do anything that is different from ordinary people instead of some mundane activities, such as listening, chatting and being cheerful (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). Some authors also try to dig more about this mundane leadership approach.

## **1.2 Problem identification**

Transformational leadership and charismatic leadership theories are popular leadership ideas that have occupied center stage in the past two decades. Transformational leaders “*exhibit charismatic behaviors, arouse inspirational motivation, provide intellectual stimulation and treat followers with individualize consideration*” (Dvir *et al*, 2002:736). It involves the influence process on subordinates, and the effect of this influence is to lead followers to participate in the transformation process of the organization (Yukl, 1989). Charismatic leadership is defined more narrowly and refers to a leader who usually has some inspired gift. Followers not only trust and respect the leader but also worship the leader as a “*superhuman, hero or spiritual figure*” (Bass, 1985). However, these kinds of leadership theories usually have some limitations which makes us able to question them.

At first sight, the transformational leadership and charismatic leadership ideas are usually based on exaggerated individualism. For instance, when people talk about General Electric (GE), it is often reported by media that all the success that have achieved would be related to Jack Welch, the previous chief executive officer. Even in a team, the limelight is always focused on some individual. Just as Senge (2000, cited in Stroey, 2004:7) concluded, the new focus on leadership in the past two decades in part at least can be interpreted as an expression of the “*cult of individualism*”. We should see that in terms of the major success of the companies leadership behavior is only one ingredient and should be considered together with context and process (Pettigrew, 1987).

The popular leadership theories are often related to formal managers. This is related to another issue, i.e. the distinction between management and leadership. Everyone can be a leader without being a manager and people can be a manager without leading. Yukl(1989) concluded that the essential distinction between managers and leaders is that leaders influence commitment, whereas managers merely carry out position responsibilities and exercise authority. But the idea about leaders and managers is often overlapped. When we talk about transformational leaders and charismatic leaders, they are often considered as some formal managers with authority. It further emphasizes “*the more grandiose aspects of leadership, reserving this term for the more dynamic, inspirational aspects of what people in authority may do*” (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a:1436).

Until recently, limited empirical research examined these popular leadership theories (Grant and Bateman, 2000). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a:1436) argued that it makes sense to consider “*the possibility that what managers and leaders do is not always that remarkable or different from what other people do in work organizations*”. Many leaders are influenced by the leadership discourses celebrating vision, values and strategies. But it is often vague, disconnected and of uncertain relevance of their work (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b).

In sum, we can see that there are some limitations about the popular notions of leadership. Firstly it is often based on a heroic individual. But the success of one company cannot be contributed to one person. It should relate to the context and other factors. Secondly, it seems that the popular leadership ideas only can be conducted by formal managers who have official titles. Thirdly there are not enough empirical data to illustrate that these popular leadership theories are very effective and can be conducted successfully in any conditions.

From the above limitations it is possible to challenge these popular leadership ideas. In our study, we will try to find the problems of these popular leadership notions. Then we want to present a case study about leadership in which another leadership style exists. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) studied leadership mainly from managers' perspective and there found that the aspects of mundane leadership were highly proposed by managers when they were asked what kinds of leadership activities they thought was important. As Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) suggested, more research should be conducted to study the follower's interpretation and reactions. Thus our study is different from Alvesson and Sveningsson's research because we will look at these mundane activities mainly from the followers' perspective. Also Kesby (2008) emphasized that leadership is a relationship which includes the two sides i.e. the leaders and the followers. It is argued that one cannot be a leader without having someone to lead and that leadership is something that gets created by their followers (Kesby, 2008). Therefore we want to know how the followers view leadership and then from this see how it relates to the leaders view of him as a leader.

In our study we want to avoid highlighting the grandiose assumptions of transformational and charismatic leadership. Instead we want to problematize the ideas of leadership. Our specific research questions can be formulated as follows:

- *Are the popular notions of leadership such as transformational leadership and charismatic leadership the answer for good leadership in organizations?*
- *What kind of other leadership styles can also be seen in practice and how do they relate to these ideas of leadership?*
- *How do the employees perceive the leadership that we find in our case study?*

Leadership is a hot topic in modern management and it indeed affects the organizational performance. We will try to answer our research problem within the scope of a case that takes place in a big international company.

### **1.3 Purpose**

The main purpose of our thesis is to show how leadership in practice can be different from what is approached in popular theories but yet can be a good way of practicing leadership through the follower's perspective.

There are many researches about the popular notions of leadership i.e. transformational and charismatic leadership. We aim to show that leadership as a form of mundane leadership or non-leadership can also be a good way. In a concrete situation in our study, we want to find what kind of leadership the employees appreciate.

### **1.4 Structure**

We approach our purpose as follows.

First, we will make a methodological comment on our study, including how we

choose this topic, a brief introduction to the company and the methodology we use. Then we will review the leadership literature and focus on the popular leadership theories, i.e. transformational leadership and charismatic leadership. In this part we will also provide some critiques about these popular leadership notions and then look closer at the limitations that exist within this field. After these popular leadership theories, we will present a case in which a successful leader is highly appreciated by followers. We will have a deep analysis of this leader's activities to see the differences from what we proposed in theory part. The thesis will end with a discussion about what we find and the contribution of our thesis. There are some limitations in our research which we will also discuss in detail in the end. And we hope this will provide some ideas for future research.

Now we will give you an introduction about our research process and methodology.

## 2 Methodology

*In this second chapter we will present our research problem and aim to give an understanding of our chosen methodology and how it has affected our collected empirical data.*

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### 2.1 Research process

From the first beginning of our thesis we started our journey with a different research problem, where we wanted to study motivation and look closer at how change of managers affected the motivation of employees in an organization. After defining our research problem we agreed on that qualitative interviews would be the most appropriate method for us to get the answers to our research problem. Thus after deciding our choice of method we started to formulate our research questions. Although we had a research problem we still wanted the content of our research questions to include more general questions about motivation and not too specific and detailed questions about our research problem. The reason for this was that we wanted to see, after the collecting of our data if we still could identify a clear problem that could be relevant for us regarding our research problem.

The qualitative research is in the literature described to be a method that set a small number of limitations on the answers provided by the interviewees. They further emphasize details, insights and exceptional answers from the interviewees. Qualitative research is also expressed for its flexibility. The research problem which the researchers aim to respond from the start may vary by the time more information is provided from the interviews. This in turn makes the research process more interactive whereby you can go back and change the research problem and data collecting method over time. (Jacobssen, 2002) This has also been the situation for

our research process; as the information from our interviews turned out to be different and not the way we had expected. From our data we realized that we got a lot of interesting information about how the new leader was perceived by his employees and how his leadership affected them. We thus decided to analyze and study in depth how the new leadership was perceived by the employees in relation to the former manager and thereby question the notion of leadership.

## **2.2 Field study and sample**

We have chosen a big, Swedish company as our field study. So we contacted the company and there got in contact with the student coordinator who was willing to help us. Luckily she found us a group that could be relevant for us. This group which was the service partner had experienced a change of manager very recently and some of the employees had the new manager for only two months. The service partners are *“the ones that fix everything and do all the work that the company doesn't have as its core business/activity”* (James). Their work is to provide the different units of the company all kinds of help. The interviews were carried out mainly with employees at the department but also with the new manager himself. We have totally interviewed nine persons which includes the new manager and eight of his employees. Each interview lasted for about 30-45 minutes. We asked them questions about their motivation, but eventually also questions about how they thought of their new manager. Gradually, we found leadership as an interesting topic for our interviews.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

To directly collect information from individuals or groups is called primary data and it means that the researcher collects the information for the first time. Using interviews is one method to get primary data. Secondary data is another type of information where it is here not the researcher collecting the information directly from the people,

instead it is based on information that has been collected by others. This kind of information has thus often collected for another purpose with a different research problem than the one that the researcher wants to highlight (Jacobsen, 2002) As we have mentioned earlier we have collected our primary data from our interviews, where we got the information from the service partner group. We have also used secondary data in the search of the answers to our research problem. We have thereby used data from books, scientific articles and our course literature. The secondary data had a vital role for us considering the results from our primary data. Thus we needed to get a lot of former studies about leadership which we could study and interpret in relation to our research problem.

Questioning rather than confirming the established and disarranging rather than reproducing cultural traditions and principles is one of the things that characterizes critical theory. Further critical theory is about revealing and demonstrating tensions when using the language instead of keeping the dominance of the language. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). As we want to question and discuss the notion of leadership in our thesis, we have chosen critical theory as methodology for our study.

