The leadership work of mobilizing committed future action

An ethnomethodological approach

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Acknowledgements

A PhD project like this requires leadership collaboration between the many actors invested in it. Typically, some of the actors involved, and especially the PhD student, are given special rights and obligations in terms of taking action on the project and being accountable for it. Although some elements of a PhD collaboration are formalized in written documents, in practice it unfolds through a wide range of interactions over time. In these interactions, documents may be utilized as a resource among others in ongoing negotiations regarding where the project is headed, what is problematic, what is good, what future actions should be taken and who is accountable for what. This dissertation has been shaped by the innumerable interactions I have engaged in during the project as a PhD student, colleague, observer, presenter, discussant, visiting scholar, and much more. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many wonderful people who have contributed to the progress of this PhD and supported me over the past three years.

I owe gratitude to my supervisors, who have supported and guided me through the project. Magnus Larsson, who has been involved from the very beginning—first as primary and then as secondary supervisor after moving to Lund University—has been a crucial and consistent source of support and wisdom. Magnus has pushed my way of thinking and writing, while always making time for friendly conversations. A huge thank you is also due to Morten Knudsen, who became my main supervisor halfway through the project and stepped into it in a truly edifying manner. He has kindly challenged me with his wit and insightful reading, helping me stay on track.

I am deeply grateful to my amazing colleagues in UKON, who continue to inspire me and have encouraged me throughout the process. I am proud to be a part of the team. I would like to thank Anders Trillingsgaard, my industrial supervisor, who has shared the passion for the research topic with me and helped me connect the two worlds of academia and consultancy. I thank the research group at UKON for supporting me in a process they know all too well. Special thanks go to my manager Jette Lindhard for our great dialogues along the way and for looking out for me in times of pressure. I also thank Innovation Fund Denmark for funding the project together with UKON.

I wish to acknowledge the wonderful people at Copenhagen Business School (CBS). Thanks are due to Signe Vikkelsø for welcoming me to the Department of Organization (IOA) and for supporting me on several occasions, including my first work-in-progress seminar. Special thanks to Frank Meier for being an eternal source of insight, good humor and great colleagueship. I am grateful to Aixa Alemán-Díaz, Elias Borgmann, Tobias Berggren Jensen, Marie Arnbak-Hartzberg and many other great PhD colleagues for lively discussions and mutual support at IOA, on courses and at conferences. A big thank you is due to Christian Dyrlund Wåhlin-Jacobsen for our enriching conversations and for taking the time to provide me with useful feedback on several occasions. I would like to thank Minna Paunova for support in the early stages, and Stephanie Schnurr, who came all the way from the University of Warwick and helped me see the beginning of the end at my second work-in-progress seminar.

I sincerely appreciate Brigid Carroll and the brilliant people in the Department of Management and International Business at the University of Auckland Business School, whom I had the pleasure of visiting for a month in winter 2024—a visit that went by all too quickly. It has been an absolute pleasure to meet Brigid, and I have learned so much from collaborating with her on one of the articles in this dissertation

I also owe immense thanks to Steven Clayman, Tanya Stivers, Giovanni Rossi, and the talented PhD students I met during my visit to the Department of Sociology at UCLA in fall 2022. I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome they extended to me in their vibrant research environment and for teaching me the fundamentals of conversation analysis.

I am forever grateful to my parents, Kirsti and Jens Ove, who have taught me so much about life, love, ambition, curiosity, and the joy of learning. I am also deeply grateful to my parents-in-law, the rest of our family, and our close friends for always being there.

Most importantly, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for my husband, the love of my life, Claus, and our three amazing daughters, Margrethe, Anna Lucia and Benedicte. Thank you for your endless love, support, and patience. You are my greatest joy.

Elisabet Skov Nielsen

Aarhus, November 2024

Abstract

Many contemporary organizations operate in complex, changing environments that require organizational actors to continuously identify and actively engage in the leadership work of producing direction and organizing future action around emerging issues in everyday work. While leadership studies have long focused on individual leaders, there is increasing attention to the collaborative leadership work that take place throughout the organization.

However, leadership literature carries a baggage of romanticized notions of someone or something extraordinary, which have taken new forms in today's pluralistic understandings of leadership. Idealized expectations and glossy images, not only of individual leaders but also of leadership collaboration, are alive and well. For leadership theory and research to provide realistic depictions of how actors succeed in leading together, and the difficulties and tensions involved in this work, more practice-oriented studies are needed.

This dissertation studies the collaborative work of leadership actors in mobilizing committed future action on organizational issues in everyday interactions. It examines the work, challenges, and practices involved in mobilizing commitment as a situated social action by which someone visibly commits to taking responsibility and action on a given issue.

To this end, the dissertation employs ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA), which is concerned with how actions are organized and mutual understandings are produced through situated talk and interaction. It draws on ethnographic data collected from two Danish organizations, including interviews, observations, and video recordings of meeting interactions.

The three included articles show that the leadership work involved in mobilizing committed future action centrally consists of negotiating the nature of a problem, available solutions, ownership, individual and shared accountabilities, as well as ongoing improvisation and balancing of influence attempts to elicit a committed rather than a compliant response. This collaboratively accomplished leadership work comprises ambiguities, dilemmas, conflicts, and power dynamics that leadership actors navigate to reach sufficiently clarified agreements and commitments.

The dissertation contributes to existing leadership theory by demonstrating that leadership work in practice is both mundane and incredibly complex; it serves as a central site for constructing and deconstructing agency; and it primarily involves skillfully improvising, balancing, and adapting one's contributions and influence attempts to fit the situation and interaction at hand.

Resumé (abstract in Danish)

Mange nutidige organisationer opererer i komplekst foranderlige miljøer, som kræver, at organisatoriske aktører løbende identificerer og aktivt engagerer sig i ledelsesarbejdet med at skabe retning og organisere fremtidig handling omkring nye problemstillinger i hverdagen. Mens ledelsesforskning længe har fokuseret på individuelle ledere, er der en stigende opmærksomhed på det fælles ledelsesarbejde, der finder sted rundt omkring i organisationen.

Ledelseslitteraturen bærer imidlertid på en bagage af romantiserede forestillinger om nogen eller noget ekstraordinært, som har taget nye former i nutidens pluralistiske forståelser af ledelse. Idealiserede forventninger til og glansbilleder ikke kun af individuelle ledere, men også af ledelsessamarbejde, lever i bedste velgående. Hvis ledelsesteori og -forskning skal give realistiske skildringer af, hvordan aktører lykkes med at lede sammen, og de vanskeligheder og spændinger, der er involveret i dette arbejde, er der behov for mere praksisnære undersøgelser.

Denne afhandling undersøger ledelsesaktørers fælles arbejde med at mobilisere engageret fremtidig handling på organisatoriske problemstillinger i hverdagens samspil. Den undersøger det arbejde, de udfordringer og praksisser, der er involveret i at mobilisere engagement (commitment) som en situeret social handling, hvormed en person synligt forpligter sig på at tage ansvar og handling på en given problemstilling.

Til dette formål anvender afhandlingen etnometodologisk samtaleanalyse (EMCA), som beskæftiger sig med, hvordan handlinger organiseres og gensidige forståelser produceres gennem situeret samtale og interaktion. Den trækker på etnografiske data indsamlet i to danske organisationer, herunder interviews, observationer og videooptagelser af mødeinteraktioner.

