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Leadership Hypnotic

The Fallacy of Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Firms

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ABSTRACT

- Title:** Leadership Hypnotic:
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- Keywords:** Knowledge-Intensive Firms, Knowledge work, Critical Thinking, Managerial work
- Thesis Purpose:** To investigate and problematize the significance of leadership in a knowledge intensive firm.
- Methodology:** This research is an exploratory study, conducted from an interpretative, qualitative perspective.
- Theoretical Perspective:** The study takes its starting point in the existing literature where leadership as an inherently good power applied to all situations for success. Concepts as ambiguity of leadership, management unpopularity and less leadership provide ground to build on and go beyond previous perspectives in this research.
- Empirical Foundation:** We empirically based our research on a case study of a consulting company specialized in regional development. Semi structured interviews were used to provide our data.
- Conclusion:** Blindly following the trend of leadership being a panacea can lead to problems for the organization. People need to be critical towards leadership in order benefit from it.



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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem

Leadership discourse has always been charged with positive connotations (Grint, 2005; Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Alvesson & Blom 2015). Every aspect of our contemporary life deals with leadership, and this ubiquity of the concept has taken the modern business world by storm (e.g. Coca-Cola, 2017; Scania, 2017). There are some authors questioning leadership (Collinson, 2005; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992), but the popular view remains in favor of the topic.

Throughout our quest to study leadership in organizations, we came across an interesting company where individuals seem to share different opinions about leadership.

At Origins, managers abide by the contemporary leadership infatuation trend by explaining their essential roles as leaders. They declare that they lead by example, assist their employees and motivate them. Staff members, on the other hand, display typical characteristics of being knowledge workers with independence and expertise as critical aspects of their jobs (Lee & Maurer, 1997). They agree on the same definition of leadership, as being connected with motivation and aspiration, but assert that leadership is unnecessary in their daily work since autonomy and self-motivation compensate it.

Instead of leadership, what the employees have voiced quite a few times to their superiors is the demand for procedural managerial support such as in routinized tasks. Managers at Origins seem to believe that they are providing necessary leadership however subordinates do not approve as much on such claims. Workers explained how managers were always too busy with leadership development programs or board meetings to communicate with them clearly and set up routines.



The following three factors sparked our curiosity: First, the difference in statements from the employees at different hierarchical levels. Second, managers appear to overlook their managerial responsibilities in favor of performing leadership-related activities; and third, leadership viewed in a critical perspective such as in the employees' point of view is a scarce finding in today's world where leadership is worshiped.

The point of interest here lies in the uniqueness of this organization. Amidst the general infatuation with leadership and the uniformly positive discourse that usually envelopes the concept, we observe members of this company looking at the subject from a different perspective.

This unorthodox point of view created an uncommon case that intrigued us into studying this organization.

Aim and Objectives

Throughout our research, we aim to investigate the significance of leadership in a knowledge intensive firm. We also aim to problematize leadership in contemporary organizations. We will explore employees' and managers' outlooks regarding leadership and by doing so, try to understand their perception of leadership, in terms of its significance, and necessity.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to rethink the significance of leadership in today's world. There is currently a lack of studies that criticize the idealized view of leadership which is, arguably, becoming obsolete. Overall, our purpose is to advance theoretical and practical understanding of leadership. Therefore, in order to do that, our thesis describes leadership attempts in Origins at an empirical level. We do not hope to give a universal guideline towards using leadership, rather provide theoreticians and practitioners with useful insights.



Significance of the Study

Leadership has been written about from the days of Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Cicero, and Confucius to John Stuart Mill (Couto, 2010). The opinions and definitions expressed differ substantially, and this implies that there is no precise delimitation of this concept. Nevertheless, hundreds of billions of dollars are spent every year to develop leaders, without concrete evidence for a need to do so (Beer, et al., 2016; Seidle, et al., 2016; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). With our research, we do not aim to capture the essence of leadership but generate substantial insight on the significance of leadership in knowledge intensive firms. By that, we hope to aid senior managers, who shape the strategies and goals of organizations to decide how much their organizations should focus on leadership. Thus, we aim to encourage decision makers to reconsider their judgment when putting faith and subsequently massive amounts of resources for applying leadership.

Our environment is getting more byzantine and therefore in need of more explanations. We generate and analyze data in order to shed greater light on the reasons why people and organizations strive for leadership, and thereby expand the existing academic knowledge.

Research Questions

During our empirical investigation, we were directed by the following empirical question:

- Is meaning and understanding of leadership and leadership's significance coherent and shared between individuals?

In addition to this question, our research generated a further theoretical question:

- How significant is leadership in knowledge intensive firms?

These questions helped in structuring our thesis and stimulated ideas. When asking these questions, we take into consideration the contextual parameters that affected their formation and answering. Thus, through answering those questions, we aim to offer insights and contribute to the literature on leadership.



Research Limitations

We acknowledge the complexity of research and the likelihood that we might have faced many challenges that we needed to overcome to produce reliable data. The limited timeframe of our study restricted the amount of data that we could collect, and the single case study implicates that the study results do not represent all knowledge intensive firms, and do not allow generalizations (Babbie, 2012). Nevertheless, it provides useful empirical insights concerning leadership and its significance. Moreover, we acknowledge that our preconceptions and knowledge acquired from our studies and experiences might give us a biased perspective. However, we have tried to counter this by retaining an objective view in the collection and analysis of data. As a final note, being too certain and accepting ‘the obvious’ too quickly, can lead to rejecting other suggestions. To get closer to the truth, one must always be critical towards one's own ideas, beliefs, and principles (Alvesson, 2003). The fact that we are two people conducting the research is an advantage since we will be critical towards ourselves and each other.

Outline of the Thesis

We start answering these questions by first describing the interpretative methodology and methods that we used for this study. Following this, we examine the existing theories that surround leadership, knowledge work, and management. After introducing the case of Origins, we inspect our research questions as outlined above by highlighting the issues related to the significance of leadership and incoherence of its use. In our discussion, we examine the identified problems and different approaches to leadership. We put forward the idea that employees and managers do not perceive leadership in the same way and leadership is not always needed at knowledge intensive firms. Afterward, we proceed to introduce our theoretical contribution. Ultimately, we make a conclusion that questions what is taken for granted concerning the existing theoretical and practical approaches to leadership.



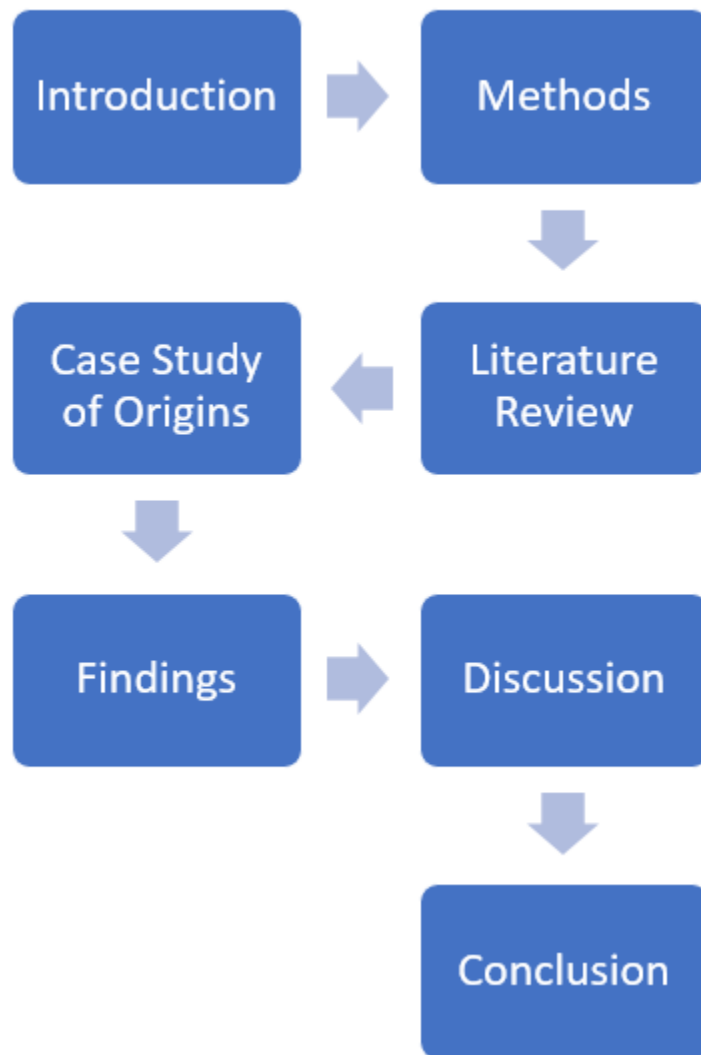


Figure 1

Chapter 2: Methods

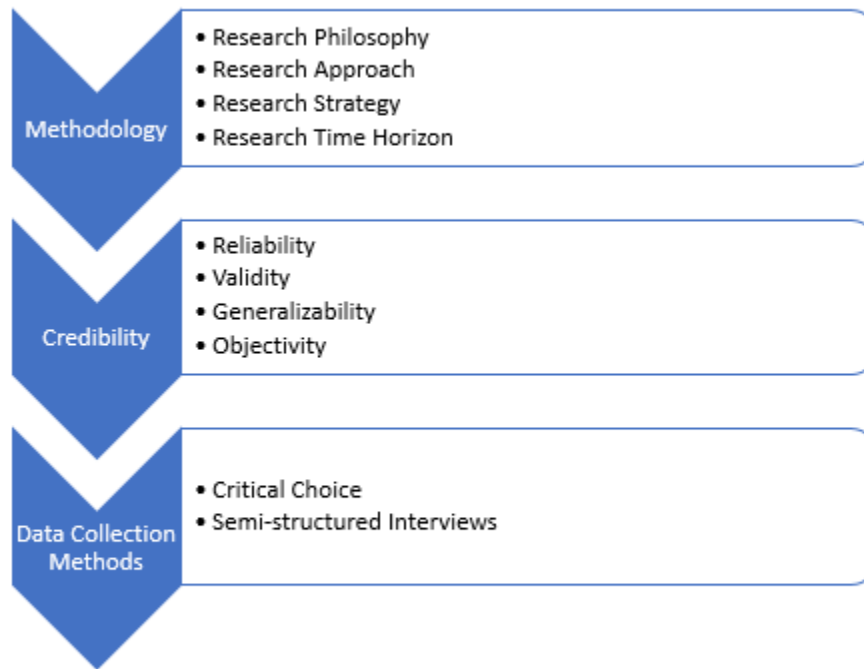


Figure 2

Methodology

According to Remenyi et al. (2003), a methodology constructs the approach to a problem during the research process, providing theoretical support from the very start of data collection. We are going to state how we answered our questions. In this part, we will explain the methodological stratifications of our research and how we position ourselves methodologically. To this end, we view research methodology as presented in the work of Saunders, et al.(2011) as an ‘onion,’ with different layers that are to be peeled off before reaching the center. We will start with research philosophy that informed our study followed by research approach, research strategy, choice, time horizon, and techniques. After explaining why we made these decisions, we will reach the

center, which is data collection. Each decision taken at each layer is connected with a decision on other layers, and all of them helped us answer our questions and come to conclusions in our attempt to advantage the leadership theory. The reason we chose the classification proposed by Saunders, et al. (2011), instead of other alternatives, is because we believe it offers a clarified and unambiguous framework which we can use to explain our whole research process.

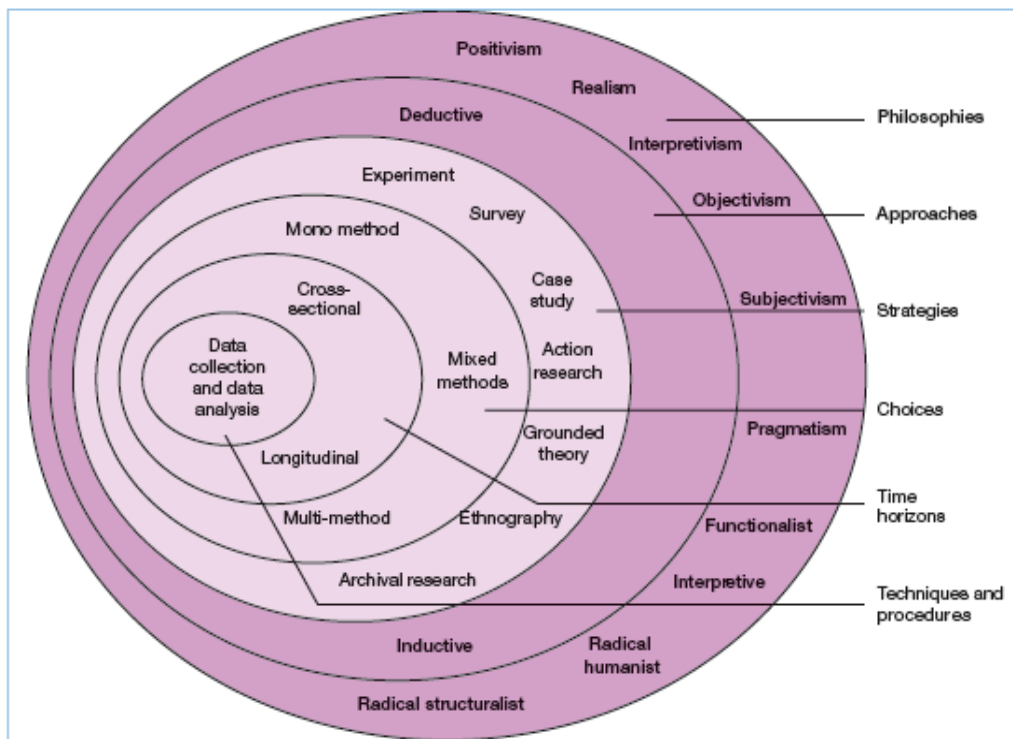


Figure 3. Source: Saunders, et al. (2011)

Research Philosophy

In our research, our goal was to answer our research questions. Epistemology as a branch of philosophy is concerned with how and what is known (Steup & Zalta, 2017), and hermeneutics is an epistemology that emphasizes the interpretation of thoughts and social acts. Moustakas (1994) states that hermeneutics is the process of deciding the intent and meaning of the experience. Hermeneutics is a reliable research tool because it involves interpretation along with gaining rich descriptive data. Using hermeneutics, we aimed to bring in the essence of the data we collected in an interpretative descriptive text that continues to acknowledge the complexity of that data.

The purpose of our research is to bring to light and reflect upon the meaning of this data. What is common to all hermeneutical research is its sensibility (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009) and a special connection with the environment it is taking place in (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 2006; Manen, 2014). Thus, we approached the phenomena we studied acknowledging their uniqueness in all of their complexity and peculiarity.

Application of a scientific method, according to Aristotle, implies to make observations with no preconceived notions. The information we have acquired from our previous life experiences and studies made it impossible for us to engage in this research without preconceptions. After all, no one is a “Tabula Rasa” – a blank slate – and preconceptions are a part of human nature. However, we did not use the obtained knowledge to perform pseudo-science and attempt to prove the notions we already possess, nor are we trying to demonstrate our pre-existent beliefs. On the contrary, we have fused horizons, given that the nature of hermeneutics is integrating what is unfamiliar with our own familiar context (Prasad, 2005). In hermeneutics, personal involvement is essential to how we understand things. The world discloses itself to us, based on our angle of vision.

This fusion was done between different read and understood viewpoints with our own preconceptions. The idea of the hermeneutic circle asserts that one's recognition of a concept as a whole is established by reference to its individual parts and the understanding of each individual part - by referring to the whole (Prasad, 2005). In our case, we studied each individual in the context of the organization, and the organization as a whole - through each individual.

Research Approach

To be able to accomplish our goals we conducted abductive research, which was dictated by our research philosophy - hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, as well as abductive approach, emphasize in using existing knowledge and new findings to come to new interpretations and conclusions (Saunders, et al., 2011). Abductive approach does not demand the collection of all available data for the formulation of a conclusion. Instead, it suggests gathering enough data for building a theory and drawing conclusions. With the abductive approach, our goal was to collect material



until we reached empirical maturity. Empirical maturity is achieved when one interviewee after another repeats the responses that have already been recorded (Saunders, et al., 2011). When we recognized this pattern during data collection, we concluded to have reached empirical maturity and were able to show our findings in a credible manner.