A form of critical thinking gets developed from critical theory which can include identifying and questioning the assumptions that lie behind usual ways to see and perceive things as well as understand and act (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). The critical thinking had a central role when we tried to interpret our primary and secondary data where we tried to look in depth and study the underlying assumptions about leadership.

Critical theory is sometimes expressed as critical hermeneutics. While big parts of the hermeneutics emanate from an acceptance of the meanings and understandings that has been mediated from traditions and principles, critical theory emphasizes evaluation and breaking of the rules (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). This is another reason why we find critical theory suitable for our thesis, because we want to evaluate



the different types of leadership styles and look closer at the traditional meanings and understandings of leadership.

Critical theory is not directly an empirical driven social science. Researchers that has started out with an empirical problem and been inspired by critical theory has often used secondary data to solve the research problem. Critical theory requires an engagement of the researcher that is much more than only focusing on empirical data. The researcher must instead use its imagination and creativity and have a critical disposition on a more convincing plan than the ordinary. As a consequence of that the empirical data is not regarded as fully crucial for good knowledge in critical theory, the frame of references become much more vital. This is among other things also important to make good interpretations, which requires certain consideration in critical theory. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008) This explains why we needed a lot of secondary data to solve and identify our research problem. The secondary data had thus a vital role for us in order to find the answers to our research problem. From the secondary data we have chosen the theories about leadership that we want to get a deeper understanding of in order to interpret and see the relation to our empirical findings in the best way as possible.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008:332) stressed that there can still *“be a reason to warn that critical theory underuse the possibilities in empirical material and can tempt to exaggerate the critical element”*. Thereby becomes self-criticism and reflection important in critical theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). We have tried to have this in mind during our analysis of empirical data where reflection and self-criticism were vital for us.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008) argued that the research problem becomes especially important within critical studies. Only accepting traditional ideas and perceptions about the world and what is important to study is not enough. What interests a certain problem and what it favors as well as is unfair to must be taken seriously when we

take the political aspect of research seriously. The authors further mean that to study leadership can easily reproduce a view which bases on that leaders are vital and do something extraordinary. This can in turn result in a certain type of sub ordinance and dependence of others, but the other side of leadership is that a group of people gets led. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008) This is another reason why we have chosen to look at the leadership from the followers' perspective and there study how they define good leadership. From this we want to see how their view of leadership relates to the popular notions of leadership.

## **2.4 Data Collection**

In interviews the reality can be portrayed and shaped by people talking about their lives, sharing their experiences and thoughts through them giving their versions and interpretations of different situations (Kaijser & Öhlander, 1999). We believe that qualitative interviews were the most suitable method for us regarding our research problem because we wanted our interviewees to share all their thoughts and experiences about motivation and change of leadership.

In a semi-structured interview the researcher divide questions with a list under some relevant and specific themes at the same time that the interviewees are free to construct their answers as they want. Usually questions will be asked in its original order but the questions don't always need to come in the same order as it is on the list of interview questions. Questions that are not included on the list can also be used if the interviewees start talking about something interesting within these themes. This in turn makes the interview process more flexible. (Bryman & Bell, 2005) We have used semi-structured interviews in our study because we believe that we in this way could get the possibility to have more open questions and make the interviews more like a dialogue. We wanted to let our interviewees talk and tell as much as possible about our different themes. The use of semi-structured interviews made it also possible for

us to follow up the questions we felt we needed more information about.

As a good conversation requires a lot of eye contact, taking notes often become difficult during an interview. By using a tape recorder for the interviews can this problem to some extent be solved. In this way one can get access to everything that the interviewees say word by word. The advantage here is not only restricting notes but also maintaining a more accepted eye contact with the interviewees. (Jacobsen, 2002) For this reason we have used a tape recorder during our interviews. We have taped each interview without taking any note which we transcribed later to get all the data. This resulted in us getting a better dialogue with our interviewees and made it possible for us to concentrate more on our questions.

Many studies have shown that the context where the interviews are made can affect the interviews. What a researcher must have in mind is thus *“how the situation can affect the information he gets through the interview”*. (Jacobsen, 2002:164-165). We had our interviews in a quiet meeting room which they gave us access to in the company. We are aware of that the situation, that we had the interviews in the interviewee’s workplaces and work time may have affected their answers. It is fully possible that our interviewees felt they had limited time to give us much information regarding their situation and the environment where the interviews were held. This in turn could also explain the reason why the results of our interviews turned out to be different than what we expected as we did not get much information about our primary topic. Instead we found other useful information which we could analyze and study more in depth and that was about leadership.

## **2.5 Validity and reliability**

Asking ourselves the question how relevant and reliable the information we get from our interviewees actually is, is important both during the planning and implementation

of a study. One can achieve a fulfilled degree of reliability and validity only through carefulness and continuous critical experimenting during the process of collecting data. (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The chosen method affects the validity of a study and the validity represents how we measure what we aim to measure. During an interview one must thus measure individual and personal point of views on a phenomena or situation and here everyone's voice is counted and valued the same. The methods also have an effect on the reliability of the study. In an interview this can be evaluated by considering how the interviewer's presence creates exceptional results and we have earlier mentioned considering the contextual effect (Jacobsen, 2002). We have tried in best way possible to have this in mind during our interviews, where we have done our best to maintain a neutral presence and give the interviewees the freedom to talk. As we earlier mentioned, we have also considered the effects that the circumstances and environment where the interviews were held had on the interviewees.

## 3 Literature review

*In this chapter we will present the previous theories about leadership and there focus on the transformational leadership and charismatic leadership. First, we introduce the definitions of leadership and then present the theories about transformational leadership where we introduce the main components with an extra notice to charismatic leadership which we want write about more in depth. Finally we present the theories with a critical point of view.*

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### 3.1 Definition of leadership

In order to have a research on leadership, we should know the definition of leadership firstly. As we said in introduction, it is challenging to give a specific definition to leadership as there are many different research approaches in leadership studies. Pfeffer (1977) proposed several problems with the concept of leadership, in which one is the ambiguity of its definition.

Yukl(1989:252) concluded that leadership had been defined in terms of “ *individual traits, leader behavior, interaction patterns, role relationships, follower perceptions, influences over followers, influence on task goals and influence on organizational culture*”. Grint (2005a) reduced these multiplicity definitions to four approaches, i.e. person, position, result and process. Below we will give a brief review about these four approaches in order to understand the broad meanings of leadership.

The person-based leadership is related to the traditional trait approach: leader’s character and personality (Grint, 2005a) .Charismatic leadership is one example in this approach. Charismatic leaders differ from other leaders by their ability to formulate an inspirational vision and create positive followers outcome, such as high

motivation and performance (Crant & Bateman, 2000). Leadership is essentially related to result, i.e. what leaders achieve that makes them leaders. But the link between leadership and collective products of an organization is problematic as the result also depends on the context and other factors (Grint, 2005a). Leadership is positional which means only people in formal positions are recognized as leaders. The last approach is process-based leadership. It means that we can distinguish leaders from non-leaders by the way that they get things done. (Grint, 2005a) This can be related to the behavior approach.

From these four approaches we can see why there is no agreement about the definition about leadership. There are different perspectives to understand leadership. Based on these different angles, Yukl (2006) concluded the definitions for leadership that have been presented over the past 50 years. Here we will select several definitions related to our research:

- Leadership is “*the behavior of an individual, directing the activities of a group towards a shared goal*” (Hemphill & Coons, 1957 cited in Yukl, 2006:3). This definition is from process perspective and focuses on the behavior of leaders.
- Leadership is “*the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization*”(House *et al*, 1999 cited in Yukl, 2006:3). This definition emphasizes the leader’s ability and is based on a person-based approach.
- Leadership is “*the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement*” (Rauch & Behling, 1984 cited in Yukl, 2006:3). Goal is highlighted here. This definition relates leadership to result.
- Leadership is about “*articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished*”(Richards & Engle, 1986 Yukl, 2006:3). This definition is also from process perspective, but it focus on diffident leader behaviors, i.e. creating vision and values.

- Leadership is the ability to initiate evolutionary change process in organizations (Schein, 1992 cited in Yukl, 2006). This definition relates leadership with changes which is different from the previous definitions.

From these definitions, we can see in leadership studies there are different perspectives. Although there is no agreement on the definition, according to Yukl (2006) these definitions agree to a large extent with each other in that it is often a process where the leader is influencing other people to be motivated and to achieve the goals of the organization. This is also the view of leadership that we have chosen to adopt for our study.