De tre inkluderede artikler viser, at ledelsesarbejdet med at mobilisere engageret fremtidig handling centralt består i forhandling af et problems karakter, tilgængelige løsninger, ejerskab, individuelle og delte ansvarligheder, samt i løbende improvisation og balancering af forsøg på at påvirke andre for at fremkalde en engageret snarere end en føjelig respons. Dette fælles udførte ledelsesarbejde indebærer tvetydigheder, dilemmaer, konflikter og magtdynamikker, som ledelsesaktørerne navigerer i for at nå frem til tilstrækkeligt afklarede aftaler og forpligtelser.

Afhandlingen bidrager til eksisterende ledelsesteori ved at demonstrere at ledelsesarbejde i praksis er både jordnært og utroligt kompleks; at det fungerer som et centralt sted for at konstruere og dekonstruere handlekraft; og det primært indebærer dygtigt at improvisere, balancere og tilpasse sine bidrag og påvirkningsforsøg til den aktuelle situation og det samspil, der er i gang.

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Preface

This dissertation presents the findings of an industrial PhD project that took place from September 2021 to November 2024. The dissertation consists of three main parts.

The first part (Chapters 1–4) introduces the study, its topic and relevance, the overall research question, theoretical concepts and research design.

The second part (Chapters 5–7) presents the following three articles, each of which has been submitted for review in academic journals. The articles follow specific journal guidelines, which means there may be slight differences in style. All references are collected in a combined reference list at the end of the dissertation.

- Article 1: "The struggle of leadership work: Three interactional challenges in mobilizing actors to commit to future action," co-authored by Magnus Larsson, Lund University. The article has been through a generally favorable review in *Leadership*, revised and resubmitted. A previous version was presented at the 39th European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium in Cagliari in July 2023.
- Article 2: "The balancing act of leadership work: Pushing and pulling for action in the effort to elicit a committed response," has been submitted to *Leadership*. A previous version was presented at the 21st International Studying Leadership Conference (ISLC) in Copenhagen in December 2023.
- Article 3: "Acting in concert: Four practices of accountability work in plural leadership," co-authored by Brigid Carroll, University of Auckland Business School. This article has been submitted to *Human Relations*. It is written in U.K. English, while the rest of the dissertation is in U.S. English.

The last part (Chapter 8) summarizes the findings across the three articles, discusses the overall contributions and implications of the findings, and concludes the dissertation.

The project is part of the Industrial PhD program in Denmark, which means that it is partially funded by Innovation Fund Denmark and carried out in collaboration between a private company, in this case the consultancy UKON, and a university, in this case CBS. I am employed at UKON and have been through the project period, and UKON is thus the other main funder of the project. While the formal requirements for an industrial PhD are generally the same as for an ordinary PhD, the main difference is that instead of a teaching obligation at the university, I have had a dissemination obligation through my employment and work as a leadership consultant in UKON. In addition, I have attended a mandatory Industrial PhD course arranged by Innovation Fund Denmark, focusing on research impact and value creation in business and society, and other activities, such as mid-term evaluation on the project collaboration and progress.[1]

[1] For more information about the Industrial PhD program, visit Industrial Researcher | Innovationsfonden.

1. Introduction

Today, more than ever, it is recognized that organizational adaptability and change is dependent on collective efforts that require organizational actors to voice and take responsibility for emerging challenges, finding new ways forward (Ashford and Sitkin, 2019; Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018; Wåhlin-Jacobsen, 2020). Trends toward decentralization, pluralistic forms of leadership, and a growing demand for specialized knowledge in contemporary organizations challenge traditional assumptions of leadership as simply what leaders do (Clifton, 2017; Denis et al., 2012; Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Ospina et al., 2020). Approaches to share or distribute leadership responsibilities have gained substantial attention in research and practice, and positive outcomes in terms of performance and creativity have been established (D'Innocenzo et al., 2021; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). However, while this research demonstrates the positive effects of such leadership configurations, it says less about the everyday work and relational dynamics inherent in navigating shared or distributed responsibilities, which is the focus of this dissertation.

The case for expanding leadership studies beyond those at the apex of organizations goes back a long way (Barnard, 1938), but the field has been plagued by romanticism and heroic notions of leadership which persist to this day (Bligh et al., 2011; Clifton, 2017; Collinson et al., 2018; Meindl, 1995; Meindl et al., 1985; Tourish, 2014). A central development over the last few decades is that the role and efficacy of the individual leader has been seriously challenged by pluralistic and relational approaches to leadership as a social process of mutual influence (Carroll et al., 2019; Ospina et al., 2020; Schnurr et al., 2021). Increasingly, this field of research is moving beyond the person and position focus, toward an understanding of leadership as an inherently discursive and relational phenomenon, located and realized in interaction (Clifton et al., 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Larsson, 2017; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). In line with these developments, leadership is widely understood as a process of sensemaking and mutual influence through which direction for coordinated action is established or changed and involved actors are mobilized (Drath et al., 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Meier, 2023; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Yukl, 2013).

Still, we lack knowledge of how such mutual influence processes are accomplished in everyday talk and action, as interactional analyses are rare in the leadership research, even within shared and distributed approaches (Hmieleski et al., 2012; Uhl-Bien and Carsten, 2018; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). Well-established methods within leadership research like surveys, factor analysis and focus groups keep us at a distance from the lived practice, the "when," "where" and "how" of leadership and relational dynamics of everyday interactions through which future actions are organized (Clifton, 2017; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

A range of scholars have further criticized the literature on shared and distributed leadership for bringing its own kind of romanticization by failing to adequately account for issues of power, conflict and struggle involved in plural leadership (Chreim, 2015; Collinson et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2012; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020). By producing a glossy picture, not only of individual and formal leaders' influence, but of the shared sensemaking of multiple leadership actors, leadership research risks distancing itself from a messier reality faced by practitioners.

Therefore, while leadership studies have primarily relied on quantitative and psychological methods, there is a growing demand for observational research and detailed interactional analyses for leadership literature to move beyond normative assumptions about what leadership should be (Chreim, 2015; Clifton, 2006, 2019; Denis et al., 2012; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Svennevig, 2008; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020: 492).

In this dissertation, I explore the messy details of how leadership actors collaboratively organize future actions on emerging issues and mobilize commitment to such actions. I explore what this leadership work consists of; what challenges require effort and struggle, and what practices and resources are utilized to overcome them in situated interplays. In this endeavor, I take an ethnomethodological approach and draw on video-recorded material from work meetings in two Danish organizations. Ethnomethodology (EM) and the derived conversation analysis (CA) are fundamentally concerned with how interactions are organized in situ and how social and organizational reality is produced through situated talk and interaction (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008; Sacks et al., 1974; Samra-Fredericks and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2008). Ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA) focuses on common-sense knowledge and tacit methods—what Garfinkel (1967) calls ethnomethods—through which actors produce and interpret social actions, creating shared understandings. EMCA enables me to study the detailed work of leadership actors in constructing future action commitments as in situ interactional accomplishments.

Research question

Grounded in an EMCA perspective, this dissertation addresses the following question:

How is commitment to future action mobilized in leadership work?

By answering this question, I aim to contribute to the understanding of leadership as a practical, discursive and interactional accomplishment (Carroll et al., 2008; Clifton, 2009; Crevani, 2018; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Larsson and Meier, 2023) and to provide empirical evidence of the complexity, challenges and efforts involved in the everyday leadership work of plural leadership actors (Collinson et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2012).