Research Strategy

In order to answer our research questions, we conducted qualitative research. To collect our data, we decided to conduct a case study. According to Robson (2002), a case study is “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence” (p. 178). We used the case study strategy because we wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the context of our research and the processes being performed. Additionally, we chose this approach because of its substantial ability of this strategy to give answers to questions such as why what and how (Morris & Wood, 1991). According to Yin’s (2003) distinction, we completed a single holistic case. Doing a single holistic case means that we studied one, ‘single,’ organization and we are concerned with the organization as a whole, so it is also ‘holistic’. The case study strategy enabled us to challenge the existing and also produce a new theory (Saunders, et al., 2011).

Research Time Horizon

Our research is cross-sectional, we studied the significance of leadership at this particular time. Our reasoning behind this decision is that our research project is time constrained (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002). Moreover, our case study is based on interviews conducted over a short period of time. Therefore, our research is a ‘snapshot’ taken at a particular time based on the current perceptions of current employees.



Credibility

This study aims to contribute theoretically and offer insights to the field of leadership research. Subsequently, it is proper to additionally expand on how these insights came out of our findings, keeping in mind the end goal to talk about both the legitimacy of the insights that are being offered.

Reliability

Reliability refers to whether your data collection techniques and analytic procedures would reproduce consistent findings if they were repeated on alternative occasion or if they were replicated by another researcher (Saunders, et al., 2011). In the attempt to make our research reliable, we tried to fight the four threats to reliability. The first one is the subject error: any factor which adversely alters the way in which a participant performs, which we tried to eliminate by conducting interviews after lunch time when people are usually more relaxed. Moreover, we did not focus so much on the way and the reason why they said something and so on, but rather what they talked about in the general sense. Correspondingly, the topic we studied is important for the interviewees, and that makes their views about it more concrete and not something that is changing from day to day. The second is the subject or participant bias: any factors which produce a false response. To protect our research from this threat we conducted interviews in private meeting rooms, we guaranteed anonymity and tried to maintain a fine balance in our interaction with the participants, to make them feel comfortable talking to us but not trying to change their answers to please us. The third is the observer error, i.e. any factor which alters our interpretation as researchers. Both of us were conducting the interviews with the potential of at least two different ways of asking questions to elicit answers. Furthermore, we limited the interviews to two per day so we could concentrate on maintaining the highest possible degree of structure. Finally, there is the observer bias. Here, the fact that we did not have a specific topic before we collected our data was very useful, as well as being two different people interpreting the replies.



We chose a leadership-related topic not only for academic but also personal reasons. The latter stems from our background in business and economic studies. Moreover, we are planning careers in management where leadership is portrayed as one of the essentials of the job. As mentioned by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), qualitative research is connected with high levels of subjectivity. This characteristic makes it fundamental for the researchers to remain critical and judge their interpretations and pre-understandings. We know about the way that our personal ideas, regarding what is pertinent and fascinating, maybe have impacted the procedure (Merriam, 2002). However, we attempted to limit the effect of this hazard by having it as a primary concern throughout the gathering of our data.

Validity

Internal validity is concerned with whether our results are accurate records of the reality we studied or not. Cook and Campbell (1979) listed the factors that can lead a research to be biased or inaccurate, and we picked the ones, related to our research, which might harm the validity of our results. First, ‘testing’ is about changing the results of practice and experience gained by us due to our data gathering techniques. To deal with this threat, we did not raise questions or topics explicitly before our research that might bias our interviewees. The other relevant threat to the internal validity of our research is the ‘instrumentation’, which has to do with our actions as researchers during the research. We conducted the interviews in a small period of time in which we did not acquire any additional theoretical knowledge regarding our research, and maintained the same reflective and critical attitude throughout the whole process.

Generalizability

Generalizability discusses whether our findings can be applied to other settings, such as other organizations (Saunders, et al., 2009). Since we are conducting a case study research in one organization, we do not claim that we produce a theory that is generalizable to all populations. What we are aiming to do with our research is to contribute to existing leadership theory with



insights and concepts. Our goal is that the concept we generated and the insights we gathered to be used by practitioners and academics.

Objectivity

Our research is in an area that we are interested in, and that is the reason we decided to research it. This contained a risk of us to be biased because our interest could mean that we have strong views about it and we might show bias in our interviews which would alter the responses we have received, or our interpretation (Gibbs, 2012). In our course “Strategic Change and Leadership” we learned about the ambiguity and uncertainty that covers leadership. Thus, being aware of the danger of being biased, we are fortunate to be neutral and not carrying opinions, but only questions towards the situation taking place in our case study.

Data Collection Methods

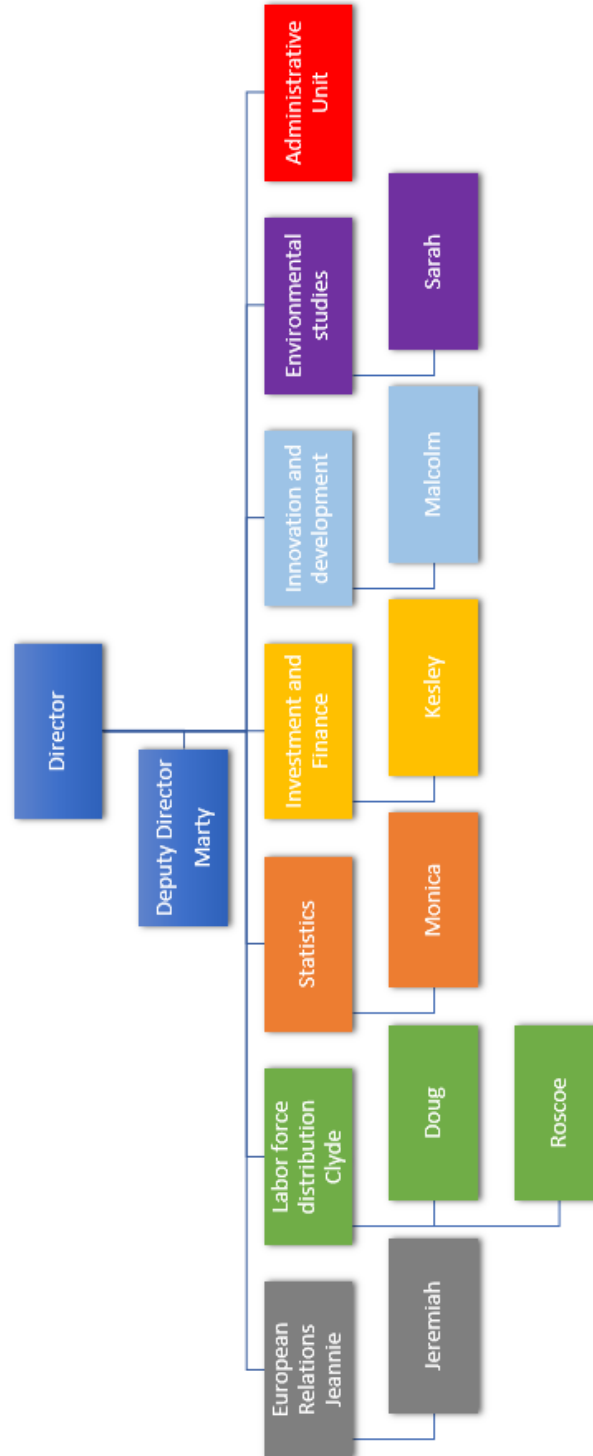
Critical Choice

We used the non-probability technique of quota sampling to select our sample. Quota sampling is an entirely non-random type of a stratified sample (Barnett, 1991), which we used based on the premise that our sample will represent the whole organization (Saunders, et al., 2009). We interviewed the employees of Origins. In the following figure (Figure 4), we explain the hierarchical structure of the company and present the positions of our interviewees. The figure aims to create a clear picture regarding the working relationships they have and give the readers a broader view. The Director of Origins sits at the top of the hierarchy. The next in command is the Deputy Director, and after her, are the managers of the seven units. We interviewed the Deputy Director, two of the managers, and seven employees from six different units. Our sample



comprises of one member from the higher management, two middle managers, and seven knowledge workers. More information regarding the structure of the company will be given in the ‘Case Study’ chapter.

Figure 4



Semi-structured Interviews

In the semi-structured interviews we conducted, we had in mind the topic of leadership and a list of questions to be covered, although these questions varied from interview to interview based on the previous findings. In our interviews, the questions were multifaceted and open-ended while the direction and reasoning of interviewing varied. According to many authors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Healey, 1991; Jankowicz, 2005), semi-structured interviews are most advantageous when the circumstances above are followed.



Chapter 3: Literature Review

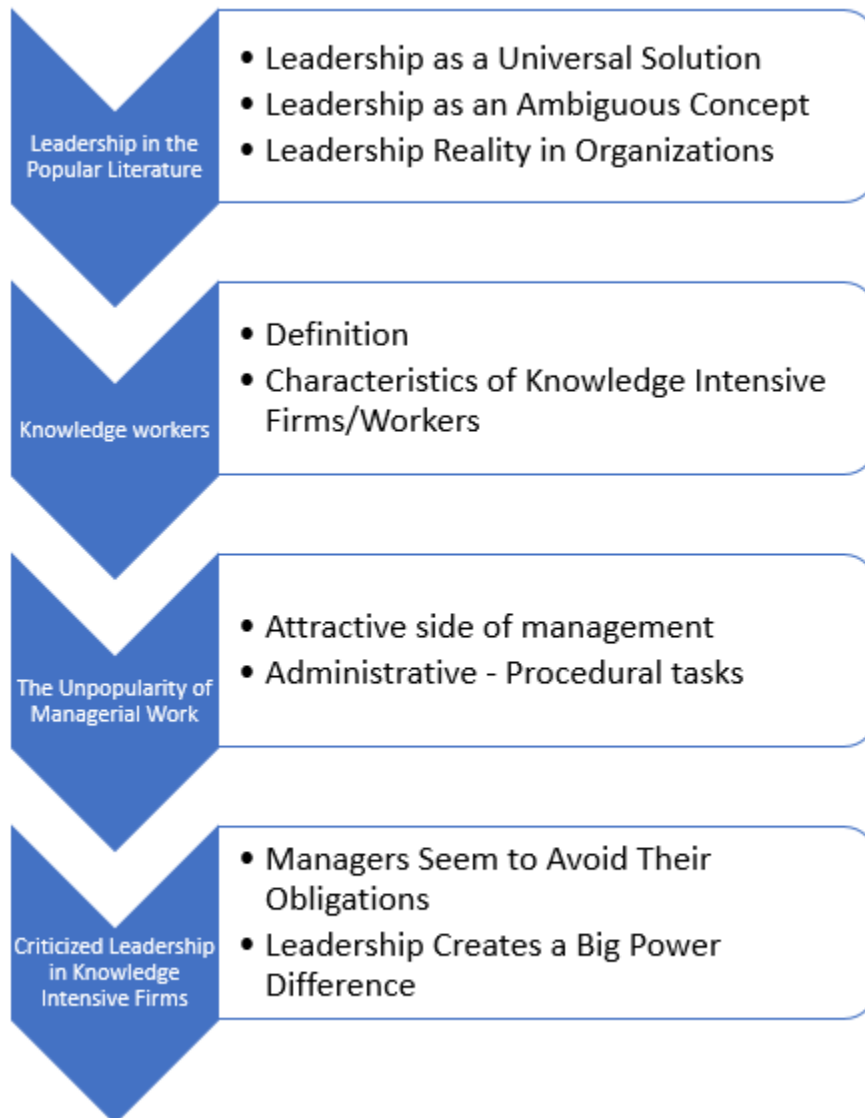


Figure 5

Leadership in the Popular Literature

Leadership is a concept that has been extensively studied by many authors to the point where it has been referred to as: “pop management or, management pornography” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p. 279). However, what has always been the dominating view in the modern business environment, is the assumption among practitioners and leadership scholars that leadership is both desirable and necessary (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). An example of such claim could be given by Kotter’s (2001) famous quote about most U.S corporations being overmanaged and underled. He emphasized the need for companies to develop their capacity to exercise leadership because successful organizations do not wait for leaders to come along. Leadership has gained so much popularity that it has been regarded as a useful obsession for companies concerned with the future (Bennis, 1999). Additionally, leadership has also been described as the one distinct factor that can make a difference in rendering a company admirable (Gill, 2011). Others also labeled leadership as a ‘holy grail’ of contemporary business; all ambitious individuals want to be successful leaders, companies want to hire exceptional leaders, and people want to be led by great leaders (Western, 2013). This infatuation with leadership has led the majority of contemporary organizations to attempt and apply leadership in their organizations (Coca-Cola, 2017; H&M, 2017; IKEA, 2017; P&G, 2017; Scania, 2017). Many companies have invested monetary and time resources in such attempts (Beer, et al., 2016). “Even organizations which have traditionally toned down leadership and emphasized professional competence and effective systems, structures and routines are now assigning it more importance” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p. 42). Leadership is about being an inherently “good” factor which always fixes organizational problems, no matter what the case (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Gardner, 2005).

Leadership as a Universal Solution

Leadership has offered not only a recipe for business success but also a universal solution to various problems encountered. “When faced with major crises, demands for better leadership inevitably appear.” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011, p. 1). This passion for leadership extends to other aspects of the contemporary life. Leadership or the lack of it seems to be responsible for just



about everything. From football clubs to political problems and fixing social issues, leadership is the answer to all. (Grint, 2005; Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011).

Leadership as an Ambiguous Concept

Many authors strive to define leadership to obtain a clearer image of this intriguing concept. Critical writers regard leadership as being an ambiguous concept that is hard to define and impossible to pin down (Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; House & Mitchell, 1975; Yukl, 1999). ‘Leadership’ could have many different meanings since it is rarely defined or used in a specific or careful way (Alvesson, et al. 2017). Multiple academic pieces link this debated ambiguity of leadership with people’s infatuation with it - the elusiveness and slipperiness of the concept make it a kind of inspirational idea without form or shape that can become almost anything to anyone.

Leadership Reality in Organizations

For the purpose of this thesis, we will employ Yukl’s (1989) definition of leadership which states that “leadership is about influencing a range of different things”. Said influence is based on vertical hierarchies constructed by asymmetries regarding intelligence, experience, overview, rhetorical skills and charisma/aura. (Alvesson, et al. 2017) Building this leadership depends on the alignment of meaning. That alignment is a shared understanding of “who is who” and cannot be taken for granted because people in relationships view different things in completely different ways. Several cases may arise from alignment scenarios:

- A. **High-alignment leadership** means that there are shared meanings between leader and followers about the leadership carried out and how to assess the value of the leadership efforts.
- B. **Value-misfit** indicates that the parties have a broadly similar understanding of the leadership conducted, but vary in their assessment of its quality or relevance
- C. **Construction misfit** would indicate that the parties have different views about what goes on, but are still similar in their assessment of the quality and value of the leadership.



D. **Multiple breakdowns** mean that there is a discrepancy in both respects – what is done and how it is evaluated. Thus, there is a high degree of ambiguity and confusion around the leadership.

Variation is always evident within relationships, where some areas or aspects are highly aligned while others are misfits or breakdowns. It is human nature to have misunderstandings, disagreements, and confusions. Nonetheless, to make it work people involved in this relationship need to have some basic common perception of relationships and practices.

Despite the popularity of leadership, there are of course critical voices (e.g. Alvesson & Spicer, 2011, 2014; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016; Tourish, 2014; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Alvesson & Blom (2015) and Alvesson et al. (2017) argue that companies seem to forget that people do not want to be the target of leadership all the time. The term leadership entails that there is a “follower”, which is not the most glamorous term. Additionally, leadership is not the only mode for organizing the work of companies, e.g. Alvesson, et al. (2017) suggest five alternatives to leadership:

1. Management
2. Exercise of (coercive) power
3. Peer influencing (via networks)
4. Group work
5. Autonomy (self-management).