To study leadership a distinction is often made between leadership and management. Kotter(1990) differentiated managers and leaders by stating that modern management deals mainly with planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and monitoring. A leader, on the other hand, deals with establishing a sense of direction by developing a vision of the future. A leader also needs to communicate with the subordinates, support cooperation, motivate and inspire the employees in order to create commitment to the goals (Kotter, 1990). This means that an individual could be a manager without being a leader or a leader without being a manager.

A manager values stability, order and efficiency while a leader value flexibility, innovation and adaptation (Yukl, 2006). Barker (1997 cited in Alvesson & Sveningsson,2003a:3) claimed that *“the function of leadership is to create change while the function of management is to create stability”* and *“leadership creates new patterns of action and new belief systems”*. As Alvesson and Sveningsson(2003a) concluded, the management and manager is related to bureaucrats while leadership and leader are connected to people of true grit capable of offering strong ideas and a sense of direction with which people choose to comply.

This distinction often emphasizes the grandiose aspects of leadership, the more

inspirational, visionary, charismatic aspects (Alvesson & Sveningsson,2003a). Next, we will present some of the popular leadership theories.

### **3.2 Transformational leadership**

As studies of transformational leadership and related charismatic leadership styles have become more and more popular lately (Bass and Riggio, 2006) we will here introduce the main ideas of this kind of leadership approach.

Bass and Riggio (2006) indicated that this interest in transformational leadership can be explained by its optimistic view of leadership that highlights the intrinsic motivation and focus on the development of followers. Transformational leaders are in the literature described as the leaders that help followers develop into future leaders by considering each individual's needs and empowering them in line with the objectives and aims of the organizational members, the leader himself, and the entire organization. A shared vision and goal of an organization or division is central when it comes to transformational leadership which is mainly useful to inspire and challenge the followers to act in a certain way. (Bass and Riggio, 2006) The transformational leaders enlarge the intrinsic value of goal achievement through setting a vision or a mission. They define *“the need for change, create new visions, mobilize commitment to those visions, and ultimately transform the organization”* (Tichy and Devanna, 1986 cited in Carey, 1992:217-218). Transformational leadership with its ability to create autonomy and challenging work became also more and more important to followers' job satisfaction (Bass, 1999).

Avolio and Bass (1995) discussed changes that take place from transformational leadership and mean that they need to be scrutinized beyond between leaders and followers and include the context where the leader's behavior is set and how it changes at group and organizational levels. For instance, a leader who constantly



focuses on the followers development and let their potential grow should “...*create group norms that encourage colleagues to focus on helping each other continuously learn and develop*” (Avolio and Bass, 1995:201). The more the leader can influence the more likely is it that these kinds of norms will become part of the culture of the organization in general. A vital idea in transformational leadership theory is thus leaders’ ability to unite the individuals within the groups and get them to go further than their self-interests for the benefit of the group. (Avolio and Bass, 1995)

Transformational leadership can be expressed through four main components which is inspirational motivation, consideration, intellectual stimulation and charisma or idealized influence. These components of transformational leadership measure how the transformational leader can influence the followers. (Popper *et. al*, 2000) These four components of transformational leadership are all correlated and must be included in a transformational leadership process (Avolio and Bass, 1995).

### **3.2.1 Inspirational motivation**

The inspirational motivation component is related to charisma and refers to how transformational leaders inspire and motivate the followers, mostly by challenging and giving them meaning. This can be made through showing enthusiasm and optimism to the followers, by encouraging them to involve in creating a better future for the company, by setting high expectations, and by representing dedication to the shared goals and vision of the company. (Popper *et. al*, 2000) A transformational leader is assumed to have the ability to strengthen and encourage followers “*to exert themselves beyond their own expectations and self-interest*” through inspirational appeal (Bass, 1985 cited in Carey, 1992:222).

### **3.2.2 Consideration**

Another component of transformational leadership is consideration in the level of both group and individual. Consideration for the group involves consultation and an agreed decision-making model between the leader and the group and individual consideration refers to a leader that is kind and relaxed, which treats the followers as equals. (Carey, 1992) Popper et. al. (2000) declared that individual consideration characterizes the leader's consistent attempt to take care of each individual as a unique person and to act as a coach that frequently tries to develop the potential of his or her followers. Consideration facilitates the process of transformation because it improves the self-image of the follower's, wish for information and satisfaction regarding their individual needs (Bass 1985 cited in Carey, 1992). Avolio and Bass (2005) pointed out that it is through individualized consideration that a transformation can be seen in the behavior of the leader and his or her influence on others. This transformation of the leader occurs because the focus is not just on fulfilling the needs of the subordinates and them finishing a job; rather, it is on being aware of the individual differences in their needs, inspiring them, and developing potential to achieve better performance (Avolio and Bass, 1995).

### **3.2.3 Intellectual stimulation**

Intellectual stimulation is the component of transformational leadership that defines the leaders' ability to stimulate and change the follower's problem awareness and problem solving as well as their thought, minds, beliefs and values (Carey, 1992). Intellectual stimulation characterizes the leader's attempt to make the followers more innovative and creative in addition to the leader's attempt to support the followers to question the assumptions, reframe the problems and seeing things in new perspectives (Popper et al. 2000). Intellectual stimulation makes it easier to the follower to re-think the situations with and see things with new angles (Carey, 1992). Bass and Riggio

(2006) pointed out that the new ideas and innovative problem solutions are requested from followers who are involved in the process of dealing with problems and finding solutions to the problems. The transformational leader encourages them to try new approaches, and do not criticize their ideas because they are different from the leaders' ideas. (Bass and Riggio, 2006)

### 3.2.4 Charisma

Charisma or idealized influence is the component of the transformational leadership which allows leaders to have an insight on the follower's motivations as needs, values and beliefs (Carey, 1992). Transformational leaders take their actions in ways that they get regarded as role models which makes them admired, appreciated, and trusted by their followers. Followers identify with the leaders and try to be like their leader as they regard them to have extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and willpower. (Bass and Riggio, 2006)

Charismatic leadership is a very popular leadership approach in recent studies. Although it has often been seen as part of transformational leadership, it gains more and more attention now. Below we will have a more profound study about charismatic leadership by presenting different theories of this leadership notion.

There are something overlapping between the two concepts of transformational and charismatic leadership and charismatic leadership can be seen as part of transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006). The current theories of charismatic leadership was influenced by Weber (1947, cited in Yukl, 2006) who used the term of charisma to describe a form of influence on the followers based not on formal authority but rather on leader's extraordinary qualities. Recently, others formulated new versions of this theory to describe charismatic leadership in organizations. These theories describe the motives and behaviors of charismatic

leaders and the psychological processes that how these leaders influence the followers.  
(Yukl, 2006)

The core ideas in charismatic leadership vary from theory to theory. Below we will select four main theories about charismatic leadership: attribution theory, self-concept theory, psychodynamic processes and social contagion. We will present the different ideas about each theory in order to have a more profound understanding about charismatic leadership.

Conger and Kanungo(1987,1989,1998 cited in Yukl, 2006) proposed an attribution theory emphasized follower attributions of extraordinary qualities to the leaders which is determined by the leader's behavior, traits and aspects of situation. They concluded six characteristics of charismatic leaders:

- Leaders should advocate an innovative vision which is much better than status quo.
- Charisma is always attributed to leaders who act in unconventional ways to achieve the vision. Leaders who use innovative strategies that result successfully will gain support by followers.
- Leaders will be viewed as charismatic if they can take personal risks, make self-sacrifices and try best to achieve the vision.
- Charismatic leaders should be confident about their own ability and their proposals.
- Charismatic leaders usually motive people emotionally rather than using authority.
- They have the ability to see opportunities and influence people to get things done which initially seemed impossible.

According to attribution theory, charismatic leaders influence followers through personal identification and internalization of new values. Followers would have the

desire to please and imitate the leader as the leaders appear so extraordinary. And charismatic leaders can influence followers to “*internalize attitudes and beliefs that will subsequently serve as a source of intrinsic motivation to carry out the mission of the organization*” (Yukl, 2006:251).

Another theory about charismatic leadership is self-concept theory which is proposed by House (1977 cited in Yukl, 2006) and Shamir and associates (2003 cited in Yukl, 2006). They defined charismatic leadership “*in terms of how the leader influences followers attitudes and motivation, regardless of whether followers consider the leader extraordinary*”(Yukl, 1999:8). They argued that the effects of charismatic leaders on followers are produced by leader behaviors that activate followers’ self-concept which in turn affect further motivations. This theory links leader’s behavior and follower effects through follower’s self-concept (Shamir *et al*, 1993) .The key behaviors of charismatic leaders include the followings (Yukl, 2006):

- Using strong, meaningful forms of communication to articulate an attractive vision.
- Selflessly taking individual risks to achieve the vision.
- Communicating high performance expectations.
- Articulating confidence in subordinates.
- Modeling behavior to be consistent with the vision.
- Managing the leaders’ impression on followers.
- Building collective identity.
- Empowering subordinates.

