Frontiers in Leadership research

- A new perspective for case analysis

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Introduction and aim

My aim with this paper is to begin to form a framework for analyzing my case as I see “leadership” as one of the possible perspectives in my dissertation. I would be glad for comments about my use of the course literature and help with further references, besides the overall comments.

In my research I have studied change processes in a privately owned radiology department through observations, interviews, interaction and partly collaborative research during 3,5 years. According to Bryman (2004), participant observation or ethnography rarely figures as a method of data collection in leadership research, although these usually are the main techniques in qualitative research. This because it requires time, it is hard to know what to observe, it is costly and it can be hard to get access. Therefore I think I might be able to contribute with some interesting data to the field.

Earlier, I have read about institutions as processes, including processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization and come across Scott (1995) who assert that reactions to change has a lot to do with who is leading the change; legitimacy is important, that the person in charge have authority supported by prevailing social norms. Therefore leadership research might play an interesting role in my dissertation. In this paper I do not intend to discuss whter the leaders can affect the processes and results of the business and to what degree. My point of departure is that leaders do matter and that they do make a difference (Bryman, 2004).

Level of analysis

Yammarino et al (2005) talks about different levels of analysis and defines four levels of analysis of human beings;

1. individuals or persons
2. dyads, or two individuals who are interdependent on a one-to-one basis, eg a leader–follower dyad
3. groups or teams
4. collectives, including groups of groups, departments, functional areas, strategic business units, and organizations.
I intend to describe the context in which the change processes have occurred. This means for example defining the kind of organization and (experienced) culture of the business unit, level four according to Yammarinos et al. I also intend to study the physician group as a whole, trying to understand how it functions and what special traits it has and why. When defining different groups in the organization, I became interested in theories about professions and thus have come to read about the particularities of professions, their power and the reactions when professions, or the professional value based as some institutionalists would say, are challenged. Parsons (yr) mean that organizations operating in different functional sectors are legitimated by differing values and the power struggles I have seen in my case, with “business/administrative” perspectives and values clashing with the medical profession, are certainly an example of the power of values on how individuals and groups react and act when someone tries to drive change.

“Beliefs and values about the nature and aim of an organization, i.e. perceptions of identity, are obviously crucial when it comes to effecting changes” (Alvesson and Björkman, 1992, p. 30, Carroll, 1995, both in Eriksson, 2004)

Given these two levels, I will continue by describing some key persons on an individual level. A lot of the focus during the changes at the radiology department came to be on the leader(s) and how they managed or not managed the changes. One leader, the business unit manager, was in particular in focus. Since she was the first business unit manager that did not have a medical background and as the initiator of quite radical changes, individuals and groups relations to her is an interesting unit of study.

Finally, I will end up in the most interesting part of the analysis; the relationship between the leader(s) and groups (cross-level) and maybe also between certain individuals, and the effects of these relationships. Some of the most important persons in this respect are the middle managers. In a crisis context, that the situation at the radiology department probably was experienced as by many co-workers, the middle managers often get a specific role given their unique two-way perspective (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). Their task is to translate the often shifting priorities of executives to immediate and short-term goals and actions (Zaccaro, 2001). In Yammarino et als (2005) terms, an analysis of the middle managers from an individual and a dyad
perspective would be interesting; the dyad perspective both regarding relationships with higher leaders and with subordinates.

**Emotions and feelings in groups and among leaders**

When it comes to relationships, it is interesting to discuss if and how emotions, feelings and moods affect the outcomes of change processes.

As in life in general, emotions are an inseparable part of everyday organizational life (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). When working with change processes one of the toughest challenges is to anticipate and try to prevent or manage the reactions from leaders and co-workers, often based on emotional processes triggered by the change initiative. Organization members have emotionally invested in the truths about the organization (Huy, 1999), and challenging this source of stability can trigger strong defense mechanisms such as anxiety and defensiveness (Schein, 1992). If the proposed change is perceived as being in opposition to esteemed core values, the change is likely to trigger feelings of anger, threat or fear. Traditional process theories of motivation often neglect the role of personal engagement (emotions, emotional processes) (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995) and in the middle of 1990’s authors wrote about the need for more research about emotions in the workplace in general and in change processes in specific. Göran Kenttä talked about positive emotions – the undoing hypothesis during his lecture and cited Fredrikson & Levenson (1998): “Positive emotions undo the cognitive and psychosociological effects of stress and negative emotions, consequently enhance recovery for the body and the mind.” Kenttä also concluded that there is no clear definition of emotions. I do not intend to try to find one in this paper, but conclude that this is an important and interesting area of study when trying to understand reactions and actions in a change process.