Networking, group work, and autonomy are horizontal hierarchies constructed by informal relations whereas management and exercise of power (similar to leadership) are constructed by vertical forms of hierarchy based on formal power.

All in all, leadership is a practice that is often complex (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011), filled with ambiguity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), gaps (House & Mitchell, 1975), and tensions (Alvesson et al., 2017). But is defined in our case as a combination of vertical and horizontal positions. Vertical positions (hierarchies) are based less on formal rights and horizontal positions based on interpersonal relationships (Alvesson, et al. 2017). Leadership application not only depends on each individual’s personality but also on the type of job they occupy (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016), which is why Alvesson (2004) states that leadership best manages knowledge workers. In the next section, we attempt to define knowledge workers and explore their characteristics.



Knowledge Workers

Definition

Knowledge intensive firms and knowledge workers are terms used extensively by authors in the contemporary business world. According to Alvesson (2004), we live in an era where the shift from blue and white to gold collar workers cannot be ignored. Many academics attempt to define knowledge intensive firms and employees to provide better data on how to manage them in an optimal manner. Alvesson (2004) described them as organizations that offer services of a highly intellectual nature. The core of activities in these companies is based on the intellectual skills of a vast proportion of the workforce deployed in development and sale of products and services (Lee and Maurder, 1997). Myers (2009) argues that the end of labor-intensive manufacturing leaves us with organizations which receive their added value from knowledge work and the creativity they put in rather than the physical power. The more obviously knowledge based businesses such as consultancy, finance, insurance and advertising, healthcare have flourished. However, an accurate definition has not yet been established to precisely pinpoint who is a knowledge worker and who is not (Alvesson, 2004). However, the consensus in the knowledge worker literature is the fact that knowledge intensive firms and knowledge intensive workers share common characteristics (Alvesson, 2004; Myers, 1996; Morawski, 2005).

Characteristics of Knowledge Intensive Firms/Workers

Due to the intangible nature of knowledge work, managing knowledge workers requires different approaches, tools, and methods than managing non-knowledge workers. There is a broadly shared idea that knowledge workers need less autocratic, more autonomous style of management than non-knowledge workers. (Mládková, 2015)



Knowledge workers are experts

Knowledge workers are highly skilled and use intellectual skills in their work. They are competent, specialized in their field, with a large section of the employees typically having an academic education and relevant experience. (Morawski 2005, Lee & Maurder, 1997).

Knowledge workers are autonomous

Knowledge workers have a fairly high degree of autonomy and independence. Morawski (2005) states knowledge workers are well informed and aware of their own values and role. Additionally, knowledge workers exercise their own judgment when it comes to their professional decisions (Mládková, 2015). The individual knowledge worker usually has more expertise of the situation compared to their manager and is more familiar with the problems and issues that he/she is dealing with in his/her everyday life. Superiors may have more general experience and overview but have less understanding of what can and should be done in specific situations. Traditional control measurements in such cases are often not so relevant because of the complexity of the problems and output (Alvesson, 2004).

Knowledge workers want a flat hierarchy

Moreover, the hierarchy is usually different in these organizations, characterized by a flatter structure (Alvesson, 2004; Myers, 1996). Knowledge workers perform best when empowered to make the most of their skills and should be preferably managed as if they were partners (Serrat, 2010). Maliszewska (2013) also states that the more involved a knowledge worker is in an organization, the more effective he/she becomes and that represents a competitive advantage. From an organizational and managerial point of view, heavy reliance on self-determination, downplaying of a single, one-dimensional hierarchy, and the comparatively weak position of top management may lead to quite unconventional organizational relations (Alvesson 1995; Deetz 1998; Hinings et al. 1991; Kunda 1992)



Knowledge work' results are intangible

Subjective and uncertain quality assessments are central in a knowledge worker's life. Alvesson (2004), supports this view by the claim "Symbolic work - using ideas and concepts - is crucial, while the transformation of material objects or the carrying out of tangible services are typically not very significant" (p. 17). Evaluating the performance of a knowledge worker is much more challenging than that of a regular worker. "How can a manager determine whether the knowledge worker's brain cells are being devoted to a task? What's the formula for assessing the creativity and innovation of an idea?" (Davenport, 2013)

Knowledge workers are self-motivated

Retention of key knowledge workers has become critical to organizational well-being in this gold collar epoch (Lee & Maurer, 1997). Studies of motivation on this kind of employees have shown that motivational factors such as mutual benefits, self-efficacy, and enjoyment in helping others were significantly associated with knowledge workers. Consequently, expected organizational rewards did not notably influence employee attitudes and behavior (Lin, 2007). Another study accomplished by Horwitz and Heng (2003) on knowledge workers emphasized that management style, marketing prowess, and similar methods motivate gold collars to do their jobs more than fiscal incentives.

Managing knowledge workers is different

There seem to be a number of circumstances particular to knowledge intensive firms as against other organizations regarding the nature of the work and how it is managed and organized (e.g. Alvesson 1995; Deetz 1997; Løwendahl 1997). Knowledge workers cannot be managed like blue and white collar workers due to their special characteristics (Davenport, 2013). Bennis (1997) compared them to cats because of their autonomy and independence; saying that they can only be managed by a trustful leader (Bennis, 1997; Alvesson, 2004). The specific attributes mentioned above are interconnected with leadership, for example, motivation. This makes it harder to manage and lead knowledge workers. Nowadays, managers, in general, are prioritizing leadership work over their managerial task (Sinclair, 2011). This classification is due to the



unpopularity of managerial responsibilities (Hunt, 2004). Managers perceive managerial activities to be dull and unfit for their leadership role (Holmberg & Tyrstrup, 2010). The next section will develop on literature written about the unpopularity of managerial activities; demonstrating reasons and factors for such phenomenon.

The Unpopularity of Managerial Work

If we ask executives what they do, we will most likely receive significantly different answers (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). It is also likely that the replies will have some common ground. Four words dominated the vocabulary of management since 1916 when it was presented for the first time by Henri Fayol: planning, organization, coordination, and control (Fayol, 2016). These words still give a vague picture of the responsibilities of a manager in the contemporary business world. Mintzberg who recognizes managerial work as rather “diverse, fragmentary, action-oriented [...] and verbal” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2016, p.30) created a framework of managerial roles. After observing managers in 1973, he identified ten roles, performed every day and sorted these into three groups, which he called “Interpersonal roles”, “Information manager”, and “Decision-maker”. In the modern work environment, being a manager adds some prestige (Alvesson & Blom, 2014). Thus, some functions and activities of a manager are preferred more than some other. Motivation and influence are more prevalent than the mere organization of a company or a unit (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Contemporary literature on managerial work strays increasingly from the established models and moves towards the conviction that each manager translates his part in an unexpected way (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2016). Nevertheless, there are some traditional models that aim to demonstrate how an organization is managed most adequately by juggling all errands a manager has. In this chapter, we will divide the responsibilities of a manager into two categories: i) attractive and ii) procedural and perhaps less stimulating. Subsequently, we will discuss both cases.



Attractive side of management

Managers today consider issues such as organizational culture, strategies, and visions of their business as elements of great importance in their daily work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). This trend creates an aversion to the procedural, administrative side of management and most importantly of the extensive micromanagement (Barker, 1997). There is a tendency in the modern view of management that if it is going to be meaningful, it must be related to leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This trend guides managers to deal with issues such as culture, motivation, strategies, and visions. Even if these are more challenging, require a substantial effort and contain a high probability of failure, the majority of managers choose to deal with them because they are closer to the way they see themselves and that makes them feel more important and necessary (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999).

In the range of options where managers' responsibilities lie, we distinguish more abstract concepts such as visions and values (Alvesson & Blom, 2014). The latter have little to do with the practical knowledge that is relevant to managers' work. Even if this knowledge exists, their contribution to the long-term plan of activities is supplementary. We recognize the tendency of managers to be treated as something different than other employees (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). The discussion about strategy seems to be more diverse and mixed than simple tasks, although possibly inconsistent and confusing too. The strategy is a flashy cover for managers' administrative responsibilities, presenting them as something interesting and more important than simple tasks and enhancing managers' self-confidence (Sinclair, 2011). These tasks, or the way they are presented, make a manager a reflective and systematic designer. Accordingly, a virtuous and real manager has no routine tasks but deals with issues of the highest importance (Hunt, 2004). This trend is creating an image of management as a science and a superior profession (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010).

Administrative - Procedural tasks

As we have seen above, managers prefer to deal with specific tasks. The tendency for megalomania makes them want to engage in activities that are ideal (Seifried, et al., 2015). Much of the typical directorial work consists of responsibilities that are probably not as appealing to



most managers, and still are necessary for the smooth operation and development of a successful business (Holmberg & Tyrstrup, 2010). These are administrative issues of procedural work which create a foundation and right conditions for a well-functioning business. These issues may have to do with a range of tasks, from the recruitment of an employee to the development of a budget, and are necessary for the majority of organizations. A manager that follows the procedures that the company has set automatically takes fewer initiatives and instead, he/she supports existing systems and decisions made by someone else (Mumford, et al., 2002). In the eyes of some people, this may not seem so appealing. A large number of studies have demonstrated that directors work at a persistent pace, that their exercises are described by shortness, variety, and intermittency, and that they are deliberately arranged in a way to avert intellectual activities (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Administrative work includes carrying out various standard obligations, including routines, services, communications, and handling of data that connects the company with its environment.

Multiple factors affect the managerial decisions throughout the chain of command. Culture and structure of the organization play a significant role in that case (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). They may encourage the manager to engage in issues that make him feel better about himself or steer him towards participating in less exciting responsibilities. Orders from the board of directors or the owners of a company may conflict with the intentions of lower managers, and then naturally they have to adapt to these commands (Harter, et al., 2006). Likewise, the company's requirements can push managers to a direction other than what they would like. Systems and institutions limit managers as well as other employees, and it is not always easy for them to express themselves as they would like regarding their ideals and opinions.

Managerial activities are portrayed in the literature as being mundane and unpopular, and directors try to avoid them (Holmberg & Tyrstrup, 2010). To the contrary, leadership discourse has always been charged with positive connotations. However, few authors have ventured to question this by trying to demonstrate the negative aspects and potential problems related to leadership (e.g. Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Blom, 2014; Barker, 1997; Grint, 2005; Western, 2013). In the following section, we will be taking a closer look at the theories that critically studied leadership and highlighted flaws with the concept in knowledge intensive firms.



Criticized Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Firms

In this subchapter, we will study the pieces of literature that distinguish the dangers of hasty leadership attempts. There are different types of organizations and businesses in the bibliography, but we focus on studies related to leadership in knowledge intensive companies. Managerial activities, as we explained in the previous subchapter, combine a variety of different tasks. Nevertheless, most managers today seem to avoid administrative tasks, while they are happy to engage in leadership (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). This preference creates problems that will be analyzed below. We classify these problems in two groups:

- Managers seem to avoid their obligations. The idea they have about what they should do differs from what they actually need for the business. This misconception creates the problem of addressing their employees' primary needs. Focusing on the incorrect issues burdens working conditions, processes, and company operations (Hidalgo & Albors, 2008). This phenomenon is frequently recurrent but naturally, does not represent all managers in every business.
- Leadership creates a big power difference between managers and their subordinates. Managers perceive themselves and their work as more important and special than their employees' (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). They place themselves in a prominent position, which leads the managers to distance themselves from the employees.

We will discuss these two topics below based on what has been written by academics and popular media

Managers Seem to Avoid Their Obligations

Managers recognize and interpret the concept of leadership in a variety of ways. The manner in which they perceive this vague idea primarily affects their daily behavior and this, in turn, influences business operations (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). Some managers seem to be caught up



by the popular tendency of managers becoming prominent personalities whom employees admire and are inspired by (Gordon, 2011). Moreover, according to these trends, directors should be heroic and “‘proactive,’ visionary and strategic and taking charge while being detached from the morally inferior management of detail” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 982). Next to this tendency towards visionary directors a tactical role, there is another tendency of aversion against micromanagement. The absence of micromanagement often refers to a real leader (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). The combination of the attractive image of a leader with vision and the repulsive image of a micromanager leads more managers to remove some tasks that may be less appealing (Nicholls, 1988). As a result of some necessary procedures for the operation of the company which may be less attractive and exciting depart from the focus of the directors' interest. Therefore, the most modern and appealing image of leadership leads to neglect of bureaucratic tasks, but such routines are needed, even in knowledge intensive companies.

A manager in a knowledge intensive firm is surrounded by the workers' elite, the golden collar employees (Alvesson, 2004). The superficial task of an administrator is to manage concepts ideas values visions and strategic directions (Trice & Beyer, 1993). In the knowledge intensive industry, it is dangerous and common to be attracted by leadership (Deetz, 1998). Managers in these businesses surrounded by all these specialists might have the need to feel important. The need to create value for themselves so that they are not prolonged by their inferiors can lead to the quest of what is ideologically attractive (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). The turn towards this quest happens since the bureaucratic and usual procedures, even if necessary, maybe tend to diminish the appreciation of the contribution and role of the managers who do not occupy ‘leading roles’.

Grandiosity

The pressure that managers undergo to become leaders makes them submissive to the powers of popularity (Alvesson, 2013). Most of the time, people tend to inflate their achievements and activities to the point where it detaches from reality. The temptation for someone to boast about their job duty is attractive. Grandiosity and competition to appear the most prestigious of the mass is a risk for businesses and organizations (Alvesson, 2013). The managers face the dilemma



of either giving in to grandiosity or taking up their duties by holding a sincere and realistic picture of themselves. The extended engagement with grandiosity contains hidden complications and traps for the players of its game. Leadership fantasies of ambitious potential leaders make them vulnerable to contradictions and confusion that follow.

Leadership Creates a Big Power Difference

Reduced freedom and innovation

We have seen that leadership, in addition to solving problems, can also be a source thereof. The existence of leadership either presupposes or strengthens a vertical form of hierarchy based on influence (Alvesson et al., 2017). We have seen above that knowledge workers are distinguished for their autonomy. Therefore, knowledge intensive firms flourish in the presence of a flat hierarchy (Alvesson, 2004). Efforts to apply leadership when it is unnecessary create problems in this kind of businesses (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). When managers insist on being leaders, we have a disagreement and failure to achieve consistency. Knowledge workers may be particularly prone to the denial of bureaucratic control and the need for autonomy may motivate a preference for leadership over traditional management (Alvesson, 2004). Independence and leadership are seen as positive concepts, but in this industry, only the first is unquestionably necessary (Hackman et al., 1975). Moreover, leadership results in diminished freedom for the employees. Managers in knowledge intensive firms have less power than in other kinds of businesses. Power balance is different; which is something that can put a manager in an uncomfortable position since on top of the reduced authority, it is common for managers to have deficiencies in knowledge compared to his/her specialized subordinates (Deetz, 1998).

The coexistence of leadership and autonomy includes an inherent contradiction as leadership by definition requires followers or (Palmer, et al., 2017). This relationship automatically places the followers in an inferior and dependent position to the manager (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016). Therefore, a form of leadership, regardless of how mild the control mechanisms are, often entails restrictions on the autonomy of the lower-ranked colleagues. Leadership usually means confining diversity, creative work, and thoughts while promoting mass creation and uniformity in thinking



and action (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Subsequently, the followers end up depending on the leader for stimuli and his/her ideas about how the work should be conducted (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Even if leadership limits itself to providing only vision and direction, liberty and autonomy of the worker remain significantly curtailed.

Leadership Does Not Guarantee a Utopia

The knowledge workers' need for freedom is the quality that makes them unfit candidates for the position of followers. Coupled with the sense of inferiority that a manager may have (due to lack of specialized knowledge, as elaborated above), can contribute to forced and overly intense efforts at leadership. The absence of voluntary compliance, on its part, limits the prospects of having an effective leader in the organization (Palmer, et al., 2017). As becomes evident, the relationship between leadership and autonomy is fraught with tension and conflicts (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). This controversy must be taken into account when dealing with the theory of leadership that promises only positive outcomes.