According to self-concept theory, leaders influence followers through social identification, internalization and enhancement of self-efficacy (Yukl,2006). Social identification can be enhanced by an articulated vision that relates follower’s self-concept with shared values, missions of the group. Internalization occurs when charismatic leaders emphasized the symbolic and ideological aspects of work in order

to make followers feel that the work was related with their own self-concept and self worth. Also by articulating an appealing vision, the self-efficacy and collective efficacy can be augmented.

Some theorists have attempted to explain charismatic leadership in terms of Freudian psychodynamic processes in followers (Yukl, 2006). Some charismatic leaders who are seen as heroes and superhuman have unusual and seemingly irrational influence on followers. The psychodynamic processes such as regression, transference and projection can explain the intense personal identification of followers with charismatic leaders (Yukl,2006). Regression involves a process of returning to feelings and behaviors of a young age. Transference happens when people's idol shifts from some important figures in the past to someone currently. Projection means to ascribe some unfavorable feelings and aims to someone else in order to shift the blames. According to psychodynamic theories, *"followers suffering from fear, guilt, or alienation may experience a feeling of euphoric empowerment and transcendence by submerging their identity in that of a seemingly superhuman leader"* (Yukl, 2006:255).

Another interesting case is that some followers are influenced by charismatic leaders without directly interaction or even don't have an opportunity to observe the leader at a distance or on television. Meindl (1990 cited in Yukl, 2006) proposed social contagion to explain attributed charisma that focused on influences among the followers themselves. Many people have a heroic social identity in their self-concept the heroic behavior syndrome is activated among these people by an emergent leader or spreads.

## 3.3 Critical theories about transformational leadership and charismatic leadership

### 3.3.1 Critique about transformational leadership

We have examined the main ideas of transformational leadership and here we will look closer at them in a critical point of view.

Carey (1992:218) questioned in his article how “*similar means for different ends*” can take place when referring to the studies of leadership and introduce how two leaders can be similarly charismatic, visionary, and motivational, but still can lead followers toward totally different and even opposing goals. The author further discuss how these two leaders with different even contradictory ideas of life, beliefs and values can through the nature of their leadership transform their followers to act in ways that goes beyond their self-interest to support a bigger vision. Regarding this the author mentioned the morality in leadership and argues that there is undoubtedly need for transformational leaders, but truly transformational leadership call for more than the capabilities of inspirational communication, strong interpersonal and social abilities, and a critical mind. Transformation must occur within the leader before it can occur among his or her followers in order to moral leadership to take place (Carey, 1992). The author further mean that the risk lies in trying to use the ideas of transformational leadership as “*a “quick fix” for the problems of the business, political, or societal world*” (Carey, 1992:232). When transformational leadership is seen as a tool that can be used or manipulated for a certain purpose it ends up in being moral and becomes at best simply transactional and at worst ideological. If the contributions included in transformational leadership such as charisma, inspiration, consideration and intellectual strength are abused for the leader’s self-interest, the consequence on followers turns out to be beneficial and moral, and becomes instead inequitable and ideological. In order remain as leaders this must be recognized and avoid becoming

leaders that easily affect their follower's through their inspirational and visionary speech. (Carey, 1992) Also Bass and Riggio (2006) discussed how the charismatic and inspirational components of transformational leadership can be used to truly create commitment of the followers and motivate them in a good way but also to manipulate the followers and create a harmful reliance on the leader. The authors explained these differences through making a distinction between authentic and inauthentic leadership and mean that every component of transformational leadership can be studied to decide whether they signify an authentic or inauthentic leadership. (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Tourish and Pinnington (2002) argued that transformational leadership is unlike other leadership styles because of its claimed ability to change the follower's goals. Placing it as its most optimistic form the new goals are understood to be of a greater level in that, once transformed, they stand for what is good for the group or the shared interests of leaders and subordinates. The authors argued that this kind of positive assumption necessitates a huge amount of belief as there is no beforehand reason to assume that the goals suggested by a transformational leader need to symbolize a deeper shared interest among the organizational member and therefore communicate the best interests of each one of them. If a leader secures enough power to change the minds of the subordinates through transforming their independently established goals in a collective path this kind of power could just as well be used for the good part of the chosen leader. (Tourish and Pinnington, 2002)

Bass (1999) declared in his article that although the idea of transformational leadership is found across the world, there is still much more to be learned, especially about how it is affected by the context where the leadership actually takes place. (Bass, 1999) The author further stressed that there is needed a broader explanation about the functions of transformational leadership and "*...how followers are moved from compliance, to identification, and to internalization of values and beliefs*" (Bass, 1999:24). This was elaborated by Avolio and Bass (1995) where they stressed that



when measuring leadership the context or situation in which the leader's actions are set needs to be included and systematically studied. Furthermore, the relations of a wider variety of leadership styles and activities that include transformational need to be studied by including the specific situation in which such actions is set and how it affects the followers over time. (Avolio and Bass, 1995)

Dvir et. al (2002) state that very little is recognized about the way leaders develop their followers to their so called "full potential". This they declared with the argument of House and Aditya presented in their article that expressed the lack of evidence of transformational and charismatic leadership to actually transform organizations and their members, even though it is often claimed that they do so. They further mean that no evidence is seen as representing the constant and lasting effects of transformational leaders on followers' confidence, motive, needs, preferences or values.

Sendijaya (2005) discussed the effects of the improved motivation and commitment that occurs from empowerment and growth of followers and mean that it will not necessarily advantage the followers. The author means that this also requires the followers to work for the good of their colleagues which is not indicated in transformational leadership. Also Yukl (1999) discussed this and views the component of intellectual stimulation in transformational leadership as diverse and ambiguous. He means that there is no clear definition of what the leaders actually do or say to influence the minds or behavior of followers. For instance, the author asked the question what the leaders actually do to encourage innovative problem solving. The author further argued that some aspects of intellectual stimulation appear to be closely related to the aspects of other components of transformational leadership such as individualized consideration or inspirational motivation is another basis of ambiguity.

Pillai and Williams (2004) questioned the visionary thinking of transformational leadership and mean that leaders may through setting a vision inspire the

organizational members in the first stages of group development but ask the question, what if the vision fails over time? Thus the authors stressed that future studies must discover the connection between leadership and unified groups over a period of time and there study if the unified group lose trust in the leader and turns against the leader in a situation like that.

Calder et al. presented in Yukl (1999) argued that similar to most of the earlier research in leadership, the theories of transformational leadership theories reveal the hidden assumptions relation with the stereotype of "heroic leadership". This is expressed through a dependent relationship between the leader and followers as the successful performance by an individual, the collective, or organization is understood to depend on leadership of a person with the abilities to find the right direction and motivate others to follow in this same direction. Often in transformational leadership theories, influence is described to work in as one direction that flows from the leader to the subordinates. There is a basic assumption that a successful leader will influence subordinates to make self-sacrifices and put extraordinary effort. Furthermore when a *“correlation is found between transformational leadership and subordinate commitment or performance, the results are interpreted as showing that the leader influenced subordinates to perform better”* (Yukl, 1999:7). Yukl (1999) argued that there is a small interest in explaining the mutual influence processes or shared leadership as the way leaders encourage subordinates to affect the performance of the leader and challenge or improve his or her vision. The author further argued that the emphasis on the universal use of transformational leadership has been too powerful. Thus the author means that more consideration is required to identify the conditions that limits and facilitates for transformational and charismatic leadership to occur. (Yukl, 1999) Also *“the practical implications for organizations need to be identified more carefully”* (Yukl, 1999:14).

### 3.3.2 The dark side of charismatic leadership

We reviewed the main theories for charismatic leadership. They provide profound insights for this popular leadership style. But these theories mainly consider the positive side of charismatic leadership. Some writers have also proposed the dark side of charisma (Yukl, 2006).

Yukl (2006) concluded the negative consequences of charismatic leadership which can be seen in Table 3-1.

#### **Some Negative Consequences of Charismatic Leaders**

- Being in awe of the leader reduces good suggestions by followers.
- Desire for leader acceptance inhibits criticism by followers.
- Adoration by followers creates delusions of leader infallibility.
- Excessive confidence and optimism blind the leader to real dangers.
- Denial of problems and failures reduces organizational learning.
- Risky, grandiose projects are more likely to fail.
- Taking complete credit for successes alienates some key followers.
- Impulsive, nontraditional behavior creates enemies as well as followers.
- Dependence on the leader inhibits development of competent successors.
- Failure to develop successors creates an eventual leadership crisis.