A clarification of central concepts is in order. I draw on an understanding of *leadership* as a social influence process through which direction for coordinated action is established or changed and involved actors are mobilized (Drath et al., 2008; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Larsson and Meier, 2023; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Yukl, 2013). *Leadership work* can consequently be seen as the situated efforts, practices and resources utilized by multiple leadership actors in the interactional accomplishment of influence to produce direction and coordinated action. Relatedly, Meschitti (2019: 621), has defined leadership work as "a process unfolding through talk and depending on a unique dynamic among the resources that participants bring to an interaction and the ability of the participants to creatively mobilize these resources to perform the task at hand." In this dissertation, I am particularly interested in the leadership work involved in mobilizing commitment to future action.

I use the concept of *leadership actors* throughout the dissertation to emphasize that leadership is not limited to specific persons or formal positions. Rather, shifts in who does the leading and who does the following can occur continuously in the unfolding social interaction, and "leader" and "follower" should therefore be viewed as situated positions and social identities when analyzing in situ social interaction, rather than fixed entities (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006). That is, actors may certainly hold formal roles and leadership responsibilities, but the situated enactment of leadership is neither defined nor determined by these roles. In the micro-dynamics of social interaction, formal authority becomes one resource among many that the involved actors may draw on to accomplish influence and construct future action commitments, i.e., engage in leadership. As argued by Fairhurst (2010: 180–181), any actor "who constructs shared meanings, defines the reality of others and provides the basis for organizational action is engaging in leadership; they are a 'leadership actor.'"

There are concepts beyond leadership that require elaboration, most notably *commitment*. I am not interested in commitment as an intrapsychic state or subjective experience of involved actors, but rather in commitment as an observable social action and in how this act of committing to future action is mobilized in situated interactions. I draw on EMCA to specify commitment as a practical, action-orientated concept, along with a few other central concepts, including influence and accountability, which I return to in more detail in Chapter 3.

Structure of the dissertation

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical perspectives and leadership literature that I built upon in the dissertation, namely approaches to leadership as a relational and practical achievement realized through everyday interactions. In Chapter 3, I present the approach and principles of EMCA, which I have applied in all three articles of the dissertation. In this chapter, I also specify central concepts and review relevant empirical studies from the field of EMCA. In Chapter 4, I present the empirical settings where this research was conducted, provide an overview of the empirical material collected, and describe the methodologies used for data collection. I outline the research process from the initial data collection forward, including the process of analysis.

The second part of the dissertation features the included three research articles. Chapter 5 presents the first article, which contributes with empirical detail of the central interactional challenges involved in the leadership work of mobilizing actors to take responsibility and future action on an issue at hand. Chapter 6 presents the second article, which demonstrates the extensive, ongoing work involved in accomplishing influence and how leadership actors utilize a range of resources to balance calls to action from others in order to elicit a committed response. The third article, presented in Chapter 7, provides detailed insights into how leadership actors struggle to move from past to future and from individual to shared accountabilities in relation to an organizational issue at hand, highlighting both individual and collaborative work to navigate conflicting accountabilities and hierarchical power. Collectively, these three articles present the central challenges and practices involved in the delicate, situated work of plural leadership actors to mobilize committed future action on emerging issues.

The three articles are presented in their original form as submitted for publication except for the following few adjustments:

- The format is adjusted to fit the rest of the dissertation
- Three references to the first article (Nielsen and Larsson, in revision) have been added to the second article. I have temporarily removed these references from the article during the ongoing review process, in agreement with the editor, to avoid compromising my anonymity, but I expect they will be included before publication, as I draw on a specification of situated commitment, which is introduced in the first article.
- All references and an appendix that includes transcript notations are collected at the end of the dissertation rather than after each article.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the articles and discusses the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the dissertation, connecting back to the overall research question presented in this chapter and to the leadership literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This concluding chapter also outlines some limitations of this research and recommendations for future studies.

2. Leadership as interactional work of plural actors

In this chapter, I introduce the field of leadership literature that this dissertation engages with and positions itself within, namely relational and pluralistic approaches to leadership as a social-communicative process located in everyday talk and interaction among multiple leadership actors. These approaches differ most clearly from approaches that locate leadership in specific persons, personality characteristics or formal roles (Carroll et al., 2019). As noted by Barker (1997), the concept of "leadership" itself, ending with the suffix "ship," can be seen to denote a skill or ability —or to indicate a relationship. What this relationship consists of and how it is studied vary in different approaches. In this review, I address some key contributions and differences in relational and pluralistic approaches to leadership and some of the questions they raise.

Approaches to leadership as a relational accomplishment

Relational approaches to leadership can be divided into two categories: what Uhl-Bien and colleagues (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012) have called an *entity perspective*, derived from a cognitive, constructivist approach, viewing individuals as independent, discrete entities that engage in relationships and influence each other, and a *process perspective*, derived from social constructionism, viewing "persons, leadership and other relational realities as *made* in processes" (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 655, italics in text). From a constructionist perspective, actors and contexts are continually being constructed and reconstructed "in ways that either expand or contract the space of possible action" (Holmberg, 2000: 181). Both the entity and the process perspectives involve an emphasis on relationship. However, while the entity perspective emphasizes an interpersonal relationship of already organized entities, which can be studied through "snapshots" reported by individuals (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 666), the process perspective emphasizes a process of continuous organizing and construction of relationships, roles, and identities through communication, which can only be studied in situ.

Taking a process perspective, entities and causality may be seen as simplistic stories that reduce the complexity of the emerging and continuously changing pattern of processes (Kelly, 2019). In line with the process perspective, Drath et al. (2008) have proposed an alternative to the ontology of leadership as a tripod of leaders influencing followers toward common goals, instead seeing and studying leadership as an outcome of a social process enacted in the production of collective direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC). Some recent process-oriented leadership studies have thus explored the ongoing production of direction and shift in the flow of action in work processes (Crevani, 2018; Lortie et al., 2023; Sklaveniti, 2020). Conceptualizing leadership work as social processes of influence and co-creation, the analytical gaze is put on the *interactions* in which such processes unfold (Carroll et al., 2019: 229). Here leaders, or leadership actors, can be seen as those participants who at the moment skilfully influence the organizing process and contribute to evolving social order and who are perceived to do so by the other participants (Hosking, 1988; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Drawing on the work of Langley and colleagues in process

organization studies (Langley et al., 2013; Langley and Tsoukas, 2010), Crevani (2018: 84) argues that studies within a process perspective can be distinguished by the extent to which reality is seen as fluid and individual actors and entities are referred to:

> This is not a sharp distinction, however, rather a matter of degree regarding which question is most often brought to the fore: either 'what do individuals do in the process?' or 'what does the process do to organizing practices?'. Both questions need to be explored, and they should be thought of as developing in dialogue with each other.

In this dissertation, I approach leadership as a relational accomplishment that unfolds through talk and interaction, and I view individual actors as both contributing to and shaped by the unfolding interaction, where situated positions and identities emerge. Thus, I adopt a process perspective on leadership, studying the construction and contributions of individual actors in this process.

In line with a relational approach to leadership, a number of pluralistic conceptions of leadership have been developed over the last few decades, including shared, distributed, collective, relational, post-heroic and more, which all emphasize the agentic role and combined influence of various organizational actors (Denis et al., 2012; Yammarino et al., 2012). Fairhurst et al. (2020) have recently categorized seven concepts under the umbrella of collective leadership: collective leadership, shared leadership, distributed leadership, complexity leadership, discursive leadership, relational leadership, and network leadership. One of the most cited in the literature is Pearce and Conger's (2003: 1) definition of shared leadership as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both."