Chapter 4: Case Study of Origins



Figure 6

The following section offers an overview of the company where we collected empirical data for our thesis. Its purpose is to provide a better understanding of how we approached the study of our topic.

Overview of the Organization

Origins is a consulting organization established in 1999, that deals with business development projects. It is in charge of projects that aim to improve the quality of life of the people living in the region. Their services include: assisting businesses in making investment decisions and helping them grow, investing in local entrepreneurial businesses in increasing their competitiveness through training and personnel development; and assisting employers in matching them with suitable candidates. Employees in the organization collaborate with colleges, universities, public bodies and private organizations to successfully accomplish their tasks.

The company also participates in international collaborations that could be beneficial for the economic growth of the geographic area.

Company Structure

When Origins first started operating 20 years ago, it consisted of 40 employees. Today, 129 employees work at Origins, divided into seven sections (See Figure 7). These divisions are headed by a middle manager. The latter's superior is the deputy director of Origins; who reports to the director of the organization. Different units have different functions. Those are as follows:

1. Unit 1: European Relations
2. Unit 2: Labor force distribution
3. Unit 3: Statistics unit
4. Unit 4: Investment and finances
5. Unit 5: Innovation and development
6. Unit 6: Environmental Studies
7. Unit 7: Administrative unit



Unit 1: European relations, deals with matters concerning the organization's projects funded and implemented with the EU.

Unit 2: Labor force distribution, works on finding methods to match employees with compatible organizations.

Unit 3: Statistics unit supports other units with data analyses concerning various fields.

Unit 4: Investment and finances, responsible for assisting entrepreneurs with starting new businesses and assist locally established organizations.

Unit 5: Innovation and development unit launches projects that aim to introduce new technologies and concept which will advance the region

Unit 6: Environmental studies, deals with the environmental sustainability of the area.

Unit 7: Administrative unit, is mainly concerned with administrative tasks.

Specialized Employees

Employees at Origins are specialized according to their respective fields/units. All employees in Origins are university graduates, holding degrees in the areas they operate. For example, employees at the European relations unit hold degrees in International Relations, International Law or European Studies. Employees at the labor force distribution unit are either Business Administration graduates or Psychology majors. Every employee has a concrete knowledge of his/her responsibilities and is highly trained in academic as well as practical aspects of the work. The employees are predominantly knowledge workers with intangible results and a high degree of autonomy.

The Origin's culture is powered by the shared love for the region and the passion for their work. Having a position that is well-aligned with their studies is one of the main positive points about their job, according to the employees.



Employees report that their direct managers do not participate in the decision making related to their projects. In Origins, middle manager's primary function is to report information to the upper management.

Human Resources Survey

Spring life is the name of the survey circulated yearly at Origins. It is a standardized method from the human resources department to receive feedback from employees. Many workers have informed us that sections rating averages vary greatly. Green in this survey means good; Yellow signifies average and Red conveys bad results. The survey portion covering life/work balance and job satisfaction has been predominantly marked green for three consecutive years. To the contrary, goal setting and communication have been remarkably rated red for the past few surveys.

Restructuring

During September 2016, Origins underwent a major organizational restructuring. A managerial layer was removed in favor of a flatter organization (See figure 8). Origins were separated into two major units: labor force and environmental. The new reorganization unified the units under the leadership of the deputy director. This increased the responsibilities of the middle managers who now deal with their previous superiors' tasks. Similar to other restructurings, many employees were shuffled around, replaced or hired. Jeannie, who has been working for Origins for the past ten years was promoted to European relations manager during the restructuring. She narrates that her coworkers encouraged her to apply for the position.

- Clyde, on the other hand, is reassured to have stayed manager at his own department of labor force distribution. After occupying the position for 13 years, Origins is like a second home to him.

Things were also changing on the employee level:

- Jeremiah has been at the European Relations department for one year. He is happy his position is unchanged, he is still getting used to things at Origins.



- Doug spent three years in the Labor Force Distribution unit. Although he is still in the same position, he thinks it is time to move on.
- Roscoe, who acted as a replacement for her boss when he left for parental leave, also remained in the same department but is skeptical about Origins' future.
- Monica has been transferred to a new department after working in the Environmental Studies department for seven years. She thinks restructurings are the upper management's hobby.
- Malcolm has been moved to the innovation and development unit. He is adapting well considering it is his second restructure at Origins and fourth unit mobilization.
- Sarah loves her job at the Environmental Studies unit. She has been anxious towards changing departments but feels relatively safe to stay in the same department.
- Kelsey is extremely optimistic towards the restructure. In her opinion, the flatter structure facilitates her work at the Investment and Finance department where she has been hired recently.



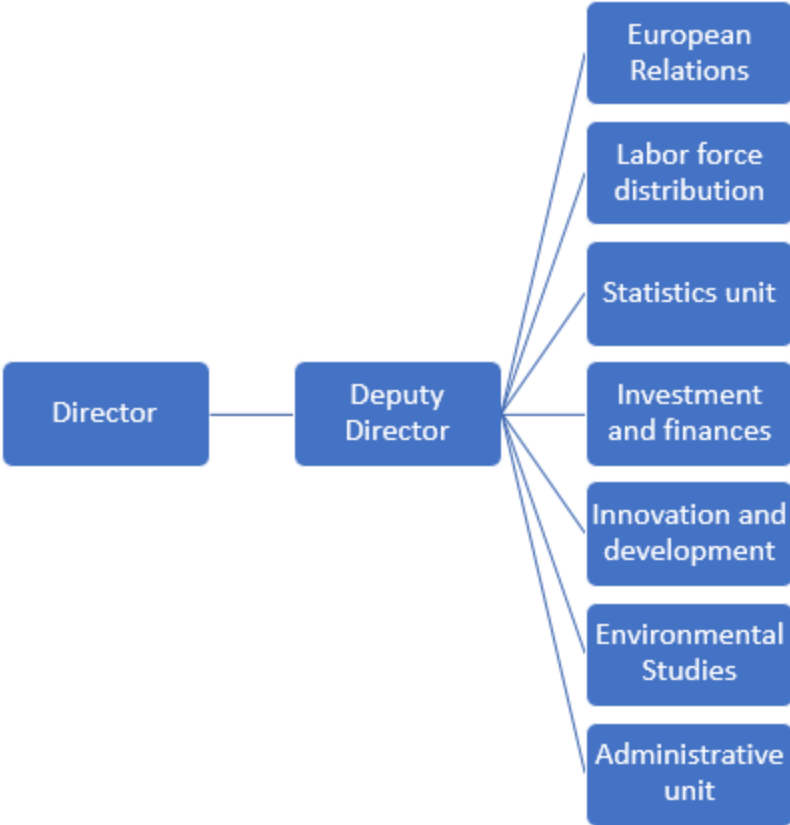


Figure 7



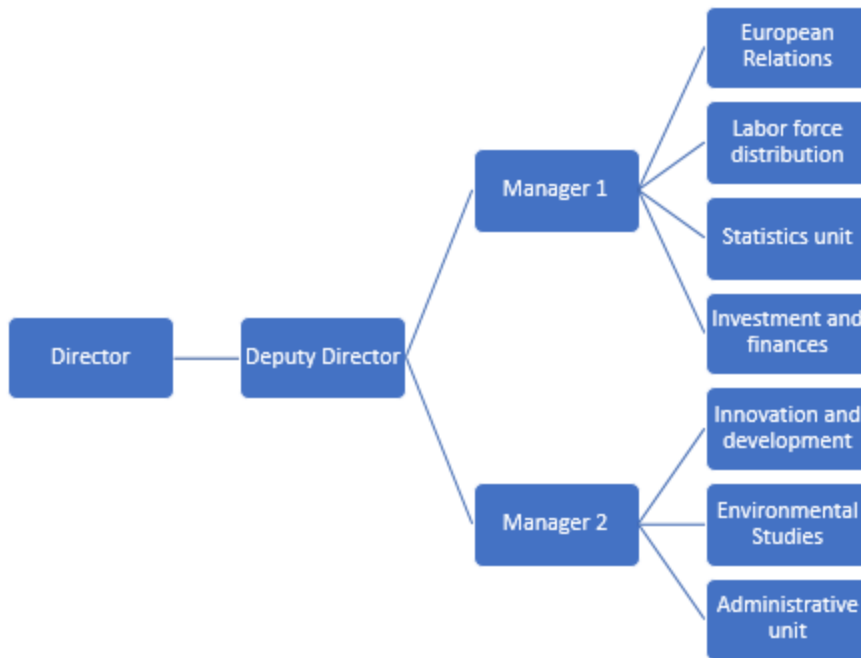


Figure 8

Leadership development program

One of the many outcomes of the mentioned restructuring is a mandatory leadership development program, to be attended by the heads of units. That program aimed to unify the previously divided units and stimulate inter-managerial relations. Although the program lasted more than six months and occupied large portions of managers' schedules, the majority of the employees' state that they failed to perceive any difference in the aftermath of the program, whether related to their direct responsibilities or the relations with the manager. Employees seem to think that the added leadership is not necessary to their work, which intrigued us into diving deeper in this issue.

Chapter 5: Findings



Figure 9

In this chapter, we aim to explore the significance of leadership at Origins. We subsequently explore our research questions. This will be done by analyzing the testimonials of our interviewees. First, we go over the statements of knowledge workers regarding their description of the characteristics of their work. Then we present the needs the knowledge workers have. After, we cover the managers' points of view concerning their responsibilities towards their subordinates. Finally, we examine what knowledge workers think about the manner their managers fulfill their tasks.

Job Description of a Knowledge Worker at Origins

We will begin the presentation of our findings by providing an insight into the characteristics of knowledge workers of Origins. This will be done by introducing their self-descriptive statements. We will start with what they told us regarding their motives. We will proceed with the employees explaining about the autonomy they have in their work and what influence this has on their performance.

Employees Autonomy at Origins

When interviewed about their job, Origins employees described motivation as being a central driver for what they do. The excerpts presented below display high levels of autonomy and the passion experienced by employees towards their projects and occupation. Autonomy is a very common subject in the Origins employees' jobs, according to Sarah:

“If I would set a percentage of how much of the work I do in a project and how much manager knows or contributes... I would say 95% to 99% is my share of the work.”

Malcolm who said that he likes his job for the following reasons:

“You need to be independent, and you have the freedom to do that. You will have to solve your problems during the project, and you must be prepared for that.”

Malcolm and Sarah talked about how working at Origins is highly reliant on autonomy. As a knowledge worker, you will have to solve your own problems since the managers do not interfere with the projects.



Another employee that talked about self-reliance is Monica while being asked about her job, she responded:

“We work with highly sophisticated jobs here; it is impossible for the boss to keep all the details about all of them. And when you have 18 other employees who have details in different kind of areas it is very difficult. It is up to you to figure it out by yourself.”

In this passage, Monica addresses the issue of how her manager is too busy to keep up with different subjects, and problems presented by her coworkers. She even says that everyone is on his or her own because her superior cannot oversee the work of all the 18 employees.

In addition to being independent, employees also explained how their own reasons motivate them.

Employee Motivation at Origins

When asked about motivation, Kelsey said:

“It is interesting because it takes a big subject of our society and I feel it is possible that I can make an impact. When you help, people get jobs; you are really contributing to society”.

In that case, the job motivation for Kelsey was not generated by a certain leader from the organization, but from the humanitarian nature of her job.

We discussed motivation with Malcolm which talked about the perfect pairing between himself and his job.

“My job is very people oriented and I am very sociable myself, which motivates me and pushes me. I am extremely happy that my actual job fits with the way I am as a person.”



Employee Jeremiah, on the other hand, indicates that he is motivated by the networking aspect he has in her job, he is more attracted to the potential relationships that can be established from it and can come in handy for future projects.

“I like establishing connections, and this job is perfect for that. You get to meet significant people who help you build a robust network in case you needed help with a future project.”

Doug stated during his interview that he is motivated by the learning potential from his job and the different challenges he is faced with:

“I really think I am still in this company after a long time because of how many various and different projects I worked with. You do not just work on one project for the rest of your life. But you get to experience a various array of topics that interest you. Same can be said about a topic that does not. You can still change topics after a while.”

The diversity of topics and subjects that Doug can deal with is the reason why he is driven and is continuously motivated to perform at the best of his ability. He would not like to commit to a single topic or area to work on for a long time; instead, he prefers change.

An enjoyable environment is a reason why Monica is motivated to work. She likes the atmosphere at Origins and her colleagues which she considers as people she can talk to, and it helps her perform her job better by feeling a sense of belonging to her community.

“I work well because it’s a good atmosphere, people do not fight, and you can actually talk to everyone.”

According to Sarah, she is satisfied because of the feedback she receives from stakeholders, she is satisfied by her people-oriented job and credits her motivation to that:

“I am happy about the job when I get feedback from external partners, and we have a project, and then you have a good meeting, and you think that you connect all the different people from all different organizations and say let's do this together.”



Monica also states:

“People around here don’t do this kind of job for the money, we do it because we love our jobs, we have freedom, and we love helping people.”

Despite the demonstrated affection and motivation towards their jobs, employees at Origins discussed multiple obstacles that challenged their jobs as knowledge workers.

Intangibility of Results

One of the main inhibitors of motivation at Origins is the lack of tangibility and measurability for most of the projects and their respective results. Employees throughout the Origins chain discussed this problem, starting with Marty who mentioned:

“We mostly produce intangible results but we need to measure them in order to get investments, and that is not always easy to work with questions we work with.”

In this quote, Marty acknowledges the difficulty that intangible results pose on employees at Origins when it comes to motivation and frustration.

Sarah mentioned the same subject:

“How can we measure from one year to another if we have enhanced or improved or moved forward with the EU relations, other than an indication from happy stakeholders. But how can we measure that happiness? It is hard for me to put a measurable standard on it and it makes my job harder. “

Malcolm discussed his discontent about a similar subject:

“Working with non-tangible, long-term projects can also have a negative side because sometimes you got a sense that you work but you're not doing anything nothing is actually changing that is how it seems so it kind of discourages you.”

Doug also claims:



“It can never be one hundred percent clear in this type of organization because we don't produce car tires, for instance, we will never have this type of clarity.”

Kelsey likewise reported working with intangible results:

“That is also a negative side because sometimes you got a sense that you work but you're not doing anything nothing is actually changing that is how it seems so this is a positive and negative aspect.”

Remarks

According to the interviews, employees at Origins are motivated by a number of factors: their jobs are aligned with their studies, personal preferences and the autonomy they get in their job. What is interesting for us in the Origins case is the employees never mentioned their managers or the higher management leadership while discussing the subject of motivation. All motivation found at Origins is being generated individually by employees based on their personal reasons. The flexible work hours, good atmosphere and connections are the main influencers to them. The employees described how little their managers had to do with their projects and how they perceived them as having a supportive function rather than a leading one. This independence in their jobs might have shifted their views of their managers from being reliant on them to a more self-governed view of motivation and work. Employees mentioned intangibility of results as being a demotivator and an obstacle.

After covering the knowledge workers' job description, motivation and few challenges; we moved on to asking them about their demands regarding management. Having heard the previous statements concerning job independence and autonomy, we knew the findings would be interesting.



Employees at Origins want Management

In this chapter, we explore the knowledge workers' requirements. They spoke to us with good intention about how management seems to be beneficial to them. They also described that they need better goal setting as well as clear communication. After the employees' statements about what they need, we will compare how bosses perceive their subordinates' needs.

Management is Cherished

As the majority of workers reported, they are autonomous and find motivation in their own tasks. According to Jeremiah, leadership is not an urgent matter of interest for the organization. He also states that there are managerial procedures that are considered necessary and are being neglected by managers for the organization to function properly.

“I think leadership doesn't matter so much. It is a lot about managing and not so much about leadership. And the pressure to be more of a leader in the unit management level shouldn't burden them. While on the other hand, they should be expected to oversee procedures in order for everything to run smoothly.”