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Table 3-1 Negative consequences of charismatic leaders. (Yukl, 2006:260)

In the above theories, one important influence process is personal identification which means followers have a strong desire to imitate the leader's behavior. They are attracted by the leader's extraordinary ability and want to get the leader's recognition and admiration. This strong personal identification creates loyal believers but it also can generate the first two negative consequences in Table 3-1. Followers would be reluctant to disagree or deviate from the leader's plan. They wouldn't provide criticism when they think the policies or strategies proposed by the leader are not

practical. And they even tend to ignore all the evidences of that the leader has some problems. (Yukl, 1999)

In both attribution theory and self-concept theory, one important leader's charismatic is self-confidence. They should have the confidence about the visions that they proposed and express the confidence in followers. But excessive confidence would make the leaders to be over optimism and cannot recognize the defects in their strategy and vision. Identifying too closely with one vision makes them cannot judge the situation objectively. The adoration by follower and early success may make the leader cannot see the flaws and think themselves as infallible. (Finkelstein, 2003 cited in Yukl, 2006). Maccoby (2000 cited in Tourish and Pinnington, 2002) proposed that many charismatic leaders seems to be narcissists. They usually have a high self-image so that they are prone to identify the reality according to his or her vision. There is no room for doubt and disagreement. No matter what the virtues of charismatic leaders are, they tend to be "*overly sensitive to criticism, can be poor listeners, lack empathy, have a distaste for mentoring and have an intense desire to compete*" (Maccoby, 2000 cited in Tourish and Pinnington, 2002:152).

One characteristic for charismatic leaders proposed by attribution theory is their unconventional ways to achieve the vision. Their methods to achieve the goals must differ from conventional leaders in order to impress followers that they are extraordinary. But the unconventional behavior would at the same time be seemed as inappropriate and troublesome. As there would be some people in the company support the conventional and traditional ways of doing things. Bass (1985 cited in Yukl, 2006) noticed that charismatic leaders tend to polarize people to loyal believers and opponents. This may cut short the leader's career if the opponents are some powerful members of the organization.

Except the negative consequences of charismatic leadership, some writers point out some other reasons to illuminate that it is not always practicable or advantageous to

have a charismatic leader in organizations.

Firstly, “*charismatic leadership is risky*” (Yukl, 2006:261). As charismatic leaders are often be seen as superhuman in organizations, it is difficult to predict the result if too much power is given to an individual leader. And it would be dangerous if the power is misused. From the negative consequences we discussed above, charismatic leadership is not a panacea and also may cause problems for organization. (Yukl, 2006)

When we discussed the differentiation between leadership and management, one main idea is that management is used to create stability while the function of leadership is to create change. Charismatic leadership involves fundamental change in the strategy and culture of an organization. And crisis is often considered to be a necessary condition for charismatic leadership. So it may be not necessary to initiate radical change in an organization if no crisis exists. This is why some charismatic leaders tend to establish a new organization instead of implementing a new vision within a existing one. (Yukl, 2006)

“*Charisma is a rare and complex phenomenon that is difficult to manipulate*” (Trice and Beyer, 1993 cited in Yukl, 2006:262) .It is difficult to teach charisma and even the conditions that facilitate charisma to occur is tough to be achieved. And also charisma is a transitory phenomenon: it can be achieved or lost as situations change (Bryman, 1992; Roberts and Bradley, 1988 cited in Yukl, 1999). As charismatic leadership tend to occur in crisis as we discussed before, it seems likely to diminish when the crisis ends. Yukl (1999) proposed that charismatic leaders can become victims of their own success. They would be removed from power as the organization becomes larger. In another situation, the radical changes initiated by charismatic leader possibly will not survive when the leader leaves (Yukl, 2006).

From the above we can see the negative parts of transformational and charismatic

leadership. They are not necessarily the answer for good leadership or a perfect leadership to solve all the problems in an organization. Next, we will give an example of how a leader is described in real life.

## 4 Case presentation and analysis

*In this chapter, we will introduce our case that illustrates how employees perceive leadership and how different leadership styles affect them. We will here also discuss how these leadership styles relate to the popular notions of transformational and charismatic leadership.*

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### 4.1 Case introduction

As we have earlier mentioned, we had our interviews in a big and famous international company which we call Super. From this company we have selected one group called service partner in which some structure changes happened recently. As we have introduced in the methodology part, the main function of this department is described as “fixing all”. They provide service support to the company, including facility maintenance, house keep and other facility services related. A new group called support center was merged into this department at the beginning of this year. In Super, there is a store in which you can get office materials, clothes with company logo and things like that. And they have also corresponding activity through the phone, for instance, new employees can call this helpdesk to get facility related help. This store and helpdesk service is the main responsibility of the support center.

James is the manager of the service partner group and he has worked in Super since 1967. During these years, he continued his education and his position changed from being an electricity engineer to becoming a department manager. In service partner, some employees have worked with James for a long time and some have only had him as manager in several months due to the new changes in structure.

First let’s see what kind of leader a James views himself as.

*“I have always said that what I rather don’t want to do is to be a leader. Because I think that it requires a lot to be a leader. I have actually got the feedback from my bosses that I am a good leader and that is may be because I gladly listen to my subordinates and see them as individuals and not as a group. That is how I see my leadership, but I am actually a technician and I am used to solve many problems by myself.”(James)*

This statement by James shows us that he doesn’t want to see himself as a leader but is often viewed as a good leader by others, from his boss and employees. From this we can see that his leadership style appears to be different from what we described as transformational or charismatic leaders that emphasizes extraordinary actions of a leader that should be used in order to influence the employees. In contrast to this, James doesn’t even see himself as a leader. As it seems, he prefers to see himself at the same level as the employees and emphasizes listening to the ideas and thoughts of each individual in his group. Thus from this we may question whether leadership always have to be expressed and necessitate extraordinary actions of a leader as it is suggested in the theories of transformational and charismatic leadership? We can see from James leadership style that the ordinary activities such as listening and talking with the employees are also perceived as good leadership traits by others.

Referring back to the critics of transformational and charismatic leadership where the morality of the leaders were discussed. It was concluded that the beliefs, values and ideas of the leader should be critically reflected in order to understand the actions taken by the leader. (Carey, 1992) From the description of James leadership we can see that his beliefs and values involve considering each individual and emphasize their interests. In this way we can see that he avoids the risk that can occur from transformational and charismatic leaders which is to become blinded by the visions, beliefs and values that a leader articulates and thereby also risk acting immorally. (Price, 2003)

As our research is based on followers’ perspective, we will have a profound analysis



about James' leadership style from his followers' descriptions.

## **4.2 Findings and analysis**

### **4.2.1 The extra-ordinary of mundane leadership**

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) presented the mundane aspects of leadership in their research. They interviewed some managers in a company and found that although managers talked about visionary notions of leadership corresponding to the popular dimensions, they explained that their exercises of leadership consisted of listening, small talk and some other daily and mundane activities.

We also can identify these kinds of mundane activities from James. Several key behaviors have here been emphasized which we will elaborate below.

#### **Listening**

Listening as an important activity in leadership has been mentioned by the employees. Many positive effects of listening as a leadership activity was defined, such as this creating better motivation, performance and feelings at work for them. Ellen, who works as helpdesk operator indicates:

*“...He listens and that motivates me because it is kind of not the same as before. It does make difference if I go to him....he tries to be there and understands us...I mean it feels kind of good to feel safe and if something happens at work you know that you can turn to your manager.”(Ellen)*

From this quote we can see that Ellen considers James as a very good listener and mean that this gives her the motivation to do things better and also makes her feel safe.

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) also pointed out this as they say that one important reason of listening is the lessening of anxiety. Listening can make people confident that leaders are interested in their job and support them.

Robert also emphasizes listening and mentions that the leaders listening makes the department he works at now feel less top led and their suggestions and changes are taken seriously by his manager. Through listening to his subordinates James is viewed as taking their suggestions and ideas seriously. In similar ways, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) indicated that listening as an activity by the leader shows that he or she cares about the employees and has an interest about their opinions before getting on with changes. Also Kesby (2008) emphasized the positive effects of listening when he states that leaders really need to try to listen and understand other people's wishes, problems and stories. In addition, leaders also must be clear when sharing their meanings with other people in order to make the communication effective. As a leader it is important to be the first one to trust and the leader can create the trust through engaging in the interests and thoughts of his or her follower's.