While the different constructions of plural leadership often overlap, blur into each other and are used interchangeably, they differ in terms of epistemology and methodology, as reviewed by Denis et al. (2012: 213). In addition, the same concept of plural leadership (such as shared or distributed leadership) is sometimes defined as an emergent property of group processes (Zhu et al., 2018, p. 834) or an inherently relational phenomenon (Fletcher and Käufer, 2003; Spillane and Diamond, 2007), and at other times it is approached as a configuration (Gronn, 2009), i.e. a relatively stable distribution of influence-based roles and functions that could be formally implemented or informally created, but in either way appears as a rather explicit pattern. Thus, while some literature focuses on cross-cutting and relatively stable patterns in the distribution of power and influence (as contrasted to centralization of power and influence), other contributions align more with a process perspective where power and influence are seen as negotiated, interactional phenomena rather than fixed entities and where the settling of who leads and who follows is based on the dynamically evolving interaction in situ.

Ospina et al. (2020) have offered a distinction in this regard, namely between *collectivity as a type* of leadership and *collectivity as a lens* on leadership. This highlights two different but co-existing levels of analysis in the literature on plural leadership: one on structural-relational configurations (collectivity or plurality as a type) and the other on situational-interactional dynamics (collectivity or plurality as a lens) [2]. The relatively stable patterns of relations and explicit role distributions will expectedly influence the dynamic level; the ways members communicate, position and orient themselves in concrete episodes (Pearce, 2007), and vice versa, sequences of talk and action can implicate changes in institutionalized patterns over time. According to Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015: 87), the scholarly focus often dwells on macro, coarse-grain properties, such as formal roles, structure, and strategy, although from a process perspective, leadership is practiced in fine-grained social interactions, which together enable the macro patterns to arise.

We generally lack empirical research on plural leadership and particularly practice-oriented studies of how it unfolds in everyday interactions (Larsson and Meier, 2019; Fairhurst et al., 2020). A growing body of studies and meta-analysis examines the overall positive and negative consequences of shared and distributed leadership configurations (Bolden, 2011; Edelmann et al., 2023; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). However, such macro-level research provides very limited insight into the actual processes of how the "sharing" of leadership unfolds in situated talk and action, as well as the challenges that arise during these processes (Gadelshina, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020).

This dissertation grapples with this question of *just how* leadership is accomplished by plural actors on a micro-level of social interaction. It explores the challenges, effort and practices involved for plural leadership actors to negotiate future actions and accountabilities in relation to organizational issues at hand. In situated interactions, macro features such as formal hierarchical roles may emerge as resources or problems for the participants, and I primarily analyze them as they arise from inside the interaction.

Before I unfold my approach as one of studying leadership in interaction, two central observations are to be made in relation to the literature on relational and pluralistic approaches—regarding the localization of leadership in processes or in outcomes and the tendency toward romanticization.

[2] A similar distinction is made by Denis et al. (2012: 272) between "pluralizing leadership," where power and influence are seen as something that can be delegated, and "channelling plurality," where power and influence are seen as widely dispersed, and where actors may attempt to "mobilize the influence that others naturally have in a direction that is likely to favor overarching group goals". This implies different conceptions of power and influence.

Leadership as a process or an outcome?

While the reviewed literature largely agrees that leadership is not just what single leaders do, but rather a mutual influence process through which direction emerges or shifts and future actions are organized, it also simultaneously describes leadership as both a process (of mutual influence) and as an outcome (of direction and coordinated action). Thus, one may ask where leadership is located—in a process or in an outcome of a process, or in both? In other words, a tension or interdependency arises between the processes and practices of "producing" and the "produced" in leadership. For instance, in the following definition of leadership work by Crevani (2019: 229):

> Leadership work is thus about social processes of co-creation in which emergent coordination and change are produced and our attention should be on the interactions and relations in which such processes unfold

As such, most of the literature emphasizes the process and practice side, the "doings" of leadership (Clifton, 2006), and approaches leadership as *organizing* (Crevani, 2018; Crevani and Endrissat, 2016; Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Meschitti, 2019). Still, these processes and practices are specifically characterized by the change or coordination they produce in situ. One of the places in the literature where leadership is, on the other hand, quite explicitly conceptualized as an *outcome* is in Drath et al.'s (2008) integrative framework of pluralistic, relational and complexity approaches to leadership. This framework proposes that leadership is located in three central outcomes, namely DAC. These leadership outcomes are produced through "leadership practices" which are broadly defined to include all "the behaviors, interactions, and systems in a collective aimed at producing DAC" (p. 643) and are understood as "*collective enactments* such as patterns of conversation or organizational routines that influence and transcend individual behavior" (p. 645, italics in text). Drath et al. (2008) thus offer an ontology of leadership that is neither tied to specific individuals (such as formal leaders) nor to specific practices (such as decision making or problem solving), but instead tied to the production of a shared direction, alignment, and mutual commitment as "the mark of leadership" (p. 646). While they clearly locate leadership in the occurrence of these three outcomes, Drath et al. (2008: 643) also use the term "leadership" to describe the processes and practices through which these outcomes are produced:

> While it is true that the DAC ontology results in a greater range of social interaction being seen as leadership, it does not mean that any and all social interactions comprise leadership. Only that which aims to produce DAC is leadership.

Notably, Drath et al. (2008) use the term "aims to," which opens up the definition of leadership to include not only the three outcomes and the processes and practices producing them, but any action *aiming at* producing DAC. An ambiguity arises here, as the previous statement that direction, alignment, and commitment is "the mark of leadership" (p. 646) suggests that without these outcomes, what we have is not leadership. It might be "collaboration", "sensemaking" etc.

However, the "aiming at" opens up the possibility that all attempts to create DAC are leadership, whether successful or not. This possibly makes the demarcation of leadership less clear (than when the outcomes do occur), opening up the definition for the criticism that leadership disappears among other phenomena (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b). As such, the production of direction and organization of action can be seen as central distinctive features of leadership processes that distinguish them from other processes. From a process perspective, such "outcomes" will, however, always be emergent and to some extent temporary constructions in the continuous unfolding interactions (Crevani, 2019: 234). Still, it is through this ongoing work of producing direction and organizing actions that the organization comes into being (Crevani, 2018).

In this dissertation, I draw on the understanding of leadership as the ongoing work of producing direction and mobilizing future action that unfolds in everyday interaction and mundane work activities (Crevani, 2018; Meschitti, 2019). I am particularly interested in the situated outcome of one or more actors visibly committing to take responsibility and future action in a matter at hand *and* the interactional work leading up to this commitment. While Drath et al.'s (2008) conceptions of direction, alignment and commitment denote broad phenomena on the level of the organization or collective (e.g., shared direction defined as "a reasonable level of agreement in the collective about the aim, mission, vision, or goal of the collective's shared work" p. 647), such outcomes emerge as situated, communicative events in the micro dynamics of social interaction. Any puncture marking the end of an interaction may create a sense of "outcome" as a kind of completed entity, such as mutual agreement or unresolved disagreement, commitment or rejection to take action, which will shape and be shaped by subsequent interactional processes, for instance deconstructing a previous display of commitment. In sum, in line with a process perspective, I treat leadership outcomes as situated events integral to interactional processes, and I specifically study the interactional practices, i.e., leadership work, leading up to the outcome of actors' committing to take future actions. I also study situated efforts and influence attempts that do not immediately lead to this leadership outcome, as I am interested in the interactional challenges involved, hindering or prolonging leadership work.