The optimized balance between a structure in the organization and freedom in their way of working is what knowledge workers are looking for. This need is really evident when, for instance, we look at what Malcolm is looking for, from his manager.

“I really think that the manager should see every employee and see what framework the employee needs. So right now, and what I generally think of, I really want management. And all levels of managements to give me the goal, the core, the framework, and trust that I have the freedom to develop my own piece of this but I can only do that knowing where it fits in.”

Malcolm is emphasizing the importance of management over leadership. He explains that the right management will give him a fertile soil for his work to flourish by enabling him to work efficiently without imposing the hierarchy by taking away his autonomy, but by giving him



liberty and confidence. This acknowledgment that management is of high significance can also be observed when we are asked about his manager Malcolm answers:

“I am thinking when I look at her that she has very good knowledge in the organization, very good network, very professional in executing at the administrative, getting things done, the way and she knows those questions very well, kind of the checkbox criteria kind.”

An additional interviewee, Monica, suggests that with the right management the organization delivers better results. Her manager is taking into consideration the assets and preferences of her subordinates before assigning the tasks which leads to better outcomes.

“I would say she has a, how do you say, from a personal point of view she tries to give each person room and work that works for that person the best. This specific task is best for you, and that works for you, and the organization functions better.”

Monica stresses the importance of giving each person instruction for every single task. As she says, a clear, communicated goal is needed.

“I would think that without good management the organization will fall apart and different units will do strange things. You do not need to have a military person that stands beside you and tells you what to do, but you need communication, and some activity plan and actually follow it and not change it after five minutes.”

A high level of collaboration between knowledge workers is needed at Origins. There are times where this collaboration is impeded by managers who seem not to support it. Malcolm considers this issue to be of high significance. He also admits that support should not come only from individual managers, but from the organization as a whole.

“I work with a lot of employees; it is also really important that their manager enables them to be part of my thing. So, in this manner, my individual manager has not been the only important manager for me it has not been a problem if my manager lacks something, to me it's a problem if the whole structure is lacking something.”



Malcolm sums the situation up by explaining that he wants his manager to remove obstacles that make him question her role in the organization and keep on working to maintain a flat organization that promotes collaboration.

“What I want from a manager is more communication and a goal that is clear for everyone. I don’t want there to be a hesitation. And if it’s possible I want clearer communication, so it makes it easier for me to prioritize. It’s not so much just my manager, but the whole management that needs to have a clear and shared goal.”

We realize that most of our actors repeat that they need goals, communication, and routines. The existence of this pattern is the reason we will present the findings for these two categories separately.

Unambiguous goals

Origins employees, express an uproar regarding the goal setting capability of their managers. As Doug mentions, the yearly survey proves that the majority of employees do not have a clear picture of what they are working towards. The lack of clear goals does not stop at the results of the survey but raises an issue that the knowledge workers worry about.

“We have a very big problem in our organization as regional development, because we have the survey of the year and how to set up goals to strive for, is pretty bad. How goal-oriented we are. We talk a lot about it. People are annoyed by that.”

The view of the problem of goal-setting is also expressed by Roscoe who connects it to the job run smoothly. Our interviewee supports clear goals would comfort him in a general sense.

“Many negative parts of the organization are related to management. I think that the main problem we have is the quality of the goals. We need to know where you're going and so which tasks to prioritize. This would enhance our work efficiency and maybe outcomes. But most importantly, I know that I would feel better.”

One of the employees, Sarah, says that the lack of clear direction creates uncertainty and insecurity.



“Sometimes I want guidelines, and I want someone to show me this direction, to pinpoint things for me. The rest depend on me but without guidelines...I can be autonomous, but sometimes I feel insecure.”

Apparent Communication

Most employees say they want clear communication in the workplace. Communication is vital to Malcolm who thinks that it is necessary for his daily routine. Without clear communication, obstacles are emerging reducing the efficiency of his work. He apparently expresses the notion as mentioned above by saying:

“I am pretty sure that I want more communication than now...! In the sense that everything we need to know in the day to day work is clear and transparent. It would be for the best to avoid speed bumps like misunderstandings and misinterpretations.”

Moreover, Malcolm connects the communication with the productivity of a knowledgeworker.

“Trying to collaborate and set bridges for me it has been a task, but maybe now there is a bigger ambition to make it more formal or structured across the department which I think is good. For now, we found our way, but we also thought that it should come naturally from the upper management.”

Another knowledge worker, Monica, expressed the desire of clear communication from the upper management. She has the expectation that the managers inform their subordinates of what decisions they took.

“Personally, I hope that the new meeting with all the managers should be better at sharing information and telling the rest of the employees what they have decided clearly. Because before the restructure there were four different meetings with managers and pretty much nothing came out of them.”

When we asked about her manager, she showed her appreciation towards her communication skills. She answered:



“This is not a difficult question. I think she is very good! She is very easy to communicate with, and I have a clear picture of what she wants from me.”

She also added accessibility as an important factor:

“I would say accessibility is important that you can talk to the person and get some kind of reply and the fact that the manager knows the area the field you are working, but I also think it is important to be clear. Don't say something on the side and do something from the other side you need to stick to your word.”

The inconsistency in communication does not only block the productivity but also creates frustration. Roscoe is confused about what to do and what not to do.

“I don't know if I really feel that I was always encouraged to do various things or if it was just accepted. For example, I don't really feel it is so encouraged to collaborate. It differs a lot because sometimes when I work with someone else, my manager says I cannot put time on this. It is a bit annoying not to know what you are supposed to do and what not to.”

Finally, Jeremiah supports that lack of communication creates problems with his daily tasks.

“I think in that sense is quite flat which I think is positive, but sometimes you can also feel that our day to day tasks are not communicated clearly in that sense.”

Communicating with the upper management is not a new issue to Origins, according to Monica:

“Yes, they are not sitting on another floor or in a locked room or something like that so in that way it is informal, but you need to have something extremely important to address them, it's some kind of formal distance, and they are always busy.”

Roscoe explained how the yearly survey, which is a form of communication between employee and manager is like:

“In the surveys, you assess only your direct manager, and we asked several times to assess upper management, but they won't let us do it.”



Employees at Origins seem to be having challenges when attempting to communicate with their upper management either verbally or formally. After listening to the staff's requests, we decided to ask the managers what they think their employees are demanding in an attempt to find out their point of view and a compatibility of answers with their subordinates'.

What the Managers are Saying

One of the managers we interviewed, Clyde, head of the labor force distribution unit, distinguishes between managing and micromanaging. He separates the organization's managers at Origins into two categories: micromanagers and "broader picture" managers. He noted that employees prefer broader managers:

"Some managers are more into details, and others are broader. I think that is just being different between us managers and I think some of these managers have more problems now because of the change in the organization, the units have become larger. Micromanaging might have worked when you had a small group, but with a bigger group it's impossible, and people don't like it. "

The Deputy Director, Marty, indicated the existence of insufficiently enabling environment for cooperation across departments. The same problem has been stated by employees previously. She acknowledges that culture is more important than leadership for changing major matters in the organization. She describes attempts to promote cooperation between the departments of the company.

"There is this expression 'culture eats leadership for breakfast'. In order to change the culture, the managers underwent a leadership development program so all the heads of units together can form a new leadership group. This happened because before their cooperation was not formalized and this created some problems. It is, also, very good to have this education as well and get to know each other apart from board meetings."



Jeannie, who is a newly appointed manager, reported that employees ask for her guidance. They have frequent appointments with her to discuss various issues, while at the same time their work is characterized by extensive freedom.

“They come to me for guidance, and we have regular appointments where we discuss where things are going, but they have a lot of freedom within their field of tasks.”

Jeannie recognizes that each person has different needs. Therefore, she says that she adjusts her management style depending on each person.

“I would say the demands vary from person to person. Some people prefer to have strict rules on what to do and what not to do. They ask: ‘What are the roles? ‘Why are we doing things?’ and I follow up. Other people are free thinkers if you can put it that way. Personality wise there is a very wide span, and that affects the way I can coach them or what kind of support they want from me.”

She understands that employees are experiencing a problem with lack of communication. She claims that she is trying to be clear and give as much information as possible. This way she is trying to make them feel informed and tries to solve the communication problem.

“I can understand how employees feel there is a lack of communication from the upper management. Especially when you talk about the reorganization, not everyone was happy about how that process took place. I think it is important for the process to be open. I really try to forward information to my team members that I think they should know, there are things that you are not allowed to tell, but I do tell them the things to make them feel informed.”

Remarks

In this chapter, we presented employees’ hopes as well as managers' views on what employees want. There are some differences in how staff and managers perceive the situation. On the whole, Origin’s knowledge workers seem to appreciate good management. They believe it is necessary for the company to function properly. They have respect for the administrative type of



work. Typically, they say it is vital for the managers to have the knowledge of the company and to know the procedural pieces well. Employees believe that with the right management the company performs better. The two biggest problems employees are reporting is the lack of concrete targets and the difficulties of communication. We believe that these two problems might be overlapping. We see employees asking of the company managers to define common goals. Without this goal and direction, there are problems, and the workers feel troubled and insecure. The lack of a goal is associated with poor communication. Bad communication creates problems in simple procedures that are necessary for the company. Also because of the specificity of their work and their autonomy, knowledge workers cannot operate freely without a clear objective that has been explicitly communicated to them. We see that the organization is pursuing a flat hierarchy, but without clear communication, the power difference grows. An important part of communication is how accessible managers are. The problems as mentioned above do not originate from individual managers but are encountered all over the business.

Managers for their part recognize to some degree what employees want but struggle to pinpoint exact issues. They agree that employees do not want someone to continuously micromanage by providing detailed instructions on each step of his or her work. They also see that there is a problem in cooperation between the departments. They recognize this issue, but apparently, the attempts they make to overcome it fall short of introducing tangible solutions. The company sends managers to leadership development programs, but this does not help to make employees' collaboration easier. Here we come across a paradox. The deputy director tells us that culture is more important than leadership while at the same time efforts are being made to improve leadership rather than change the culture. We see that managers recognize that each employee may have different needs, but that does not mean they are trying to cover them. Only Jeannie said she is aware of the communication problem and for her part, she is trying to be as clear as possible. None of the managers reported trying to solve the issue of the non-existent goals. This lack of attempt is peculiar since this problem has existed for years and appears every year in the annual survey conducted by the Department of Human Resources Management but with no reaction. From the above, we conclude that leadership is much less important than proper management. Unfortunately, only employees seem to recognize the importance of good management and their managers are leaning towards the fallacy of leadership by describing it as their solution.



After exploring what managers think and employees want, we decided to investigate actual actions performed by the directors. These efforts will assist us in comparing them with the workers' actual demands and if they are being met.

Leadership Illusions

This chapter discusses how managers describe their roles in Origins. The managers we interviewed claimed that leadership is essential for the organization as well as for the employees. Below, we will examine the answers of three managers and their perception of leadership. What is interesting is that they talk about promoting leadership and being leaders themselves. In addition, they believe they know what their employees want and try to deliver on their requests.

Marty

Marty expresses a necessary and certain view of leadership. She says that a leader should serve as an example for his/her employees, emphasizing the importance of values and reassurance for employees.

“I think you have to lead by example. It is good to have a value driven leadership and be trustworthy. You have to feel something for what we're working with, and I often talk about that. It is a good way of creating a motivation. If we want to be competitive, it is management's issue to move employees.”

As we see she does not see that employees are self-motivated, and she perceives their motivation as one of the management's tasks. Marty explains how the right leader must bear in mind the leadership position and responsibility to move on his/her employees:



“Even if you're in the middle of a big project and you have to work with the reports and Excel sheets, you always have to have in mind that your role is to be a leader. That requires a special leadership and in the long run that will make us stronger and stronger.”

Here we clearly see Marty believing that leadership is the only way for the company's advancement.

Jeannie

Jeannie tells us that she separates the concepts of manager and leader. She states that during her tenure as an employee she was an informal leader to her associates, which makes her feel more like a leader than a manager in her current position as the head of the unit. It is evident that she recognizes the two-way relationship that leadership requires.

“I do make a distinction between management and leadership. I would like to think that I am both a manager and a leader. I was more of an informal leader of the team before I had the formal management tasks and position. I know that anybody can be appointed as a manager, you need the employees to be with you. The employees are the ones who decide who is a leader and well many of them came to me for guidance before I gained the formal position.”

Jeannie continues to say she sees herself as a coach leader. She accepts the expertise of her employees and at the same time believes that leadership is needed in this organization. With leadership, she says, there is a vision and support for the employees when they need to make difficult decisions.

“I am more of a coaching leader. I think leadership is still necessary for a knowledge intensive organization. Because it is also important to have someone to create a vision where we are going and have someone standing behind you, motivating you and coaching you in difficult decision-making processes.”

She also spoke about other leadership roles that she occupies in the organization:



As a leader, I have to maintain a relationship with other organizations with whom we work together, Partners in other countries and try to make our company bigger. I have many issues with which I work and influence other parts of the organization. These are the jobs for a leader, and I must be worthy of my role.”

She states that she has limited duties as a leader because of the specialization of her employees. She perceives as her responsibility to train each person on her team to realize their potential as much as possible and to try to make their duties enjoyable rather than burdensome.

“It is always important to listen to the employees, and I know that I am not always right. Some of them are more experts than me. I have quite an independent group of coworkers that have been working here at quite some time and are experienced in the organization, they know what they are doing, and I have full respect for them. I try to influence and get the best out of the people. I motivate them and have more of a coaching leadership.”

Jeannie seems to be reflective, but she insists on her role as a leader. She does see a need in motivating and influencing her employees. This is intriguing because one of her subordinates, Jeremiah, denied this need.

Clyde

Clyde considers the improvement and development of employees as an important task for a leader.

“I need to get the best of the coworkers that I have, and I can help them grow and develop.”

He points out that he is consistently leading and this is necessary to be an example of how employees should carry and work.

“I am leading all the time, everywhere. I think it’s like when you are raising children: what you say should be the same as what you do. When I tell my coworker, you need to do that you need to get there, then I need to act accordingly as well, or else if I don’t, they



will do as I do. I think it is really important to be a good example for how we are going to work and how we interact with other organizations.”

He considers himself to be a coach and describes his style.

“I think, and I hope that they think I am a coach more than a tough leader. I think I am a leader that is always there for them and that’s because I try not to go into details and balance between taking the whole picture and being there for the co-workers and coach them or to be in details and projects then you have no time for other matters.”

Finally, he says that as he gives feedback to his employees about how they perform and expects the same from them. Feedback is something that will give him the right direction in how to act as a leader.

"Yes, coworkers want feedback. Especially good feedback. But I think in some way managers need to get feedback as well. It is not easy to know if you are in the right direction or to change things if you don't know what to change.

Remarks

The assistant director says a leader must act as an exemplar for the employees and inspire them with his demeanor. He thinks that it is necessary for each manager to be a leader and to bear in mind constantly this principle even when it is not evident. A good manager must always inspire his employees by being a leader.

Jeannie, seems to enjoy her new role. It appears that she prefers to see herself as a leader rather than as a manager. We see that Jeannie recognizes that there is a necessity to be followers along with leaders in a leader-follower relationship showing a realistic and down-to-earth view of management. Jeannie also admits that her employees are more knowledgeable in certain areas and she sees no problems with that. She says that the leadership style she exercises is a coach leader. The interviewee believes that leadership is essential to the company and that it gives meaning and direction to employees. Jeannie describes her role as a leader, giving the description of the function of a manager. Although she considered herself as an informal leader before her



promotion, she does not mention the reasons why her former associates relied on her in the past to describe why she used to be a leader.

Clyde on the other hand, in contrast to Jeannie, has had the role of a manager for many years. He believes he needs to be a leader at all the time. Marty also mentions his preference to lead his employees by example. He says that his employees are expecting to see his behavior to imitate him. The common feature with Jeannie is that he also sees himself as a coach leader, unlike someone who is feared by employees, his goal is to improve and develop them. He states that he is making an effort to be there for his employees when they need it and that he spends the time to be able to listen to their worries and problems. Finally, he says that as he gives feedback to his employees, he would like to receive useful feedback from them as well. Last, Clyde enforces his leadership utopia by reminding himself that he is a leader while performing administrative activities.