Similar thoughts about listening have also been stated from the other employees where they also emphasized listening as a way of providing them feedback in a good way and making them feel included as a member of a team. As Emma and John indicates:

*“We have a good manager now... I think that he is a good listener and likes to tell if it is right or wrong what you do.” (Emma)*

*“...he is a team builder, he can put the teams together so we work at the same direction and he gives good very good feedback.”(John)*

From above statements we can see that the listening as an activity is highly appreciated from the employees as it makes them feel included and important. Putting

the teams together and their participation is also emphasized here. This in turn can be good input for Alvesson and Sveningsson's (2003a) statements about listening as they mean that listening can make people get a feeling of respect, inclusion and participation. It can also put the team together and get people feel social significant instead of anonymous. (Alvesson and Sveningsson,2003a) Sveningsson and Blom (forthcoming) also mean this as they indicated that a leader through listening gives full notice to the followers that are seeking his attention. They further indicated that a leader makes the followers visible and important through listening.

Now let us go back to the popular notions of leadership. Take charismatic leadership for example, from the self-concept theory we have introduced before several key behaviors of charismatic leaders are concluded (Yukl, 2006). From these behaviors of charismatic leaders, one word was repeated, that is articulating. The leaders need to articulate an attractive vision, persuade followers to believe in them, show confidence and express high expectation. The main image for these leaders is talking while in our case the main behavior of the leader is listening. Articulating the shared vision, mission and goal can let followers identify themselves with the organization in order to achieve high performance. (Yukl,2006) But our case show that the mundane activity such as listening without articulating can also be a good way to build teams and motivate followers.

Below let us continue to see other different activates of the leader in our case.

### **Informal talk**

Talking with employees is another mundane activity that has been highlighted by the employees. The positive effects from this was described as that the manager could get better insight on their daily work and stay at the same level with them. About this Martin and Emma says:

*“...He has his desk nearby. You can talk to him any time. He listens to what we to say and that motivates me to do better...He doesn't have the control need as other bosses. He is very flexible, down to earth, you can speak to him. He is very human and natural, nothing fake...”(Martin)*

*“ He is one of us...He stays with us right now and works and I think that is really good that he has taken the initiative to be among us so that he gets the information about what we actually do...”(Emma)*

From the above statements we get the understanding that James is not the one who sits in a corner office and only gives directions. This in turn makes his employees feel that they are equal and that they can talk with him about their job. This is also indicated by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) who argued that informal talk can make people feel better. By talking with subordinates in coffee room or any time during the work can help to confirm employees' presence and show interest in their work. The authors further mean that informal talk is another mundane activity in leadership conduction that can have a positive influence on the work environment which also can improve creativity.

Communication is often seen as an important activity in organizations. Kurland and Pelled (2000) proposed a new model of communication as a process in which message is transferred from the sender to the receiver. In their model, they primary empathized the process that message flowed from source to receiver. But at the same time they paid attention to the interplay between source and receiver which means the receiver's interpretation of the message is also very important. So the communication is not only one-way process but a two-way process. (Kurland and Pelled, 2000) The informal talk that is used by James can be seen as a two-way communication. The leaders shouldn't only give orders or articulate the big notions; they also should know what the follower is thinking. Also Kesby (2008) indicated that the ability to communicate is vital in leadership since it sets the grounds for creating a good

relationship with the employees.

Then let's say the concept of the communication. In our interview, the followers always emphasize that James know exactly what they are doing. Their communication is often about the daily work and this makes the follower feel that James is one of them. In contrast, in the popular leadership theories, the transformational and charismatic leaders are often communicating some big notions such as vision, goals, meaning

From these empirical data, we can see that leaders don't always necessarily do something that is very visionary as it is often described in the popular writings about transformational and charismatic leadership. What James does is closely connected to listening and chatting. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a:1448) argued that these activities actually are "*far from being ordinary, insignificant and mundane*", in contrast they are key aspects of many practical leadership.

Below we will continue our analysis about leadership in our case by using different metaphors.

## 4.2.2 Gardener, cosy crafter or commander?

Different metaphors are often used to describe leadership and there is a huge amount of leadership metaphors to choose. Here we will present several metaphors that we can relate to our empirical data.

### **Commander**

The new group i.e. support center had a manager before in which there have been described to be clear problems between manager and employees. James considers the

difference between him and the previous manager as follows:

*“...he has seen the group as a group and not the individuals...This means he has told everyone that you must do this and you must do that, instead of listening to very individual and trying to find strengths and weaknesses of every person.”*

From James' statement above we get the understanding that the former manager didn't value mundane activities such as listening and chatting with the employee as much as the new manager does. The employees described their former manager as very strict and military just as Emma and Martin say:

*“What makes me de-motivated is when somebody makes up something that we don't agree on, without discussing it with us in the group instead something that only gets decided “over our heads” which happens quite a lot.”(Emma)*

*“... I had one boss kind of like military, very strict. He just wants to make things happen... It did affect my motivation on a negative side. I like work but I don't like to be forced to do it. ” (Martin)*

From these statements of the employees we can see that the former manager is described as someone that gives orders and makes decisions without considering the ideas and suggestions of the employees as it with James. It also seems clear that the employees don't like this kind of leaders. And they think it can be a de-motivation factor and have negative effects on their work. From the description of the previous leader, we can see that it is similar to the description of the metaphor of commander (Spicer, forthcoming)

Grint (2005b) pointed out that being a commander includes the role to take the necessary and decisive actions. In the behaviour of the leadership as commander,

what needs to be done is certain, which is “...to provide the answer to the problem, not to engage in processes” (Grint, 2005b:1474). The work of the commander is to explain what needs to be done, and then get started and performing it. Grint (2000 cited in Spicer, forthcoming) argued that many aspects of military life can still be seen as a typical way of leading in organizations.

Leaders as a commander often try to break the old rule and attempt to create his or her new rules (Spicer, forthcoming). In other words, they seek to bring transformational changes for organizations. And that is also described in the theories of what the transformational leaders do. Their ultimate goal of transformational leaders are transforming the organization (Tichy and Devanna, 1986 cited in Carey, 1992). One reason for transformational leader act as commander is to be at a heroic position and show that they have extraordinary abilities to make a difference (Spicer, forthcoming). But from our case, the commander seems unpopular in organizations. In contrast, James who behaves differently is perceived as a good leader. Now we will continue to look at the metaphors that can be used to describe James’s leadership style and try to see the differences.

Now let us look at the metaphors that can be used to describe James’s leadership style.

### **Cosy crafter**

Sveningsson and Blom (forthcoming) proposed the cosy crafter metaphor to describe leaders who conduct mundane activities to develop subordinates’ well-being and build strong nice bonds of reciprocal dependency between leader and followers.

To make the followers feel good about themselves and their work life situation is a central idea of this metaphor. Leadership activities should emphasize the need of recognition and praise for people. This in turn ideally facilitates further motivation, dedication, and performance of the followers (Sveningsson and Blom, forthcoming).

This idea is reflected from James's view of himself, when we asked him how he motivated his subordinates;

*“Confirming and acknowledging them...it is important to find all these good examples and highlight them as often you can. ...I mean you must allow people to do wrong and so. It is better that you do something and that it sometime gets wrong also, without turning the world upside down”.*(James)

By using these words James emphasize, similar to Sveningsson and Blom (forthcoming) the needs of recognizing and praising people in order to create better conditions for their performance, motivation and commitment. According to James it should be ok to make mistakes and learn from it. Again here, treating everyone individually and caring about all the employees are the central ideas. Diclaudio (1991) emphasized that gaining the respect of the followers is vital for a manager in a new position. The author further emphasized that the followers need to be acknowledged as individuals. Kesby (2008) also highlights the importance of praise and recognition and mean that leaders contribute to strengthen their relationship with the followers through concerning praise and congratulations to the followers for their achieved performance. The author further argues that these kinds of praises and recognition must be real and not be said just to say it.

As Sveningsson and Blom(forthcoming) argued that the central idea that making people feel good would be a bit surprising to transformational and charismatic leadership as they to a large extend focus on other themes. In the literature review about the popular notions of leadership, they seem to more focus on how to influence people without giving them praise and recognition.