Romanticization in pluralistic approaches to leadership

A further observation in the reviewed literature is that little consensus exists regarding the overarching theoretical framework and operationalization of plural leadership (Bolden, 2011; Denis et al., 2012; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). At the same time, there is a tendency toward enthusiasm and positivity and a lack of attention to conflict and power dynamics in the literature on plural leadership, which has consequently been accused of bringing its own kind of romanticization (Chreim, 2015; Collinson et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2012; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020). The "romance of leadership" critique was originally developed by Meindl et al. (1985), who, drawing on archival and experimental studies, argued that there is a strong tendency to attribute organizational success and defeat to leadership, assigning disproportionate influence to individuals and formal leaders in particular, which contributes to a mystification and heroization (or villainization) of leadership.

With pluralistic and relational understandings of leadership, this romanticization has not vanished, it seems, but changed. In a recent critical contribution, Collinson et al. (2018) thus argue that the critique of romanticization is relevant to many contemporary leadership theories, including pluralistic approaches to leadership and process perspectives, as in Drath et al. (2008), where notions of power and conflict largely recede in favor of harmonious accounts of shared sensemaking and commitment to collective goals. Collinson et al. (2018: 1637) thus argue that the "heroic properties previously associated with individual leaders" are here transferred to the collective, which becomes "the unit of leadership agency to such extent that the category of 'follower' becomes redundant.". By all practical accounts, leadership actors struggle to reach consensus and succeed in effective decision making every day, but we lack empirical inquiries that unpack the challenges and efforts involved.

Several process-oriented scholars have further proposed that, recognizing the co-constructed nature of leadership processes, the literature should place greater emphasis on diverging processes, unresolved conflicts, ambiguities, and the facilitation of dissent and alternative viewpoints that enable shifts in and co-existing branches of direction, rather than focusing on the achievement of one direction and full agreement (Crevani, 2018: 89; Tourish, 2014: 81). According to Tourish (2014: 79),

> there is no essence of leadership apart from the discursive constructions of organizational actors and in which the facilitation of disagreement and dissent holds the same importance as a traditional stress on the achievement of cohesion and agreement.

Interestingly, in a recent critical analysis of a configuration of distributed leadership at a school, Humphreys and Rigg (2020) demonstrated that strong discourses of empowerment, collaboration, and commitment to a community can "stifle dissent and conflict" (p. 713) and normalize compliance in the sense that individuals accept being less well positioned than others to participate and exert influence and even "feel good about it" (p. 733). Thus, a critique is directed at the normative assumption that plurality implies agreement and shared responsibility, which overlooks issues of power, agency, and exclusion, as well as the occurrence of conflict and rivalries within plural leadership (Humphreys and Rigg, 2020; Lumby, 2013).

In parallel with these problematizations, there have been numerous calls for research that addresses the challenges, conflicts, and power dynamics involved in plural leadership processes (Bolden, 2011; Denis et al., 2012; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Gordon, 2010; Gronn, 2009; Hatcher, 2005; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020). Accordingly, Denis et al. (2012) have advocated studies that explore how plural leadership unfolds in everyday interactions between formal leaders at different hierarchical levels (p. 230) and the interplay between the emergence of pluralistic leadership and the ongoing structuration of power relations (p. 271). Holm and Fairhurst (2018: 716) have further called for process-oriented studies that address "the ambiguity of the shared-hierarchical-leadership space", and Van De Mieroop et al. (2020: 511) have called for fine-grained interaction analyses of the "in situ mobilisation of sources of authority" as important arenas for research into pluralistic leadership.

This dissertation addresses these calls by studying the interactional challenges, dilemmas, and practices involved in the leadership work of multiple actors from different hierarchical levels, with a particular focus on the situated efforts to mobilize committed future action. Although still relatively rare in leadership research, there has been a turn toward more microanalytic studies through the past few decades (Asmuß and Svennevig, 2009; Clifton, 2009; Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). This dissertation contributes to the steadily growing field of research that locates and studies leadership *in interaction* (Clifton et al., 2020; Larsson, 2017; Larsson and Meier, 2023), which I now briefly introduce.

Studying leadership in interaction

Leadership in interaction was first marked as a field of research in leadership in 2017, with studies that "share a focus on organizational practices rather than on the competencies or characteristics of the individual leaders" (Larsson, 2017: 173). These studies focus on actual workplace interplay and the intricate processes through which leadership is accomplished in situated talk and action (Clifton et al., 2020; Larsson, 2017; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Schnurr et al., 2021; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). As such, this field of research treats leadership as ontologically located and collaboratively produced in social interaction, rather than being rooted in individual characteristics, formal roles, or social structures (Larsson and Meier, 2023).

Studies of leadership in interaction draw on discursive and social constructionist approaches to leadership positioned within a broader linguistic turn in organization studies (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a; Fairhurst and Cooren, 2004; Schnurr, 2018). While the early work in this field was mainly published in linguistic and discourse-oriented journals, Gail Fairhurst's (2007) book *Discursive Leadership* paved the way for contributions in leadership journals (Larsson and Meier, 2023). In her influential book, Fairhurst (2007) argues that psychological conceptions and research, which have dominated leadership literature alongside the focus on individual leaders, fall short in capturing the practical accomplishment of leadership in everyday interactions and collaboration on tasks. She employs the term "mental theatre," used by Cronen (1995), to describe a tendency in leadership psychology and research to reduce the messy, fine-grained details of human interaction to the projected "play of mental operations" (Fairhurst, 2007: 8). Thus, Fairhurst (2007) emphasizes the difference between studying actual situated work interaction (through observation) and studying reports of experiences of interactions (through interviews and surveys), notwithstanding that both types of studies may approach leadership as a social construction in some sense. Discursive studies of leadership focus on language *in use*, such as the sensemaking accounts in texts, interviews, interaction processes, and the formations of discourse, both in the sense of comprehensive ways of thinking (capital "D" Discourse) and in the sense of what is written or said (little "d" discourse; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000b; Fairhurst, 2007). Leadership in interaction studies draws specifically on the latter, micro-discursive focus.

Methodologically, this field of research is based on observations and video or audio recordings of naturally occurring work interactions, providing direct access to the enactment of leadership in situated talk and action (Larsson and Meier, 2023), and allowing for detailed analysis of the microlevel mechanisms and practices involved (Larsson, 2017). EMCA, focusing on the methods utilized by people to produce social order through situated social interactions (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008; Sacks, 1984a), is particularly suitable for studying leadership in interaction and will be thoroughly introduced in the next chapter.

A range of leadership in interaction studies have demonstrated the distributed nature of leadership and how leadership is accomplished through the joint efforts of participants in meetings and teams (Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Clifton, 2017; Gadelshina, 2020; Larsson et al., 2021; Schnurr et al., 2021; Schnurr and Chan, 2011; Van De Mieroop, 2020; Vine et al., 2008). For instance, in a study of decision-making episodes in management meetings at a school, Clifton (2017) demonstrated how the identities of leader and follower shifted turn-by-turn and were distributed among the group, illustrating the difficulty in attributing leadership to any one person. Other interactional studies have demonstrated that leadership processes are not always harmonious or conducive to agreement (Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020).

In interactional research, *meetings* are considered central sites for sensemaking and organizing work and occasions where leadership processes can be observed as they unfold in situ (Asmuß and Svennevig, 2009; Boden, 1995; Clifton, 2006; Cooren, 2007). A number of interactional leadership studies have thus explored the role of the meeting chair (Pomerantz and Denvir, 2007), the emergence of direction (Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Crevani, 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020), the construction of identities (Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Clifton, 2014), decision making (Huisman, 2001), negotiations of authority (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Holmes and Marra, 2004; Van De Mieroop, 2020; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020), conflict resolution (Holmes and Marra, 2004), and resources utilized to do influence, e.g. hierarchical position and expertise (Clifton, 2009; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009; Meschitti, 2019) among other aspects of situated meeting interactions. Collectively, these studies show how the exploration of situated social practice allows for capturing the "messy, ambiguous, and often unglamorous leadership as it unfolds in the organization of everyday life" (Gadelshina, 2020: 523).