The interviews we conducted showed five patterns. First, all three respondents consider leadership essential to the organization. A common feature is that they seem to fall into the trap of seeing the leadership necessary everywhere which makes it redundant and may still pose a problem for knowledge workers who do not need it and for the managers themselves as well who turn their attention to something unnecessary devoting time and power to a fashion. This fashion phenomenon leads to the second pattern, which is that they like to see themselves as a leader rather than a manager. It is certainly more attractive to think that your subordinates consider you as something special. The grandiosity of one's self leads to the third pattern. We see that Marty and Clyde see themselves as an example for their employees. The fourth motif is the common leadership style that the managers we interviewed classify themselves. They think they are coach leaders with a mission to improve their employees and feel they have a duty to motivate. They do not see themselves as someone who creates fear and is totalitarian. The fifth and last motif is the confrontation between leadership and management.

This belief in leadership essentiality has led managers to apply leadership as they have mentioned. As treated in the previous segments, employees voiced their demands which included more managerial tasks due to the job descriptions. In the last subchapter of the analysis, we will discover the opinions of knowledge workers on said leadership and how it fits with their work.



Rejecting Leadership at Origins

Throughout our interviews with different employees, we discussed the topic of leadership at and its relation to their job. The high degree of sovereignty displayed by employees towards this subject was hard to miss. For example, Jeremiah said:

“Here, we can work with our own tasks without a leader; I just need a manager to be a discussion partner, not a leader that “leads” me.”

In Jeremiah’s opinion, he can do her own tasks himself and wants a manager as someone to bounce ideas with, not someone who inspires, leads or motivates him.

In the reality of her job Kelsey goes further in her views of leadership:

“A leader for me is the one who gives me total freedom to operate within it. I don’t want someone authoritarian who will micromanage me.”

Kelsey prefers to have a leader who gives her an unquestioned freedom to do what she thinks is suitable. In her view, a “strong” leader would micromanage her, thereby decreasing her freedom.

When talking about leadership and his job, Malcolm noted:

“This choice really comes naturally, to move around when you have a lot of possibilities to do that with or without a manager pushing you. I’m not sure I have personally felt that “pushing” has been for me the most important quality in a manager. I can push myself to produce good results.”



Malcolm explains that he thinks one can operate with their self-leadership and without a manager urging them on towards better results. Also, he talks about leadership not being a primary quality that he looks for in a manager, considering that he is confident in his own ability to complete the job.

In another quote, he emphasized the need for a good organizational structure over the leadership of a particular person.

“For me, it feels like the whole organization is as important as a specific manager. When you work with one manager, you want certain qualities from that person. When you have to work with different managers, on the other hand, you can’t depend on them all being leaders. I believe this is not a matter of leadership but, dependence on work culture and work structure.”

This part of Malcolm’s interview gives further insight into his views of leadership not being a primary characteristic of a manager’s personality. He endorses a work culture and work structure that facilitates working instead of focusing on developing leadership in particular managers.

Moreover, Doug questions the efforts to improve and develop leadership by saying:

“In fact, I don’t understand why they keep sending them to these leadership development programs, is it the HR habit to do such things? As if we needed more leadership here. I can do my job on my own, and we are the ones running the projects anyway, I don’t need my manager to be more of a leader.”

Doug’s views are motivated by multiple attempts of the company to inject more leadership in the organization. In his opinion, he and his other coworkers run their own projects with a minimum need for an intervention from the managers. The superfluity of leadership is the reason that makes him think that the organization should not invest in his manager to be a leader because lower-ranking employees already do everything themselves.



Doug also claims that:

“I like my manager because he is not that bossy. I really think if he was more of a leader, it might inhibit my innovation. At the end of the day, this is my project, and I am doing everything”.

Doug gives details about how he is okay with leadership not being one of the strong points of his manager. He continues by saying that a more intrusive manager might interfere with his work.

Remarks

There seems to be a pattern of rejecting the traditional idea of accepting leadership by the employees. The majority of employees pointed out that leadership is not crucial to them. Some like Kelsey said that they would not prefer to have a leader as a manager because of the micromanagement concerns. Malcolm explained that the leadership of individual managers is insignificant and work structure is an important factor. Doug stated that he is apprehensive about a leader because he wants his projects to go the way he wants them and also complains about too many leadership development programs. Additionally, employees like Doug and others have also complained about how often leadership development programs take place at Origins, saying that they do not have continuous results. Subsequently, we can conclude that employees do not believe that leadership has an important role in Origins and argue that these programs are a waste of money and time, unnecessarily overburdening the schedules of workers for weeks. These strong statements of rejecting a follower tag are not strange, being a follower is a demeaning word by itself and most employees would not actually admit being one. But what we have noticed is an absolute rejection for leadership as being unnecessary. This clear rejection and high degree of self-dependence is our point of interest. And the fact that managers do acknowledge their needs to some extent but fail to deliver is the cherry on top.



Armed with the collected empirical data about knowledge worker's characteristics, their request from the management, managers' views of these needs as well as the rejection of the leadership, we proceed to discuss the meaning of these results in the following chapter.



Chapter 6: Discussion

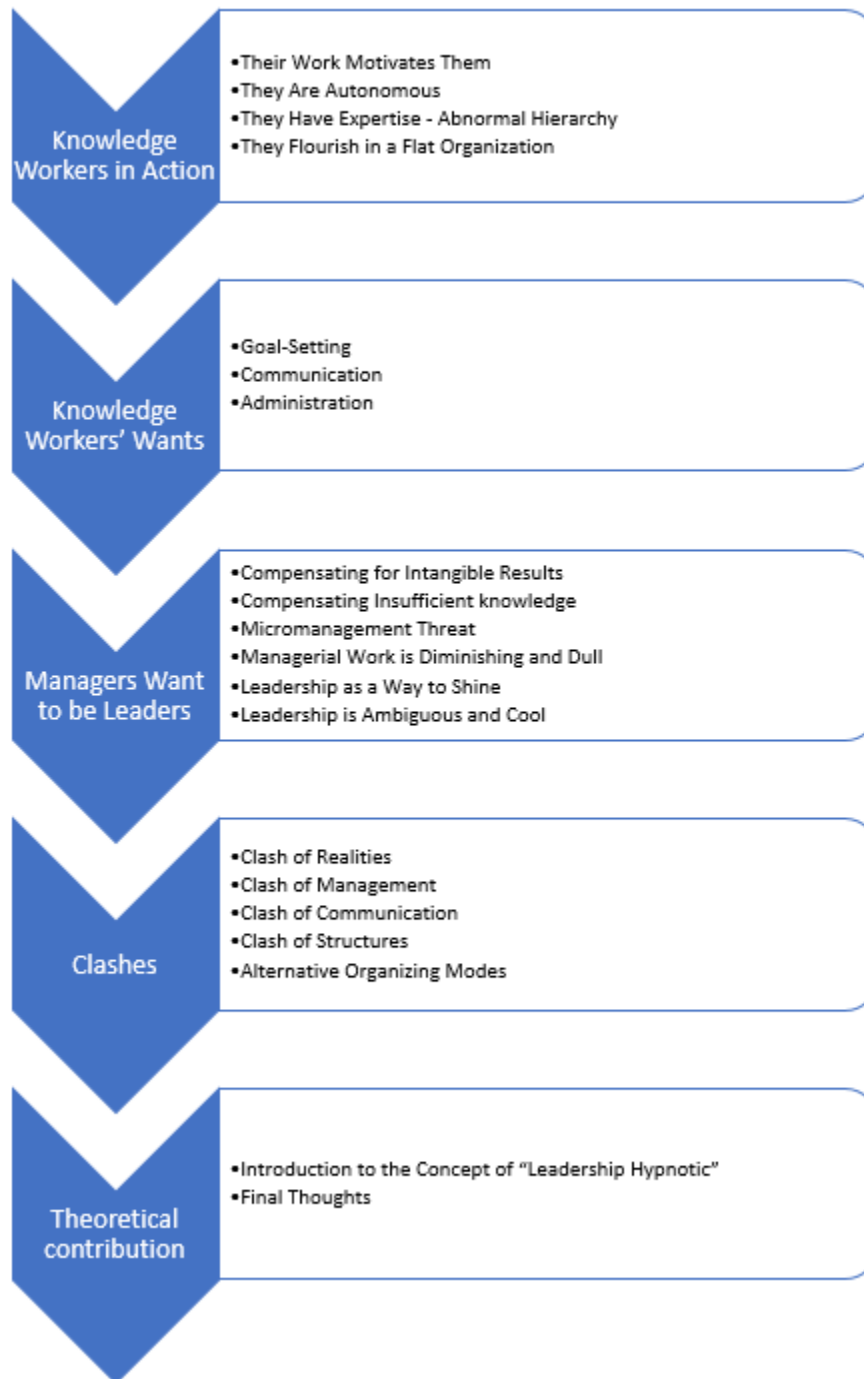


Figure 10



Knowledge Workers in Action

Based on the job descriptions obtained during interviews, we have concluded that employees at Origins possess the characteristics of knowledge workers. Data collected through interviews suggested low appreciation towards leadership among the employees.

The interviews revealed that employees at Origins claim not to need any leadership by linking self-motivation, autonomy, and expertise to their daily jobs. Contrary to the common opinion about the benefits of leadership, answers collected from employees revealed a different pattern on the subject. When workers asked further about this spurning, knowledge relied on several reasons to explain such a phenomenon. We believe autonomy might dissolve the controlling ties between an employee and his manager.

In the following part, we will be discussing employees' arguments for connecting low leadership perception to knowledge work. Additionally, we will contrast statements from the employees about their preferences concerning leadership with the existing literature on the subject of knowledge work.

Their Work Motivates Them

Motivation appeared to be an “intimate” subject to Origins employees. Almost all of them state that they are motivated by the love for their work. They also seem satisfied with their work because it is in line with their studies and set life goals. This finding is discussed in the literature where knowledge workers are described as not being primarily motivated by monetary incentives (Horwitz, et al., 2003). Almost every project that our interviewees worked on had a deep connection to them; personally, academically or socially. Knowledge workers’ performance is the result of their thinking and active engagement, and this makes them feel as if the project is their “baby”, meaning that the degree of attachment to their work is very high (Maliszewska, 2013). We believe this acts as some sort of self-motivation since managers do not have a significant contribution or saying in their projects. This reduced input from the superiors dissolves the motivational and influential aspect that could be provided by the manager, hence the possibility of making him less valuable as a leader to his employees. This decreased need for leadership renders the role of a leader as potentially “complementary” instead of being



indispensable for doing their job on a motivational level. When seeking motivation in one's tasks, a manager could try to motivate them and push them to do better, but in the case of these knowledge workers, we trust their passion for their job is potentially the main driver towards the accomplishment of their tasks, as we saw from Malcolm and Kelsey.

They Are Autonomous

The theme of autonomy discussed by Alvesson (2004) and Morawski (2005), running through nearly all interviews might weaken the importance of leadership in the organization. During the interviews, employees pointed out that their autonomy is cherished at Origins, which raised our suspicions that it is another central aspect that helps them steer away from the need for leadership. While discussing their job, many employees expressed themselves with such key-words as: “freedom”, “independence” and “innovation” which gave us the impression that it is all about their own personal work, not controlled by someone else. There was no talk about “limited” autonomy; the established practice seemingly gave a significant degree of independence to the employees with managers having the minimal necessary information on the proceedings of the projects. This vast autonomy in knowledge intensive firms can possibly empower employees to the point that the discourse is all about them with no mention of their managers' use.

They Have Expertise - Abnormal Hierarchy

When asked about leadership necessity at their organization, employees at Origins emphasized the reduced weight placed on leadership. This declining importance takes another dip with the employees being experts in their fields (Morawski 2005, Lee & Maurder, 1997). A certain power asymmetry (Alvesson, et al., 2017), characterizes the relationship between a leader and subordinate, the fact of knowledge workers holding more specialized knowledge absent among the managers, tips the asymmetry scale further towards the employee. In this setting, the employee feels empowered to make own decisions as the manager lacks relevant knowledge for valuable input and advice. Some employees turn to their peers for advice which aligns with the heavy use of networks claimed by knowledge work-related literature (e.g. Alvesson, et al., 2017). Part of being a leader in their opinion is to help your employees when needed. Unable to



do so is possibly one of the reasons that our interviewees “lost faith” in their upper management which reinforced their belief of not needing leadership and criticizing leadership attempts.

They Flourish in a Flat Organization

During our interviews at Origins, employees spoke extensively about the restructuring and the flatter organization that Origins has acquired. This flatter hierarchy means employees have more autonomy (Alvesson, 2004; Myers, 1996). This resulted in increased work responsibility on the employees and the more holistic approach of the manager (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). We have noticed that the tendency for leadership attempts at Origins could originate from the upper management. Employees may see upper management trying to apply excessive leadership with their unnecessary training programs (LDP), and many restructurings. This might lead to the possibility of employees to call for a flatter organization (Serrat, 2010). We believe that by supporting that flatter hierarchy, employees are actually calling for less leadership. Our belief is strengthened by Alvesson et al. (2017) who discuss the leadership followership relationship. The more hierarchical the organization, the more vertical power is exerted, resulting in a stronger leader-follower relationship. Being seen as a follower is demeaning (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016) especially if employees are as autonomous as knowledge workers, therefore a flatter organization might smoothen this asymmetry.

The need for leadership at Origins might be diluted because of the character of employees’ work. As explained previously in this and the previous chapter, employees perceive leadership as being unnecessary due to the job characteristics that they have. What is interesting is the bold, direct rejection expressed by knowledge workers towards their managers who they think might be leaders. What employees suggest is their need for more administration, which contradicts popular literature. In the next section, we will contrast requests of employees with literature to be able to understand better the Origins staff’s necessities.



Knowledge Workers' Wants

The literature referring to knowledge workers suggests that they have different needs than blue and white collar employees (Alvesson 1995; Deetz 1997; Løwendahl 1997). However, what do the employees of Origins ask for? In this section, we will discuss the calls of knowledge workers in Origins and compare them to knowledge workers needs according to the literature. We will explain what they seem to want from their managers and the organization to be able to produce knowledge efficiently.

Goal-Setting

Our findings led us to a surprising need articulated by knowledge workers which we did not expect to encounter. As noted from the interviews, one of the most urgent needs employees displayed at Origins is goal setting. These knowledge workers are troubled by the inability of their managers to set clear goals. This goal related concern is also evident in the yearly human resources survey mentioned in the case, where the goal setting criterion has consistently been ranked poorly throughout the past few years. This need for goal setting contradicts with the existing literature concerning the knowledge workers need (e.g. Alvesson 1995; Mládková, 2015; Morawski 2005) that suggests that knowledge workers have an independent mind, set their own guidelines, arrange and assess their own work and accomplishments. A number of our interviewees have numerously expressed their want to be part of bigger picture. We assume, although it was not articulated directly, that this need is relevant to their ideals, ambition, and motive to offer to the development of the society through their expertise (Alvesson 2004; Lin 2007). This need in conjunction with their statements that there is no necessity of leadership leads to the following conclusion: While employees need neither motivation nor influence they need a common cause which strengthens their own motivation and enhances the way they perceive the results of their work.