Sy et al (2005) talk about contagious leaders and mean that leaders’ moods influences for example group processes. They assumed that public expressions of mood impact how group members think and act and could see in their research that this was the case. “The findings of the present study accord an important role to the emotional intelligence of leaders in determining the effectiveness of leaders (George, 2000; Goleman et al., 2001)” (Sy et al 2005).
However, they mean that research show that the influences of moods depend on the context. They mention the “mood-as-input model” (Martin et al, 1993) which says that people take into account the context when interpreting the information provided by their moods. This means that the leaders must understand the role of moods to be successful, but the leader must also understand the context of the task and the specific group process involved.

Sy et al (2005) also find that groups as a whole can be affected by moods in themselves, a phenomenon which they call “group affective tone”. This consist of “consistent or homogenous affective reactions within a group (George, 1990, p. 108)” and they assert with the support from George (1990) that if the moods of the individual group members are consistent, then group affective tone can be treated as a group property. This implies according to the authors that leaders can understand and should try to efficiently regulate the affective tones of their groups in order to have more impact on group processes.

Finally, Sy et al points out that leaders who regulate their expressed moods may influence their groups in a more controlled and planned way. Sy et al are also interested in, for future research, exploring the role of mood in transformational leadership (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978), which should suit my case well.

**Transformational leadership**

Transformational leadership was first discussed by Burns (1978) in a political science context (Elkins & Keller 2003), but elaborated and used in management and psychology research by Bass (1985), who defined transformational leadership in terms of the leader’s behaviors and effect on followers (Yammarino et al 2005). Along with charismatic leadership, transformational leadership represents the new leadership genre, the new emphasis in the 1990s (Yammarino et al, 2005; Eagle & Carli, 2003).

Transformational leadership differs from transactional leadership, that could be defined as “an exchange process to motivate follower compliance with a leader’s requests and organizational role requirements” (Yammarino et al 2005), managing in the “conventional” sense by clarifying responsibilities, rewarding and punishing for meeting/not meeting objectives (Eagle & Carli, 2005; Elkins & Keller, 2003). Instead,
transformational leadership focus on future orientation and goal accomplishment (Eagle & Carli, 2003; Yammarino et al, 2005). Followers, through transformational leadership, are motivated to do more than originally expected, to view problems from new perspectives and to feel trust, loyalty, respect, and admiration toward the leader (Yammarino et al 2005; Elkins & Keller, 2003), who establish themselves as role models by gaining followers’ trust and confidence (Eagle & Carli, 2003).

**Change dynamics**

Zaccaro and Horn (2003) mean that leadership researchers should focus on understanding the central dynamics of change management and try to understand how leaders manage change in order to be able to provide prescriptions and guidelines to the practitioner as an outcome of their research. According to Zaccaro and Horn (2003), Avolio et al (2000) use theories such as transformational leadership theory to describe and understand these change dynamics. These theories should be interesting to combine with “improvement capabilities”, or dynamic capabilities, originating from researchers in the field of Resource Based View of the firm (RBV). In this field, operative capabilities are related to a firm’s operative performance in relation to its environment, while an organization’s improvement capabilities concern organizational adaptation and renewal. Improvement capabilities thus determine an organization’s adaptiveness to changes in the environment and to crises, in effect its ability to survive when conditions change (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece, et al., 1997). Improvement capabilities can be related to the evolution of organizational processes and structures, including process innovation, organizational restructuring, integration of IT and business knowledge, emotional capability, change management and project work (Källberg & Mähring, 2006).