This dissertation draws on and expands this work, shedding light on hitherto under-explored aspects of situated leadership work, specifically the efforts to mobilize actors to take initiative and committed future action on emerging issues, and the challenges and struggles involved.

When leadership is studied in everyday interactions and engagement with tasks and emerging issues, it may seem both mundane and messy in relation to more common understandings of leadership as a distinct person, a specific set of skills, or formal position, as well as romanticized narratives about captivating cases and transformative outcomes. Thus, a dilemma may arise between either considering leadership to be an everyday phenomenon (Larsson and Lundholm, 2010) or questioning how leadership, as a distinct and extraordinary phenomenon, seems to disappear (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b).

In the following section, I will briefly discuss this question, which closes the chapter. In the next chapter, I will introduce the ethnomethodological approach on which this dissertation is based.

Mundanity or disappearance of leadership?

Several scholars have touched on the apparent disappearance or disintegration of leadership that seems to follow when the focus is shifted from general discourses and ideals of leadership to descriptions of everyday leadership practice (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b) and from individuals to collective and interactive processes (Denis et al., 2012: 274):

> The interactive processes whereby leadership is produced easily shade into decision-making, collaboration, or simply work. When "leadership" can no longer be attached to individuals at all, there is a danger that it may become a chimera.

In particular, Kelly (2008) has argued that the discursive turn and interpretive studies of leadership as a locally produced, observable social practice bring about the problem that "leadership as an empirical object of inquiry has a tendency to disappear among the milieu of everyday life" (765). What is accounted for as leadership by the participants, such as formal managers, tends to be ambiguous, even contradictory, and what emerges in the accounts of work being done are mundane activities such as planning, giving advice, support, listening, solving problems, etc. (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). Drawing on ethnomethodology, Kelly (2008: 775) argues that leadership researchers tend to commit what he calls the category mistake of "treating leadership as a linguistic construction representative of a potentially knowable reality" —a reality that is seen as something to be discovered through more detailed observational research, rather than viewing leadership as a blurred concept or a family of language games. Kelly here points to the challenge that leadership appears as a lofty concept in the encounter with everyday practices and the possible critique I've touched upon earlier, that what we have in our observational research could as easily be described as problem solving, decision making, etc.

In this dissertation, rather than approaching leadership as an actors category—something to which the participants visibly orient and whereby it fades from view—I take leadership to be an analytical or second-order construct (Schutz, 1953). This construct refers to a complex social phenomenon that is introduced by me as the researcher rather than by the participants themselves (Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Larsson, 2017). In other words, leadership is here seen as an interpretative framework rather than the studied actors' own category. Accordingly, when analyzing everyday talk and interaction of organizational actors, I make analytical connections between what is observably going on, focusing particularly on situated negotiation of future action commitments, and the analytical concept of leadership. Indeed, the ethnomethodological approach I employ allows for empirically demonstrating the mundanity and messiness that characterize leadership work in practice (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011; Gadelshina, 2020; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010). I will now turn to introduce this approach.

3. An ethnomethodological approach

With the purpose of exploring the in-situ leadership work of organizing future actions and mobilizing commitment to such action, this dissertation takes an ethnomethodological approach and draws on the principles of EMCA, which will be presented below.

Ethnomethodology (EM) was founded in the 1960s by sociologist Harold Garfinkel as a program of research on how members of society create and maintain social order through everyday social interactions. That is, EM is concerned with documenting the commonsense knowledge and methods ("ethnomethods") that people rely on to make sense of and navigate their social world, daily lives, and tasks (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). In his pioneering work from 1967, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Garfinkel draws on the thinking of Alfred Schutz and approaches everyday activities as anthropological strange to be able to identify the "seen but unnoticed" (p. 36) tacit expectations, taken-for-granted reasoning and practices in life-as-usual scenes in the family or at the workplace. He treats social order as a practical problem and an ongoing accomplishment of the members engaged in social interaction rather than as an analytical problem that requires sociological explanations in terms of structures or institutionalized norms outside the interaction (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009).

Primarily known for his work studies, Garfinkel also proposed an alternative theory of work itself (Rawls, 2008). Opposed to conventional theories that treat the local order of work as resulting from individual interests, power, and external constraints, Garfinkel insisted that the details necessary to create and understand local order—including power and constraint—are *local matters* adequately explained in each workplace interaction and "requiring a research approach focused on the order properties of those details" (Rawls, 2008: 701). Through his research, Garfinkel aspired to illuminate the tacit practices and methods "through which people produce and interpret social actions and activities in particular settings without distorting them through the use of concepts, which a social theorist might bring to the analysis from outside those settings" (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 12). One way he studied this was through breaching experiments, designed to disrupt the taken-for-granted nature of social life by intentionally violating commonly accepted norms and expectations to reveal, through participants' reactions and way of handling these breaches in situated social interactions, the underlying rules and processes by which social order is constructed (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008).

As social order is seen as continually constructed by the members of any social interaction, EM research focuses on the micro-level methods and practices through which actors reflexively produce mutual understandings and shared social realities, rather than on macro-level social structures that are commonly the focus of sociology. These methods and practices are characterized by "reflexivity" in the sense that "each next thing done or said is taken in relation to the last (reflects back on the last), and this reflexive sequential chain constitutes a basic order of sensemaking" (Rawls, 2008: 712).

Since social order is seen as constructed in situated social interaction, the same applies to change of that social order and thus leadership, understood as the social process through which direction for coordinated action is produced or changed (Crevani, 2018; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Drawing on EM, leadership can thus be studied as a practical accomplishment of social interaction, which may seem routine, mundane and unremarkable, but which really is a delicate, reflexive achievement of the involved actors (Fairhurst, 2007; Knights and Willmott, 1992; Larsson, 2017). While EM is often considered a form of social constructionism, Garfinkel rejected any such description and positioning of EM within the interpretivist tradition. Instead, he adopted a stance of "ethnomethodological indifference" toward research paradigms (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 12).

A significant development from the EM research program is EMCA,[3] which I draw heavily upon in this dissertation. EMCA emerged in the late 1960s, primarily developed by sociologist Harvey Sacks in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (Sacks et al., 1974), and greatly influenced by the perspectives and methods of Garfinkel. Another influence was Erving Goffman, particularly his conception of "the interaction order," which he used to describe the tacit conventions, norms and rituals in face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1967, 1983). Goffman argued that social interaction should be studied as the management of these conventions rather than through the lens of individuals and psychology, which inspired Sacks and colleagues in their development of EMCA (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 11).

EMCA is a highly data-driven and inductive approach to studying social interaction and the ongoing production of social order, where any theoretical or analytic claim is grounded in the practices and understandings that participants display moment by moment. This involves examining the subtle details of the content, design and context of each turn (Schegloff, 2007). In EMCA research, attributing inner motives, emotions, or thoughts to the participants is generally avoided; intrapersonal elements are only considered to the extent that participants refer to them in their talk-in-interaction, thus keeping the focus on what is visibly displayed (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). In this sense, the analytical interest in EMCA is strongly emic, focusing strictly on how the interactants themselves visibly make sense of and understand the evolving interaction.