Communication

The next need discussed by employees was communication. Knowledge workers produce work through thought (Morawski 2005, Lee & Maurder, 1997) which means that their intellectual and cognitive skills are their most treasured asset. One of the common complaints that employees addressed was the lack of clear communication with their bosses. The need for extensive communication to coordinate and solve problems in a knowledge intensive company has been presented by Alvesson (2004). This is accurate in our case since the problems knowledge intensive firms face are generally more complex than issues faced by a non-knowledge intensive company (Davenport, 2013). Our findings are in line with Alvesson (2004) since the lack of communication appears to be more common in ‘non-technical than technical’ matters. This creates confusion and difficulty in communication in routine procedures, which in turn makes it more challenging to produce knowledge. Lack of communication interrupts simple procedures that are necessary for the day to day work of knowledge workers in the organization. This lack of clarity of communication may make knowledge work production more challenging, as Malcom suggested for instance. Interventions caused by lack of communication are highly likely to distract their attention. This logically leads to a reduction in the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness in completing their duties and may decrease the quality of their work

Administration

In discussions of what knowledge workers want, another issue is related to administration. On one hand, authors argue that leadership is the only way to manage a knowledge worker based on their unique characteristics (Bennis, 1997; Alvesson, 2004). On the other hand, Alvesson (2004) contends that what knowledge workers need is administrative management to carry out tasks such as accessibility to documents and that may ease the knowledge work. Others even maintain the view that independent professionals such as knowledge workers require self-directed processes in their work and they do not need either leadership or management that both imply a vertical form of hierarchy (Alvesson, et al., 2017). According to knowledge workers at Origins, the administration is an essential part of their organization. A convenient, trouble-free administration system enables them to be more focused on their work. In many cases, they seem



to embrace the administrative skills of their bosses, pinpointing how important they are in order for them to carry out their tasks without any delays and distractions. This comes in contradiction with the literature that claims managers who are not acting as leaders are diminished by their employees (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). Based on the responses we received from our interviewees we believe that they would actually be more satisfied if their managers did carry out successfully their procedural and bureaucratic responsibilities. Paradoxically they seem to escape the infatuation with leadership. This might be the case due to being the potential victims of their managers' tendencies to be leaders. So, what is making these employees face reality? The answer to that question might be adverse side-effects of the leadership attempts on their work. Therefore, knowledge workers seem to be resistant to the leadership trend that appears to be ubiquitous.

The needs of knowledge workers at Origins are not in line with the requirements suggested by the authors in the literature. As demonstrated in earlier sections, they appear to repulse leadership and emphasize in this part their desire for more managerial tasks. Goal setting requests, coupled with increased communication could be a signal of deficiency in managers' performance. Isn't a central part of being a manager to set goals and communicate? (Fayol, 1916). What is also interesting is the employees' focus mainly on managerial tasks but not on leadership. Managers, on the other hand, expressed opposite opinions, rejecting their managerial roles to transcend into being leaders who support their employees. In the following section, we will be debating the managerial view and opinion on the necessity of leadership while examining possible reasons as to why they may want to attain the leadership status.

Managers Want to be Leaders

Managers in Origins put an emphasis on leadership, but knowledge workers seem to disagree with this reasoning. Managers maintain their uncritical efforts to apply leadership while employees voice their concerns about other subjects. Superiors seem to be convinced that leadership is a necessary tool for the organization to develop and evolve. While knowledge workers and managers share the same view about what leadership is, they seem to have different



opinions on whether leadership is needed or not. We believe that the lack of sound understanding throughout the organization regarding the worth of leadership has nothing but negative outcomes. Managers are focused on developing and applying their leadership skills while the employees state that they have other needs that are not covered.

Compensating for Intangible Results

Knowledge work produces results that are difficult to measure (Davenport, 2013; Alvesson, 2004). As we have observed in our findings, this feature is also part of the work generated by the employees of Origins. Both subordinates and managers reported the inability to measure productivity and performance as a problem in the business. Managers in knowledge intensive companies possibly resort to leadership because they are an easy solution to avoid procedures such as measuring the work of their employees. The attempt to take the leader's role could be explained by the tendency to believe that leadership is something essential. Therefore, managers try to cover their weakness in measuring the results of their employees by seeking to do something else that is substantial or at least presented as such. Managers attempt to motivate, influence, and improve their employees. This characteristic of knowledge work could be the incentive for managers to try to become leaders, and subsequently, this creates more problems for the employees. In this case, a vicious circle is set up in which both managers and knowledge workers are sufferers.

Compensating Insufficient knowledge

Another feature that problematizes management in a knowledge intensive company is that their employees occasionally are more knowledgeable than the managers about certain topics (Morawski 2005, Lee & Maurder, 1997; Alvesson, 2004). This perceived superiority of subordinates puts managers in an awkward position. Managers in Origins do not control nor have a significant share of participation in the projects and the work of their employees. We conclude that perhaps this makes them feel less useful. The urge to avoid this feeling possibly strengthens their urge to lead through other means. Without having the necessary expertise and a high degree



of involvement in the production of knowledge, what managers are trying to do is to influence their employees and lead them by example.

Micromanagement Threat

The complexity of knowledge work may not only result in the attempts to strengthen leadership, but also micromanagement. Clyde and other employees informed us that bosses resort to micromanagement in their attempt to manage their employees. Many authors argue that micromanagement and knowledge work are incompatible (Barker, 1997). Micromanagement acts as a barrier to creativity and freedom - features that knowledge workers need to have to produce good results. A joint statement, from the majority of the employees at Origins, was that their managers have as their primary duty to report to their superiors. This role may lead managers to focus on how employees' work reflects on their bosses. We assume that it is hard for them to overcome their need to control employees. The tendency for micromanagement can be created by the fear that employees are not doing the most, and so the managers appear to be inefficient. Employee failure will result in the manager's letdown in relation to their respective supervisors. Micromanagement can seem to be attractive especially to managers who underperform (Nichols, 1998). The rationale behind it is to minimize freedom for their personnel, which means fewer chances of unexpected negative results. However, in fact, micromanagement is significantly detrimental for knowledge workers and the productivity of a knowledge intensive company.

On the other side of the spectrum, avoiding micromanagement also has its bad side. Management bibliography presents micromanagement as something negative and affects negatively the reputation of those who implement it (Holmberg & Tyrstrup, 2010). A manager who uses micromanagement is considered to be powerless. The majority of Origins' managers perceives micromanagement as negative and recognizes that employees would not be pleased with its implementation. This aversion for micromanagement leads managers to find ways to avoid it. According to the literature, leadership is described as almost the opposite of micromanagement (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). The directors know that their employees are autonomous and make decisions on their own. Accordingly, the anxiety of interrupting their autonomy makes them resort to leadership. Leadership promises to create a healthy working environment. Most



importantly, knowledge workers are in need of a leader to support them, and not a micromanager who controls them and makes decisions for them (Patalas-Maliszewska, 2013). These views might push the managers towards the careless hunt for leadership.

Managerial Work is Diminishing and Dull

Management is known to have both creative and procedural tasks. It is reasonable that managers would like to focus on tasks that are more demanding and exciting than those that are repetitive and do not require creativity and skills worthy of admiration (Alvesson, 2013). This phenomenon is evident in *Origins*, since managers believe even in cases that need procedural duties one should have in mind the role of the leader which is inseparable from a manager who does his/her job well. Subsequently, managers consider leadership as an escape route from the procedural duties that are, actually, required for their work. Leadership that aims to influence the mind and heart of the followers seems more attractive than management seeking to achieve goals through less attractive practices. Maybe this can be explained by the fact that leadership is considered an instrument which guarantees particular ideals, for example, moral predominance for the leader and crucial effect to the organization (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Therefore, managers in *Origins* strive towards being, or possibly being viewed as, a leader – which can be comprehended as a normal way to self-satisfaction (Alvesson, 2013; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

Leadership as a Way to Shine

Managers pressed by leadership tend to create a blurred image of their position and tasks to feel good about themselves (Alvesson & Blom, 2014). We suspect that company managers fall into this trap. They seem to be giving in to the temptation of overstating what they are really doing by trying to give their tasks a remarkable significance. That is no surprise since as Alvesson (2013) asserts, managers seek to impress and be more important than all the others around them. The unusual power difference between an employee and a manager generated from having more knowledge as a subordinate (Alvesson, 2004) leads the managers to exaggerate in order to feel



good about themselves. The managers might give in to this game of impressions with the result that their employees have complaints about the way they carry out or do not perform their duties.

Leadership is Ambiguous and Cool

Ambiguity characterizes leadership, and yet it is a trend that many follow in the modern business world (Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; House & Mitchell, 1975; Yukl, 1999). Moreover, it is portrayed as a panacea for companies' problems (Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Grint, 2005;). Origins seem to push managers to take on the role of a leader. We see this from the higher ups, who are probably excited by the popular leadership trend as well as by the leadership development programs in which they send the managers. We have seen that they are trying to solve procedural problems by improving leadership. They also stated that leadership is the only way to continue improving and can help the company attract more skilled employees. These notions contradict the problems that managers themselves say that the corporation has. None of them is related to leadership or lack of it. Most importantly, knowledge workers tell us that the problems they face are the uncritical attempts of leadership. Here, the company appears to be falling victim to the 'grandiose' nature of leadership (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Blom, 2015; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2015). Correspondingly, autonomous knowledge workers at Origins face the problems of not having their needs fulfilled since their managers are too hung on their own fantasies and aspirations.

It is useful to point out that leadership "fever" was manifested in different degrees to various managers. We recognize two degrees of leadership attempts within Origins: Medium and High. According to our data and observation, Marty exhibits a high level of leadership addiction. While describing the necessity of changing the culture to improve the work at Origins, Marty still resorts to leadership development programs to resolve his issue. Clyde displays a similar degree of infatuation to leadership attempts and discourse. This was apparent in the manner he describes himself doing leadership all the time and seeing his employees like his kids. Jeannie, who is a newly appointed manager, appears to have medium leadership attempt infatuation. She shows critical thinking towards leadership by acknowledging her managerial shortcomings but also resorts to leadership as a solution.



What could be concluded in this part is that this mask of leadership that the managers are trying to wear is quite apparent for employees. The latter are aware that they are more knowledgeable than their superiors, that the results are immeasurable and that their superiors sometimes micromanage for better control. We suspect that employees associate leadership with the previously mentioned symptoms that weaken the impact and effectiveness of leadership. The most intriguing phenomena that we have perceived talking about this context is how managers believed that the need for the leadership that they are exercising is crucial, whereas their employees did approve of the leadership meaning projected by their managers but questioned its effectiveness and usefulness in their daily jobs. This suspected clash is the root of why we will be discussing the possible construction misfit manifested at Origins.

Clashes

In this chapter, we will discuss the incoherence in need of leadership views among individuals in Origins. Some of our interviewees agree that leadership is necessary while others deny the importance of leadership in such an organization. While it is normal for different people to have varying views, we identified a paradox worth focusing on. We will elaborate further on this topic in this part of the discussion.

Leaders and subordinates might experience a certain degree of incoherence concerning the meaning alignment of leadership in their relationship. Based on the four grades of meaning offered by Sveningsson et al. (2017), we have distinguished that managers and subordinates at Origins could be exhibiting a degree of construction misfit.

Clash of Realities

Managers discussed how they do not concentrate too much on managerial tasks because their team members are autonomous (Alvesson, et al., 2017; Myers, 1996) and how they focus more on leadership tasks (Mumford, et al., 2002). Managers try to portray the importance of leadership



to their employee's, in the form of guidance (Jeannie), motivation (Marty), and companionship (Clyde). We separated leadership discourse in two parts:

1- Employees claiming that leadership is unimportant and could cause problems (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Gordon, 2011).

2- Managers who insist that leadership be necessary and are exercising it all the time. A clash between both points of view is apparent in this case.

We suspect Origins organizational members exhibit a high degree of construction misfit. The similarity they both displayed for the shared understanding of leadership as a source of guidance, motivation, and influence is similar to each other. What differed is the reality of how they both expressed its need, urgency, and applicability in Origins.

Clash of Management

As argued in the previous section, managers at Origins emphasize the importance of the exercise of leadership in the organization. We speculate that they are misguided by the inherently good nature of leadership and using expressions such as “applying leadership all the time”. According to many authors, who are critical towards this matter, leadership is a concept that should not constantly be applied, but rather according to the needs of a situation at hand (e.g. Alvesson & Blom, 2014; Hidalgo & Albers, 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Upper management and middle management seemingly takes the positive meaning of leadership for granted which could be linked to the widespread belief that “leadership is good and always necessary for the success of this organization” (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). This does not align with the employees’ view elaborated in previous sections where they believe that they are capable of functioning well without the need for leadership.

Clash of Communication

This high degree in construction misfit could be explained by the lack of communication mentioned in earlier paragraphs. Despite the HR surveys reflecting that need and employees are vocalizing it, we had the impression that management seems to blame them on uncontrollable factors such as intangibility of goals without looking for a solution other than leadership. This



high degree of construction misfit (Alvesson, et al., 2017) is also salient in leadership-related activities performed by the management. An example of such activities could be the leadership development programs that management has been undergoing for the past few years with no information about them communicated to the employees. Employees do know that the mentioned programs are “supposed” to make their managers better leaders (Beer, et al., 2016), but at the same time; we perceived a sense of sarcasm when discussing these programs with knowledge workers. In the sense that, employees just spoke about the topic as a waste of time and filler for their superiors’ calendars. We believe that the sarcastic discourse about leadership development programs is another sign from the employees rejecting leadership and having the construction misfit with their superiors.

Clash of structures

This high construction misfit could also be created by the different structural clashes occurring in Origins. It is argued that knowledge work flourishes the best in a flat hierarchy (Alvesson, 2004). While on the other hand as Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) claim, leadership has a vertically oriented structure. This clash of structures may be one of the possible reasons why this high degree of construction misfit is exhibited. After all, the flat hierarchy has been one of the many motivators for the employees since it provided autonomy and more freedom for doing their job. Upon collision of these two structures, we are faced with freedom, autonomous mindset mixed with the asymmetrical relationship between leader and follower (Alvesson, et al., 2017). This asymmetrical relationship which is supposed to be empowered by the leader’s knowledge and experience seems unwanted from employees who seem to portray themselves as rejecters of leadership and non-followers.

Managers and employees give the same meaning to leadership and yet seem to feel very differently regarding its significance. Managers are trying to implement leadership considering that it is useful and helpful for the company and its employees. Knowledge workers, on the other hand, see leadership as something redundant and their managers spending their time instead of doing something useful. This difference in ideas regarding leadership could be caused by communication problems between employees and managers and is depicted by the concept of



construction misfits given by Alvesson, et al.(2017). Lost in the fallacy of leadership, managers fail to carry out simple administrative tasks the employees seem to need. These mentioned problems could be the cause of the clash that we have witnessed at Origins. We think it is really important that they talk so much about their wants which are not really included in the more contemporary leadership skills (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). These are the things that employees say they want in order to perform as knowledge workers, by motivating themselves and being autonomous. They suggest that by having the things they ask for, they can retain their horizontal coordination, autonomy, networking and feel empowered. Employees and managers regard leadership in the same meaning but realities are not compatible.

Alternative Organizing Modes

Despite dominating management discourse and solution recipes, leadership is not always the answer. Other modes of organizing can be implemented to coordinate work at organizations (Alvesson, et al., 2017). Options include networks, group work, and autonomy. Since knowledge work is based heavily on interactions and intellectual projects, human relations and independence play a crucial role in the jobs of knowledge workers. By relying on these horizontal forms of organizing, employees might be able to replace what leadership offers with other alternatives. By attributing motivation for their personal love for their job, employees would be creating their own motivation. While working on projects independently with no extra help, they would possibly be building their own virtues. And finally, the possessed expertise might render meaning-creating also part of the job description.



Theoretical Contribution

In order to elevate our discussion to a more theoretical level, we have elaborated a visual model that will assist our cause. This model should not be seen as a model to illustrate causal or straightforward relations, but somewhat depict an overview of the relationships in play for the reader. Prior to detailing theoretical contributions and relationships depicted by this model, we will be explaining different parts of the figure.