Another meaning of leader as cosy crafter is that they among other things protects the voice and interests of the employees and guarantee their opinions among top managers (Sveningsson and Blom, forthcoming). For service partner, they need to



provide high quality service for employees within Super. They pursue customer satisfaction but at the same time they also need support when they have problems. We also can see this from James, his employees says:

*“...he has an ability to get himself heard, lead the information forward. It is easier for him than the previous manager. For other managers, the information flow maybe have broke or stopped. But now we feel that we have someone that is with us on our side.”(Emma)*

Here Emma indicates that James gives them the feeling that he is on their side and are interested in the information he gets from his employees. From this the employees feel that their voices get heard and they have the ability to affect and influence and the decisions that are taken by top management. In other words James facilitates this process rather than make it more difficult as it was described about the former manager. As it seems James' leadership stands for mutual influence rather than just giving direction and influencing his employees. Moqvist (2005) argued that one important aspect of leadership is to support the followers in different ways in their work. In congruence to the behavior we can see of James the author means that this can includes being there for the employees, knowing their situation and showing that you care about them as a leader. This in turn can result in the followers trusting the leader as the leader shows that he or she cares about them and wants their best. That James takes the issues that are important for the employees seriously is one of the initiatives by James which makes the employees trust him as a leader. (Moqvist, 2005)

We can see that the employees want their voice to be heard and their rights to be guarded. But for the transformational and charismatic leaders, they are often described to be adored by followers and this will cause excessive confidence. (Yukl,2006) The over-confidence will blind the leader to hear from the followers. They are often seen as superhuman who can do everything without any else's help. In

our case, James views himself as a non-leader who listens and supports follower's ideas. This clearly different behavior of the leader is welcomed by followers in our case.

Except the metaphor of cosy crafter, another metaphor is explored as below.

### **Gardener**

As we have discussed before, James described his leadership in through saying that he prefers to treat his employees as individual not as a group. He means that it is important to talk to everyone and to find strengths and weakness in each individual. Thus leadership as gardener described by Huzzard and Spoelstra (forthcoming) can be used to describe James' leadership. The metaphor of the leader as a gardener means that leaders construct their leadership to by nurturing people and contributing to their development (Huzzard and Spoelstra, forthcoming). Also Moquist (2005) emphasize that leadership should pay attention to the development of people and mean that this requires creating an open relation between the followers and the leader. This relation in turn should be built on trust and mutual respect between the leader and the followers.

One typical exercise of the leader as a gardener is the appraisal interview (Huzzard and Spoelstra, forthcoming). Huzzard and Spoelstra (forthcoming) referred to a very interesting metaphor for the appraisal process and mean that appraisal interviews are just like pruning for roses. It aims not only to develop employees but also to control the performance. These appraisal interviews are also mentioned by the employees and they say that in these appraisal interviews James gives them feedback for their work. As John indicates:

*“...two times a year we have something we call “appraisal interviews” and at then we sit down for two hours and James tells me this is good, this you could be*

*better and go, then it is my turn to put out what I think about him...he gives feedbacks, good or bad.”(John)*

Here John points out that from the appraisal interview he gets feedback from his managers. From these both good and bad feedback, he would know his strengths and weakness and perform much better in the future. At the same time, he can give feedback to his manager. Yukl (2006) declared that most popular theories emphasize how leaders influence and empower the followers and mean that more emphasis should be put on mutual influence processes. The author further argue that although the leaders influence on the followers are important, it is not enough to clarify how leaders build extraordinary teams. There are not enough clarification on the way leaders develop the mutual trust and cooperation, empowerment between the leaders and the followers in the popular leadership theories. What James does can be a good input for this.

This shows once again that James is interested in his employees’ opinions and values the development of people as it is described in leadership metaphor as gardener. The other employees also talk about this when they refer to feedback and how he gives them the possibility to develop. As Martin and Robert say:

*“...he gives a lot of feedback whether it is good or bad. He is fair. I like a manager that is honest; he is honest and says exactly what he thinks and feels.”(Martin)*

*“...I mean we have a lot of freedom under responsibility, he trusts us, we do our job and we get commendation from him or he hears from the clients that we do a good job and then he tells that further to us.”(Robert)*

From these interviews we get the idea that James provides his employees a feeling of trust and also make create the possibilities for them to grow and develop in their work.

It seems that through his leadership style James manages to influence the performance of the employees as he not only conduct the scheduled appraisal interviews but also give daily feedback for his employees. It is important for him to tell his employees the feedback to help them to grow from their problems.

Another meaning for leader as gardener is that they develop people indirectly and construct proper conditions for subordinates to grow. Just as gardeners water, apply plant fertiliser and so on to ensure the plant can grow very well (Huzzard and Spoelstra, forthcoming). James is very much described as being this kind of leader. He empowers and trusts his subordinates and does anything he can to support them. About this John and Malin say:

*“... I don't want a manager to come out to me and say do that and do that, I know what I should do, if I get a problem I contact James and he will come.”(John)*

*“...he (James) motivates me through believing in me, he gives me a job where I all the time can develop myself...you feel like one in the team and that is how I think manager should be.”(Malin)*

By this the employees mean that they feel that James through his leadership gives them the right conditions and possibilities to grow and develop. Trusting and believing in them as well as giving them the autonomy and freedom to do their work is central in this aspect. Similar to our case Moqvist (2005) proposed that one way of supporting the followers is through trusting them. According to the author when there is trust for the followers, one becomes also as a leader more willing to share the knowledge, responsibility and freedom and other things that may contribute to the development of followers. The author further stressed that encouraging the employees and giving them feedback just as James does as a leader is another way to create trust for the followers.

Personal development is also one main idea in transformational leadership theory. But the transformational and charismatic leaders often claim to transform the members to achieve their full potential.(Dvir *et al*, 2002) It has also been stated that whether they can be successful to do that is lack of evidence (Dvir *et al*,2002). In our case we have shown that personal development can be like gardening which means that the leader as gardener prune, water and fertilize instead of totally transforming.

Above, we tried to dig much more about what kind of leadership James conducts in practice. It seems that his leadership style is different from the leadership activities that we described in the popular popular leadership notions. From his activities we can see that he is not visionary, charismatic or willing to make transformational changes in organizations. What he does can be seen as not different from the normal people. These mundane activities such as listening, chatting, caring and nurturing are also highly appreciated by the employees in our interviews.

From our interviews, we didn't find the characteristics of transformational or charismatic leaders from James. We interpret his leadership style as mundane leadership. He is described to be just like cosy crafter and gardener to build cosy connections and garden his employees. This is only one example of effective leadership in practical life. But it will give us some indications to rethink about the popular notions of leadership.

# 5 Discussion and conclusion

*In this part we want to make a discussion about our analysis and relate this to the popular notions of transformational and charismatic leadership. We will here present the main findings and conclusions of our thesis and discuss how our limitation has affected our results as well as how this topic can be studied further in future research.*

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## 5.1 Main findings

In our introduction, we introduced our three research questions. Here we will provide the answers to these three questions. And those answers can also be seen as our main findings. Our first research question was:

- *Are the popular notions of leadership such as transformational leadership and charismatic leadership the answer for good leadership in organizations?*

In our theory part we have proposed some popular leadership theories and provided critiques about these notions of leadership. We have there found that the popular writings about transformational and charismatic leadership with its emphasis on important elements such as visions, the ability to inspire, motivate and influence the employees, empowerment, intellectual stimulation and consideration of each individual is often presented as an ideal way of leadership. But we have found in the critiques part that these popular notions of leadership are not necessarily the answer for good leadership.

From one hand, these concepts of leadership can be very ambiguous and difficult to conduct or measure when it comes to studying them in practice. What is transformational and charismatic leadership is often presented as something vague

and can be difficult to understand in practice. From the critiques we can see that one must look closer at how leadership is affected by the context where it takes place in order to understand transformational as well as the charismatic leadership. We have also been reminded of that the morality, beliefs and values of the leader must be considered in order to understand the actions and behavior of a leader. Price (2003) similar to Carey (1992) proposed that the transformational leaders may act immorally as they might be blinded by the visions and values that they articulated. The critiques have further shown us that more research is needed when it comes to understanding the way that leaders influence, empower and develop individuals and what the effects are from this. On the other hand even if people can learn and conduct these popular leadership notions, they still have some negative consequences. These popular leadership theories give leaders a heroic portray and sometimes it can lead to over individualism. From the negative consequences concluded by Yukl (2006), we can see the heroic leadership theories can cause followers to become dependent on the leader, reduce the good suggestions and also may blind the leaders to see dangers.

From these critiques about the popular leadership notions we can see that these ideas are difficult and ambiguous to conduct in practice and not always appropriate to use in every situation.

The other two research questions we have tried to answer in this thesis are:

- *What kind of other leadership styles can also be seen in practice and how do they relate to these ideas of leadership?*
- *How do the employees perceive the leadership that we find in our case study?*

When we conducted the interview in Super, another interesting leadership style which is clearly different from these popular leadership notions appeared. But still it was appreciated by the followers and the manager in our case was considered as a good leader by his boss. The employees in this company seem to prefer this kind of

leadership rather than the leadership style of their former manager which has been described as very strict and kind of like military. The former manager was described to not emphasize the value of the more mundane activities such as listening and chatting with the employees as it was with the new manager.