The emic interest is clearly expressed in the so-called *next turn proof procedure* (Sacks et al., 1974: 728) of attending to how the recipient of an utterance or non-verbal action visibly makes sense of and orients toward it through their next turn. Building on Garfinkel's work, a guiding principle in EMCA is that social interaction is *sequentially organized*, meaning that each turn builds on previous turns and projects reasonable following turns (Schegloff, 2007). Through each action, interactants thus both display their understanding of each other's previous actions and contribute the evolving interaction and production of a mutually intelligible social situation (Heritage and Clayman, 2010). The sequential organization of interaction create *preference structures* by setting up normative expectations to what actions and responses would be relevant and preferred over other actions (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013).

[3] To keep the ethnomethodological origins of conversation analysis clear, I generally use the collective abbreviation EMCA in this dissertation, except in Article 3, where Brigid Carroll and I use the abbreviation CA.

For instance, a question sets up an expectation for an answer, and acceptance or rejection is anticipated in response to an offer; these linked actions are referred to as "adjacency pairs" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Acceptances are generally preferred over rejections in response to a range of first actions, such as offers, invitations, requests, assessments, etc. These preferences manifest in utterance design, where a dispreferred response, such as a rejection to a request, is typically delayed (for example by silence), may include mitigating linguistic elements (like "well" or "eh"), and is often followed by an account for the response in contrast to preferred responses, which tend to be delivered relatively promptly and not accounted for. Such patterns have been found across a range of languages and cultures (Kendrick and Torreira, 2015; Stivers et al., 2009)

While Garfinkel included both experiments and participant diaries in his research, EMCA generally emphasizes the study of naturally occurring interaction and participants' in situ reflexive understanding of what is going on amidst practice rather than later reflections on practice, such as in interviews (Llewellyn and Spence, 2009). Audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions are therefore preferred over other methods (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010) and video recordings in particular, as they allow for inquiries into the fine-grained and multimodal details of social interactions (Streeck et al., 2011; Mondada 2011, 2019).

Finally, it should be noted that EMCA does not share assumptions about validity, objectivity, and generalizability with mainstream science. The systematic in EMCA is not about frequencies and statistical relationship (although occurrences of a pattern may be counted in large collection studies; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). Instead, it focuses on preference structures and intersubjective practices, which participants share access to, enabling them to act in intelligible ways and perceive each other's actions as conditionally appropriate. Here rigor pertains to fine-grained analysis of in situ interaction (Whittle et al., 2015: 385), and the quality of EMCA research is assessed "by the extent to which findings describe normative practices, which are observably oriented to by participants in the details of their interactions." (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 88).

A key principle in this regard is that there is "order at all points," meaning that such normative practices and details of how mutual understandings are created can be identified in even just a single sequence of talk (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). Another principle is that while everyday activities, such as meetings, may appear to follow a generalizable structure, each instance is also "another next first time" (Garfinkel, 1967: 9). Therefore, single-case analyses are essential and often presented in EMCA-based publications as part of a lager corpus of instances that have been analyzed case-by-case (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Schegloff, 1987). They are also often published alone, which allows for including longer sequences of talk and thereby enables the exploration of complex social phenomena (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008). According to Schegloff (1993), the relevance of a particular element of orderliness should always be established through the displayed orientations of participants, and any quantification of its occurrence across cases should be built on the evidence and relevance found through analyzing single cases.

This dissertation builds on focused ethnographic work in two Danish organizations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Knoblauch, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2000), using multiple data sources, including video recordings of work interactions, observations and field notes, as well as audio recorded interviews, which will be presented in the next chapter. Therefore, I would like to briefly outline some central differences between ethnography and EMCA, and how I approach them.

Ethnography and EMCA

Building on anthropology (Geertz, 1973), the ethnographic researcher traditionally immerses herself in and uses her own understanding of what is going on in a setting, trying to make sense through participating from a distance and empathizing with the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Tracy, 2012). The researcher's own understanding and interpretation here becomes a core resource in the analysis, and it makes sense to engage in dialogue with participants to get closer to an understanding of their practice, gradually improving the researcher's familiarity and knowledge in relation to the setting and group.

EMCA, on the other hand, drawing on sociology (Garfinkel, 1967), emphasizes a strict distinction between the phenomenon itself and the research(er). In this tradition, the researcher's own experiences and interpretations cannot serve as analytic resources; instead, they are treated as topics for investigation (Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Rawls, 2008). This approach maintains an inductive stance towards data, with knowledge being seen as emic in the sense that it is "owned" by the interaction order. Consequently, anything of significance should be observable in the fine-grained details of talk and action (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). As argued by Rawls (2008: 724),

> The problem is that the conventional observer participates (qua observer) in a different social world with different constitutive expectations from the identified actor engaged in working acts. The observer is not constructing the situation they are analyzing, the participants are. Focusing on the observer at all is a problem in itself.

While EMCA focuses on visible relational dynamics and turn-by-turn displayed understandings instead of inferred psychological and cognitive processes, ethnographical studies are criticized for typically not providing enough detail to substantiate their claims (Silverman, 2014), "and what they mean by detail is more conceptual and cognitive than empirical" (Rawls, 2008: 725).

In this dissertation, I combine EMCA-based analysis of video-recorded interaction with ethnographic methods, such as observations and interviews. While recordings of naturally occurring interactions provide direct access to the phenomenon under study, other methods enable me to examine aspects of organizational activity outside the analyzed talk-in-interaction and to develop a sensitivity to the organizational setting in which the interactions are embedded (Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Samra-Fredericks, 2000; ten Have, 2007).

This means that while my primary focus is on the situated, sequential context when analyzing social interaction, I also relate to the broader organizational context, which frames and is shaped by the organizing processes of everyday interaction (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst and Cooren, 2004; Hosking, 1988; Weick et al., 2005). It is emphasized within EMCA that no instance of interaction should be analyzed in isolation from its context (Heritage and Clayman, 2010) and that studies in complex organizational settings can benefit from interviews, field notes, and other sources of information to understand the nature of participants' work, tasks and roles (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018). Thus, interaction analysis may be part of an ethnographically inspired study, as is the case in this dissertation. A central point in EMCA is, however, that the information gathered through methods distanced from social interaction, such as retrospective accounts in interviews, cannot be directly transferred to interaction analysis, unless it can be shown to be relevant to the participants themselves in the unfolding interactions (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Larsson and Meier, 2023).

EMCA studies related to the mobilization of future action

In this section, I will briefly review some of the most relevant lines of research within EMCA in relation to the focus in this dissertation, namely the leadership work of mobilizing commitment to future action in everyday interactions at work.

Within EMCA, a substantial body of research has explored how actors seek to mobilize or "recruit" others to engage in an action or activity. A common example of this is requesting, where an actor appeals to another for assistance or to perform a task. Requests are a pervasive form of social action, often performed through verbal means but also through nonverbal cues, such as pointing (Rossi, 2014). Studies of requesting practices have shown that getting someone to do something they did not initiate themselves is a socially complex matter, raising questions about entitlements and obligations—specifically, who believes an action is necessary, who stands to benefits, and who is responsible for carrying it out (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014). A typical request (e.g., "Can you get it to me?") can be seen as transforming the recipient into a tool for the requester, effectively doing the action on their behalf. Accordingly, requests contain interpersonally sensitive issues, such as respecting the agency, integrity, and autonomy of others (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014).