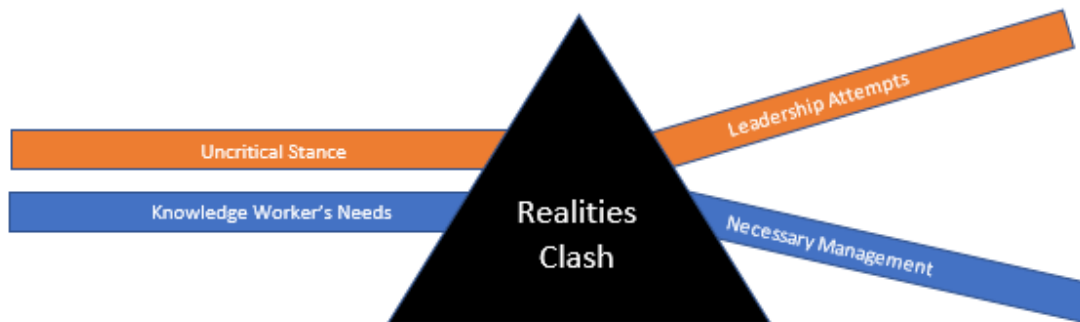


Figure 11

The figure 11 depicts the situation we have perceived at Origins, displayed are the different components discussed in the thesis

- a. “Uncritical Stance” represents what manager believe and propagating about the necessity for leadership at Origins
- b. “Knowledge Worker’s Needs” stands for the displayed needs of employees Origins (Goal setting, communication, more administration)
- c. “Realities clash” exhibits the collision of two realities at Origins, one from the employees and the other from the managers.
- d. “Leadership attempts” represents the managers’ trials at exercising and imposing leadership

e. “Necessary Management” portrays the managerial duties that are needed but are being neglected by the managers

Thus, we attempt to illustrate the current situation at Origins with (a) Uncritical Stance going in parallel (and independently) to the (b) Knowledge Worker’s Needs; to a (c) Realities Clash about the significance of leadership at Origins. This reality crash results in (d) Leadership attempts from the managers and (e) lack of Necessary Management.

Lifting our empirical data to a theoretical level, we theorize that in the knowledge work environment, the manager’s exercised uncritical leadership attempts that are most of the time different from what the employees really need. Their fascination with leadership nurtured by popular literature constructs an irresistible narrative around leadership. Following a recipe solution is tempting, and managers seem to be convinced that leadership is necessary for both their own and their employee’s jobs. These beliefs on the managers’ side are paralleled by actual needs of their subordinates, who are requesting more goal setting, communication, and administrative routines. Leadership in their opinion is not needed, and administrative matters should be prioritized. These two different points of view clash in a construction misfit with a common agreement on the basis of the meaning of leadership; but a difference in the realities they are experiencing. Such case may be the reason for the following outcomes: First, managers attempting to be leaders by substituting their burdensome managerial tasks with the application of leadership. They may be hoping to cover the deficit in control and motivation with leadership. At the same time, while applying said leadership techniques, managers fall short on their necessary tasks. This possibly creates frustrations and challenges for the employees’ jobs.



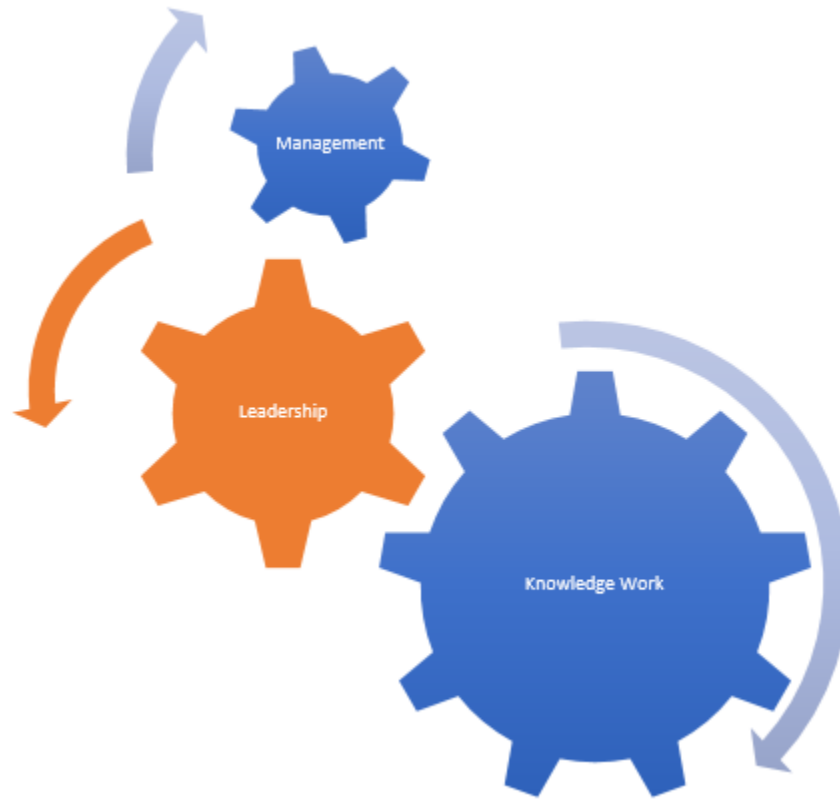


Figure 12

Figure 12 represents the separation of knowledge work and management by leadership by jamming:

- a. Management depicts managerial tasks that knowledge workers at Origins suggested that they need
- b. Leadership displays the application of leadership at Origins
- c. Knowledge intensive activities represents the work of knowledge workers

According to the empirical findings of our case, employees asserted that (a) management is necessary at Origins and that they strongly need it for their daily work. On the other hand, managers expressed that leadership is necessary and the solution for their problems.

In this case, leadership (b) acts as a jammer for (c) knowledge work by separating it from managerial activities (a) that are essential for smooth knowledge work production. This jam comes from the managers' belief that (b) leadership is indispensable for (c) knowledge work and neglecting or trying to compensate their (a) managerial tasks with leadership. In reality, employees discussed that (a) management is necessary for (c) knowledge work, and because of the nature and autonomy of their job, these (b) leadership attempts are seen as unnecessary. In this situation, (b) leadership is locking with both (c) knowledge work and (c) managerial tasks, resulting in a jam for employees who want more managerial tasks to perform their job easily.

Uncritical leadership attempts in such circumstances can be seen as problematic for work. Instead of offering a solution as it is claimed by the literature and practitioners, it might be morphing into a problem that is jamming the development of the organization. Managers seem to be dealing with the concept of leadership without any reflection. Therefore, the uncritical attempts they make regarding leadership are not related to the needs of their employees. Here we want to pinpoint that even if someone sees goal-setting as a leadership skill that does not contradict our argument since the managers do not appear to realize what their subordinates would expect from them. Even if one argues that they actually demand leadership, managers are heading in a different leadership-direction.



Introduction to the Concept of “Leadership Hypnotic”

The response of leadership in different people and contexts could be variable. We believe that on the one hand, leadership can be a useful tool in some organizations, but on the other hand, can be the source of problems. Therefore, when engaging in the discourse of leadership, it is salient to keep a critical point of view. We define the uncritical stance towards leadership as *leadership hypnotic*. While, like any ‘drug’, *leadership hypnotic* can be used under many different circumstances, we will focus on the use of this ‘drug’ in the business environment, which is within the context of our study. Taking drugs at work is nothing new. Since the 1960s scientists used acid as a contributing factor to an array of significant human advances (Leonard, 2015). Leadership, is a trend nowadays, can be perceived as a new drug that people consume consciously or unconsciously. It is not like the drugs people are using at work in order to be more productive. Rather, it has the opposite effect. It puts people to ‘sleep’ by inhibiting them from seeing the reality, similar to someone being drugged and having no clear image of what is happening around them. Today’s societal tendencies push individuals to portray themselves as something more than you actually are - grandiosity (Alvesson, 2013; Trice & Beyer, 1993): the need to be extraordinary and not just another manager. It is distributed by the uncritical thinking towards leadership, and lack of self-reflection. It is consumed by the ambitious managers with the aspiration of being leaders. The effects of the *leadership hypnotic* are obstacles in the day to day work of a manager. By distorting the perception of the user, it makes it impossible for him/her to see reality as it is, creating an anamorphic viewpoint. This unclarity of mind may result in inefficiency and therefore bad results for the user and related stakeholders. This inability to concentrate and perform the tasks needed are the problems that many realize, but few recognize the source of uncritical leadership attempts. That said, *leadership hypnotic* has proven popular although it might reduce insight and problem solving abilities. We have been given examples of this concept in our study: our respondents with managerial roles seem to be addicted to the *leadership hypnotic*. Drugged by leadership, they fail to face the reality. This ‘addiction’ leads them to neglect some of their administrative, managerial tasks and focus on careless leadership attempts.



Final Thoughts

The relationships and assumptions represented as such in both models and concept introduction are inherently influenced by the findings in our specific case study. For further research, it would be interesting to see how these relationships work in other knowledge intensive situations. In this respect, we trust that research can significantly contribute to theoretical development by addressing questions such as:

- Can we be soberer about evaluating to the extent leadership as an option? What about other options?
- Why are managers not receiving the messages sent by the employees?
- Should we be more cautious when addressing leadership as a virtue?
- Is chasing leadership in knowledge intensive firms similar to chasing windmills?
- What can we learn from this organization that can help us problematize the discourse about management.?
- Can we think of leadership in another way?
- Can we organize knowledge intensive firms in a different manner than regular organizations?

In this chapter, we have discussed the implications of our finding from a theoretical perspective. We will now proceed to the conclusion of our research.

Food for thought

In the last section, we have elaborated on our findings and now we want to discuss them on a broader level. What do the results of our research mean from a broader perspective? By doing this we want to raise some serious skepticism around the prevailing discourse of leadership. What does this skepticism around leadership suggest? We want to raise awareness around the importance of critical thinking towards leadership in an era that seems to suggest the exact



opposite - uncritical acceptance of trends. Every one of us is pressured to submit to a model posed by the elite that is considered flawless and thus unalterable. In this case, thereby the critical approach is pushed away. The tendency of following trends is supported by the political, financial, and religious elite as a means to stop us from asking questions. ‘Job’ of the Bible and ‘Antigone’ of the ancient Greek tragedy give us the tangible example of criticizing and questioning what was commonly accepted. We should follow their example and be critical towards leadership not only in a business context but in every aspect of our lives.



Chapter 7: Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we would like to zoom into the results of our research. Later on, we will elaborate further, but first, we want to give answers to our research questions.

Our empirical question is:

Is meaning and understanding of leadership and leadership's significance coherent and shared between individuals?

We believe that while employees and managers give very similar definitions to leadership, they have different opinions regarding its significance. Managers see leadership as something important for the organization and inseparable from their work. Knowledge workers, on the other hand, are questioning the reason for leadership based on their characteristics, such as self-motivation, autonomy, and expertise.

Our theoretical question is:

How significant is leadership in knowledge intensive firms?

We came to the conclusion that leadership if carelessly exercised can be dangerous for knowledge intensive firms. If people fall into the trap of leadership trend can end up having an unperceptive attitude towards their work. Not critically thinking can lead to overlooking the real needs while being too engaged with the tasks associated with leadership. It is crucial to be critical towards the leadership hypnotic if you want to avoid its hazardous effects that we mentioned in the discussion chapter.

We managed to come to our conclusions through a case study where the meaning and importance of leadership were scrutinized. We used an interpretative, hermeneutical approach throughout our research aiming to get a better understanding of leadership and its significance in knowledge intensive firms. This was achieved through a qualitative research approach. We collected the testimonies of participants through in depth semi-structured interviews right and explored how each individual perceives the situation in the organizational environment. This



assisted us informing a broader picture of how and why each person understands leadership and its significance. Our goal was not to come up with conclusions that can be generalized to all organizations but to provide information that improves the perception of leadership. In this chapter, we will summarize our most important findings and their usefulness in theory and practice. We will also suggest topics and directions for new research. This was something unexpected since the hitherto literature mentions leadership as the main tool for managing knowledge workers (Bennis, 1999). Nonetheless, our findings are in line with the reputation of knowledge workers as hard-to-manage employees (Alvesson, 2004).

There is a clash of realities that takes place in the company and might be the result of communication problems. Employees have needs that are unfulfilled while managers try to satisfy them with uncritical leadership attempts. These attempts probably are triggered by tendencies managers have to lead. This supports our view that leadership should not be treated as something virtuous or divine that encloses a solution for every problem. On the contrary, each situation should be analyzed and judicially assessed, following a decision about which direction should be followed. Managers are likely to be affected by many factors that could affect their judgment, and as a result, they resort to leadership.

Origins is not a utopia, as expected, and there are some problems in the company. The existence of difficulties was voiced by all participants in the interviews. The knowledge workers expressed it while their directors recognized it. Establishing procedures might help ease their work and routines that will allow them to work unobstructed. They said that without the conditions above their work could not go on uninterrupted.

The efforts to implement leadership are very common in Origins. This tendency towards leadership is seen at all levels of management. We gave some possible interpretations and explanations for the reasons this leadership trend was adopted in Origins. Initially, the characteristics of the knowledge workers that are difficult to manage (Alvesson, 2004; Myers, 1996; Morawski, 2005) could prompt the directors to exercise leadership, or at least try it. In addition, a manager's bureaucratic and administrative duties are considered uninteresting and mind-numbing (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), unlike the captivating issues that leadership address (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). The phenomenon of the exaggeration when addressing their duties (Alvesson, 2013) can lead directors towards the struggle to apply leadership in order to feel



better about themselves. Leadership is a fashion that is constantly projected therefore it is intricate to abstain (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

We realize that the attempts to apply leadership might lead to problem creation within a knowledge intensive firm; subsequently, knowledge workers end up loathing it. Our findings suggest that these attempts could decrease productivity in a knowledge intensive firm. This contradiction transpires with managers focusing on leadership application while overlooking their necessary administrative tasks. Therefore, the tendency towards leadership could possibly translate into obstacles of the knowledge intensive firm operation.

The phenomenon of treating leadership as an ever-needed virtue, without being critical towards it is identified in our case. We would label this phenomenon ‘Leadership Hypnotic’. Such a hypnotic could result in hallucination and the inability to lucidly face reality. Therefore, the inability to clearly assess what is needed in any given situation. The effects mentioned above can create problems for the manager under the ‘*leadership hypnotic*’. This new concept contributes to the existing leadership theory by presenting a critical view of leadership, and also serves as an awareness agent for practitioners.

We have seen that uncritical leadership initiatives create issues for knowledge intensive firms where employees reject leadership. The practical implications of our research revealed that the uncritical approach to leadership widens the gap between what is happening and what is really needed in today’s organizations. Additionally, it is an important issue for management literature. Based on the above conclusions, our research covers a gap and contributes to the existing theory. The methodological approach we applied to conduct our research gave us the necessary and valuable information we needed to answer our research questions. We detected that uncritical leadership attempts could result in problems instead of the solution. Therefore, leadership should not be treated and be regarded as something positive by definition for a knowledge intensive firm. It is essential to evaluate each situation and decide whether leadership is needed or not. Subsequently, the solution might be to apply other forms of horizontal organization such as networks, teamwork, and autonomy. All of the previous fit perfectly with the job description of knowledge workers.



During our research, we came across questions that we believe are worth answering. We did not have the means to answer these questions in this thesis, but it would be interesting for future researches to address them. Originally, the study we conducted regarding leadership and its importance was targeted at Origins, so we were able to look at the particular organization and its specific features. For this reason, we believe it would be very interesting to explore how leadership and its importance are perceived in other contexts. We may have different results in a company with another culture in which employees faced problems other than unclear communication and bad goal setting.

An additional question that emerged during our investigation was about the employees and the inconsistency in communication they had with their superiors. We saw that the lack of communication could be a problem for Origins. It would be interesting if someone found the source of this obstruction. Why do directors fail to understand that their employees do not need leadership? Is it because there is this communication gap between managers and employees? Research on these issues creates an interesting direction for study.

In conclusion, this thesis strongly suggests that a fruitful skepticism which questions the value, and use of leadership in knowledge intensive firms should be more dominant in leadership research as well as application. We believe that the interpretative position decided for the study on the significance of leadership has opened up more nuanced bits of information about knowledge work. Hence, we trust this proposition is significant, for practical and theoretical purposes alike.



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