Thus what we find in our case analysis is similar to Alvesson and Sveningsson's article about mundane leadership that the ordinary activities of a leader such as listening and informal chatting are vital behaviors when practicing leadership (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). Our case analysis has shown that this is also highly appreciated among the employees. These ordinary activities of the leader such as listening to the followers, talking with them and trying to be at the same level as them are seen as great actions of leadership from the employees' perspective. According to this kind of behavior of the leader, the employees seem to become more open and willing to share their thoughts and suggestions with their manager.

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) found that in practice the managers are influenced by the popular notions of leadership very much. They talked about visionary, charismatic and transformational leadership. But in their daily work they still think these mundane activities are very important. We also can see this from our case in which not only the leader but also the employees emphasize the importance of mundane activities. Mundane activities such as listening and trying to understand each individual can have a range of positive effects for the relations between the managers and employees and also they can result in better performance.

In leadership studies, metaphors are used to describe different leadership styles. In our case from the interview with some employees, we got the information that they had some experience with a very strict leader. They compared the differences between that kind of leader and James. Those leaders are sometimes very arbitrary; as they just want to make things happen, don't take suggestions and only give directions. We have referred to the commander metaphor to portray this kind of leaders. As we discussed



in the critiques of the popular notions of leadership, leaders are sometimes seen as superhuman. This may lead to over self- confidence for the leaders and would reduce suggestions and criticisms from followers. From this we conclude that the notions of transformational and charismatic leadership in some conditions also may lead to a leadership style that reminds us of the commander. We believe that a leader should not only influence the followers but also allow him or her to have the ideas of the followers and get feedback from them. Good suggestions and feedback from the employees can also be a good input for the company's future.

In contrast to the former manager, we can use cosy crafter and gardener to describe James' leadership style. He doesn't see himself as a leader who is different from the employees. He doesn't emphasize giving strict directions, instead he emphasize the value of listening, advising and supporting. Just as cosy crafter, he conducted these mundane activities to build a cosy bond between managers and employees. He gave his employees the opportunity to develop and work by themselves and provided proper conditions for development like gardeners.

We analyze the mundane activities of the leader in our case and at the same time use the metaphor of cosy crafter, gardener and commander to try to find the differences between the leader in our case and the leader proposed in the popular leadership theories. Several differences are analyzed in our case analysis. For example, leaders according to popular notions are mainly articulating while leader in our case is mostly listening; what the former articulating is primarily vision, goals and meanings while the latter generally communicates with followers about daily work. Other points can be seen in the case analysis part. We can see that on the one hand, from the literature review for the critiques of popular leadership theories, we can see the transformational and charismatic leadership theories are problematic. On the other hand, from our case a different leadership style is highly appreciated by followers.

Although we cannot say that this mundane leadership is better than the popular

leadership notions, at least we can see in practical life that another effective leadership style exists and is conducted successfully by some leaders. We believe that transformational leadership and charismatic leadership should be critically reflected and not be taken for granted. It should not be seen as a ready-made tool for leadership.

## **5.2 Recommendation**

Through our research we hope that we have been able to give a critical insight to the popular notions of transformational and charismatic leadership and from this show that these ideas are not always easy to implement in practice as they often might seem.

As a student of management studies you often get the ideas that leadership requires remarkable and extraordinary actions in order to influence the followers to act in the same direction. But we have seen through our case that it not necessarily always have to be like that. We have found that the ordinary, daily activities of a leader such as listening to the employees and being available to them should not be underestimated. Thus the contributions we can give through our thesis are first, to not forget the value of these kinds of mundane activities when practicing leadership. They are important activates for a leader as they have shown to have a huge influence on the employees' trust, motivation, performance as well as commitment. One reason for this, we believe can be explained through that these activities provide value for the employees and make them feel that they can relate to and understand their leader and in turn also make them more willing to share their ideas and thoughts. They feel that they can make a difference.

We also want to mention that we believe these activities become even more important when someone starts as a new manager in a company. There we believe one must really listen to the employees, get to know them and try to be around them as much as

possible. This will not only be appreciated and respected by the employees it will also give the leader a better opportunity to work with the good ideas that is provided from the theories of transformational and charismatic leadership. Another reason why we believe that these activities are important as a new manager is that they have shown to create better trust between the leader and the followers. Although it is a time-demanding process we believe that emphasizing mundane activities such as listening and supporting the ideas of the followers from the very beginning can facilitate this process.

Secondly, we have from our study presented a case very briefly and there shown that the mundane activities of a leader also can result in creating better relationships between the leader and followers. The mundane leadership approach encourages a mutual dependency relationship between the leader and the employees.

For future study, we believe that it could be interesting to study the aspects of mundane leadership more broadly and deeply. One could for instance study how this kind of leadership relates to the theories of transformational and charismatic leadership more in depth. And maybe also find and discuss the similarities and differences more in depth. Another interesting study could be to make a deeper research on the differences between how leaders talk about leadership and how their employees view their leadership.

### **5.3 Final thoughts**

As we have started with a different research problem and ended up in the topic of leadership we think that our research have some limitations. We are aware of that our research could have had more depth if we had only focused on this topic from the start of our research process. We have also initiated our study mainly from the follower's perspective. We believe it will be much deeper if we have both. At the same time, the

fact that we actually started our research process with a fresh mind and without any theoretical direction can have provided us the ability to increase the validity and reliability of our empirical data. This, because it gave us the possibility to ask more open questions to our interviewees as we were not influenced by the popular theories of transformational and charismatic leadership. We started looking at the theories first when we got our empirical data and there found leadership as an interesting topic. This way we believe that we have been able to avoid confirming these theories and got the possibility to study them through a different perspective.

As we got the interviews randomly, we don't know the relations with the employees and the leader. This may have affected the result as there could have been employees that don't feel the same about James leadership. The fact that James had in total 27 employees and we've only interviewed eight of them is another limitation of our thesis. Interviewing all the employees could have given a more valid view of the leadership style of James. Although the above mentioned limitations, we also believe that one strength of our thesis is that the leader's view of his leadership and the employee's view of the leader in our case were aligned. This shows that it is not only the employees perceiving him as this kind of leader but also himself.

Another limitation of our thesis is that we don't know the result of his leadership from the customer's point of view, as this department is service partner who provide services for employees within company. This could be another interesting topic to study more about.

Moqvist (2005) declared that leaders are also a part of a culture which affects how they act within an organization. The author further stressed that these cultures can be within the frame of an organization as well as outside the organization. Thus the activities within organizations should also be understood through other cultures that exist outside the organization. (Moqvist, 2005) We are thereby furthermore aware of the fact that the company in our case was a Swedish company could have had an

effect on the answers we got from our interviewees as their view of leadership may have been influenced by the Swedish culture which emphasizes a more non-strict and open way of leadership practice. Yet we believe that it is vital to have the mundane activities of leadership in mind and it can also relate to everyone's daily life and not only for leaders.

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# Appendix

## Interview questions for the manager:

### Brief introduction

1. Could you give us a brief introduction of yourself?  
How long have you worked in this company?  
How many subordinates do you have?

### Motivation about himself

2. Why do you work?
3. Why do you choose this company? How is here?
4. How do you see yourself as a leader?
5. What motivates you at work?  
When do you feel most motivated at work? Could you give us some examples?
6. What de-motivates you at work?

### Motivation for employees

7. How was the situation when you first came to this department? How was the motivation of the employees then? What did you do at that situation?
8. Do you think a manager can affect the motivation of employees?
9. How do you motivate your employees? What is the result? Could you give us some examples?
10. How do you think change of managers affect employee's motivation?

## Interview questions for the employees

### About the person

1. How old are you?
2. Can you give a brief introduction about yourself?
3. How long have you been in the company?
4. Why did you choose this company and started working in this company?
5. What do you work with in the company?
6. What is it like to work in the company?

### **About feelings**

7. How is the general atmosphere in the company?
8. What is your situation in the company?
9. How do you deal with it?
10. How would you describe your feelings in the company right now?
11. What do you think about the company, is there any differences between your thoughts of the company before and now?
12. What do you think will happened next?
13. What does it mean to your work?

### **About behavior**

14. What motivates you at work?
15. How are you motivated to stay at work?
16. What does the company do to motivate you?
17. Are there any differences between your motivation for work between now and before?
18. How do you believe this has affected your behaviour at work?
19. Can you give us any examples?

### **About future plans**

20. What are your plans for the future?
21. How has your situation in the company affected your future plans?