Larsson et al (2003) are inspired by transformational and functionalistic leadership approaches and have developed a model that they choose to call developmental leadership. In developmental leadership, four competences are desirable: task-related, management-related (intraorganisational and extraorganisational), social competence and the ability to cope with stress, emotion-focused coping skills (Lazarus 1991, 1999). The reason for the choice “developmental” instead of using the well-used
“transformational” is that the authors found it difficult to translate the word into simple Swedish and instead used the Swedish word “utvecklande”, which translation into English is closer to developmental. In Bass original model, charisma stood for “engender emotion and identification” and Waldman and Bass (1991) suggested that project effectiveness is related to charismatic leadership displayed by champions who are typically powerful organizational members, and thus project effectiveness should be related to transformational leadership behaviours (Elkins & Keller, 2003). However, Larsson et al (2003) altered the Bass model by dropping the charisma and integrated this with inspiration and motivation. In the model, individualised consideration means support, including both emotional and tangible support. Inspiration and motivation has to do with communicating a vision, encouraging and promoting creativity. Conventional leadership has two sub forms; demand and reward control.

Figure 1, Larsson et al (2003), p 17
Larsson et al emphasize that situational aspects must be taken into consideration; just as Bass’s theory indicates that contextual variables may increase the effectiveness of transformational behaviours (Elkins & Keller 2003).

**The importance of trust**

In times of change, psychological safety is needed (Gronn, 2002). According to some researchers, a charismatic leader can be a person possibly capable of fulfilling the employees’ emotional need for psychological safety, giving assurance of a safe path to the future (Huy, 1999). The anxiety can be projected onto the leader in exchange for hope. While hope is one way to find motivation, engagement and change willingness/readiness for major change processes, trust is another. Trust in that the change is necessary and either inevitable or resulting in a better way of working than the present. Trust in that the organization will survive, in yourself that you are going to overcome the hurdles and in the leaders that they are working for everyone’s good.
Trust is seen as one of the key issues in leadership (Kenttä, Larsson et al 2005) and also frequently used in transformational leadership. When Elkins and Keller (2003) discuss climate of innovation they concur that an innovative culture can be created by “building a sense of community consisting of a family feeling, socializing, trust, caring, information flow, learning approach, individual recognition/rewards, and teamwork”. According to Bryman (2004), apart from good communication on the part of the leader, the leader’s integrity and how far he or she is trusted and how far he or she trusts others is particularly important for effective leadership.

McAllister (1995) speaks about two kinds of trust, cognition-based trust, knowing that the person is competent and has the experience needed, and emotion-based trust, trust in the relationship, that the person is telling the truth and is considerate. Changes in ways of working, in competence and culture in connection with restructuring often lack emotion-based trust Huy (1999). This may lead to less experimenting, less spreading of knowledge and undermining of the legitimacy of the leaders.

Gerry Larsson mentions three different kinds of trust (REF?); “personal trust”, the kind of trust that is identification-based and seen in intimate relationships like a loveaffair, “relate to other people”, a knowledge- and experience-based kind of trust, and “basic trust”, an individualistic trust learnt during the first year in life. He also speak about trust in professional relationships and defines three different kinds of trust here also: calculation-based, knowledge-based and identification-based. A trust-building, everyday leadership demands visibility, respectful treatment of individuals, open climate – freedom to speak one’s mind, values, morals and sincerity and competence.

According to Gronn (2002), there are four factors that are likely to account for depth of trust in role constellations and couples; shared values, complementary temperaments, requisite psychological space, previous experience of collaboration (Gronn 99, pp 54-57).

**Indirect and informal leadership; who is the leader?**

Reading about what behaviour leaders should strive for, the question arises; who is the leader that my research should focus on? In the beginning of the paper I talked about middle managers and their role as translators. In my study I roughly saw five hierarchial
levels: managing director, division manager, business manager, operating manager and employees. However, in this context, the medical profession has an alternative hierarchy, with medical manager(s) and physicians, and among the physicians there are of course both formal leaders and informal. Bryman (2004) refers to Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p58) saying that “informal leadership may be especially relevant to professional organizations where individuals who are not in formal positions of leadership may influence others through the advice they offer and their reputation”.

According to Larsson et al (2005), little attention has been focused on the “how’s” of indirect leadership; what leader actually do to influence individuals. Larsson et al introduce the indirect leadership-model that I found very interesting and would like to spend some more time analyzing my material with.

Next step
The theories studied in this course will hopefully give me another perspective on my case study and I will develop my analysis based on this paper.
References


**References used from articles:**


Fredrikson & Levenson (1998)