Therefore, some EMCA studies suggest that offers are generally preferred over requests in social interactions, a preference reflected in the relative sensitivity with which people construct these social actions (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Schegloff, 2007). This leaves actors with the challenges of how to elicit—that is, how to make an offer a relevant contribution from another actor in order to avoid making a direct request. To elicit an offer, actors may employ various interactional tactics, such as presenting a problem and predicament in a way that makes it clear that the recipient will be able to help out. For instance, telling someone that my car has broken down might prompt that person to offer to drive me (Schegloff, 2007). Conversely, if the solution to a problem is ambiguous or it is unclear whether the recipient has the necessary resources or capacity to solve it or help out, it is less likely that an offer will be made.

The sensitive issues involved in making even simple requests are navigated through the subtle, "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel, 1967: 36) design of turns and utterances. While one might expect that requests and other methods of mobilizing others to act are relatively accepted in work settings and not least in hierarchical asymmetric, Curl and Drew (2008) have found evidence that the choice of request format is less tied to the specific sociolinguistic settings or social identities; rather it displays the requester's understanding of the situation in terms of their own *entitlement* to make the request and the *contingencies* that might affect the recipient's capacity to grant it. Accordingly, actors visibly attempt to avoid overstepping perceived entitlement by using various modal verbs (such as "would" and "could") and displaying an orientation to the recipient's willingness and capacity to do what is asked. Variations in linguistic design can thus be categorized based on the degree of built-in entitlement and orientation towards contingencies on the recipient's behalf, ranging from directives, which are the most forceful (e.g., "do x"), to need statements (e.g., "I need you to x"), and to interrogative requests (e.g., "Can/Could you do x?", (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008). Consequently, the choice of a more or less forceful design can be seen as a local claim about what the actor believes him/herself to be entitled to and what they see as the contingencies surrounding the granting of that request.

As argued by Craven and Potter (2010), the imperative design of directives, commands, and orders entails no orientation to contingencies and the possibility of the request not being granted; they "embody no orientation to the recipient's ability or desire to perform the relevant activity" (419). Thus, they do not set up expectations of acceptance or rejection, but rather make compliance as the relevant as the next possible action (Craven and Potter, 2010: 426, cf. Goodwin, 2006). It should be noted that, drawing on EM, the practical effect of specific utterances and social actions cannot be decided a priori or detached from the interaction in which they are enacted. However, findings such as suggest that softer design are needed to mobilize commitment. In a study of small requests of here-and-now actions in informal contexts, Rossi (2012) found that directives tend to occur relatively often in activities and projects that are jointly undertaken and oriented to by the requester and the recipient as a shared endeavor (such as dining together), arguing that the strong format is "licensed by the relation of the request to a larger course of action, within which the mobilization of a certain behaviour is a relevant component" (p. 435–436).

In sum, EMCA research shows that mobilizing action from others is an interpersonally complex matter that involves a number of considerations and possible strategies. I will draw on these findings in the analysis of leadership actors' situated efforts to mobilize committed future actions. However, while this literature predominantly focuses on proximal and low-cost impositions, such as asking another to pass a plate at a family dinner (Rossi, 2012), my focus is on the organization of distal future actions in work interplay. These actions cannot be performed here and now; therefore, commitment to a future action is not shown by performing it, but by other displays of commitment, as I will elaborate on in the next section.

A relevant contribution outside the requesting literature is Huisman's (2001) study of decision making in work meetings, in which she approaches decisions as collaborative constructions of commitment to future action, defining a decision as a "formulated future state of affairs that is positively assessed by relevant participants" (p. 83). Huisman (2001) demonstrates that decision making is not just bounded in rationality, but rather emerges as a situated and discursive process, where participants rarely explicitly state that they are deciding something. Additionally, she found that teams can orient themselves to rather different interactional norms and procedures "regarding whose formulation of the future state of affairs and whose assessment were relevant when constructing a decision" (Huisman, 2001: 79).

This relates to what other EMCA scholars have referred to as issues of "epistemic" and "deontic" authority (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015). These issues concern who has the right and responsibility to know and make claims about matters at hand (epistemic primacy), and who has the right and responsibility to make decisions, announce, propose, and determine one's own and other's future actions (deontic primacy; Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2012). These rights and obligations are displayed through participants' orientation to how knowledgeable and decisive they each are or expect each other to be regarding particular matters. From an EM perspective, epistemic and deontic authority should be viewed as practical and discourse accomplishments rather than phenomena predetermined by structures outside the interaction, such as formal hierarchy or formalized areas of expertise—although these can be drawn upon as resources to claim epistemic or deontic authority in situated interactions.

An EMCA specification of central concepts

In this final section of the current chapter, I will specify *commitment*, *influence*, and *accountability* as practical, action-oriented concepts through the lens of EMCA and highlight their significance in this dissertation's exploration of the leadership work of mobilizing committed future action.

Other concepts, such as agency and power, will also be discussed through the dissertation and the three articles. I will here note that if action is seen as organized from within (Garfinkel, 1967), studying talk and interaction provides a direct window into the agency of organizational actors, "who reflectively monitor the ongoing character of social life as they continuously orient to and position themselves vis-à-vis specific norms, rules, procedures, and values in interaction with others" (Fairhurst, 2007: 14). For Garfinkel, agency is not about psychology and intrinsic capacities; rather, it is about "the capacities that being in organized relationships with others make possible for agents" (Rawls, 2008: 717). Relatedly, from a discursive and social constructionist perspective, actors and the potential spaces for action can be seen as continuously constructed through communication, including attributions of identity, knowledge, or decision-making rights (Clifton, 2006, 2017; Endrissat and von Arx, 2013; Hosking, 1988; Tourish, 2014; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020).

On commitment

As I study the in situ leadership work involved in mobilizing commitment from others to take future action, the focus is not on whether these actions actually occur on subsequent occasions, but rather on the achievement of *visible displays of* commitment to such actions. This implies a conceptualization of commitment that differs from the widespread uses of the term in organizational literature as an intraindividual psychological state (Klein et al., 2012) or broad readiness "to subsume their own efforts and benefits within the collective effort and benefit" (Drath et al., 2008: 647). Previous interactional studies have demonstrated how what is treated in the literature as psychological phenomena—such as managers' openness toward employee voice (Wåhlin-Jacobsen, 2020)—are actively enacted and closely fitted to the unfolding interaction. In this dissertation, I therefore shift the analytical gaze from commitment as a psychological phenomenon to *committing* as visible displays of willingness and capacity to engage with specific tasks and future actions. These displays may occur as a verbal promise and other signs of engagement that project future action accountabilities.

I distinguish the concept of committing from related concepts such as "complying" and "obeying," which describe different forms of submissive responses (Meyer, 2021; Yukl, 2015). Leadership is often explicitly or implicitly defined as entailing a *voluntary* obedience as distinguished from other forms of influence relationships, such as command, rulership, or dictatorship (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Grint, 2005; Joullié et al., 2021). While the concept of "obeying" contains the sense of carrying out actions just because they are requested or commanded, involving some loss of autonomy (Meyer, 2021), the concept of "committing" contains an active and willing engagement of oneself or the making of a promise. Thus, I take leadership to be a matter of mobilizing not only submissive acceptance from actors to carry out future actions, which can be accomplished through commandment and coercion (Grint, 2005), but *committing* as an active response that involves visibly engaging with the issue at hand and acting as accountable for future action on it. As claimed by Joullié et al. (2021: 3),

> If leaders coerced others, they would not be called leaders but, depending on the situation under analysis, dictators, autocrats, bullies, police officers, managers or other terms associated with those who can force others into behaving in certain ways.

This suggests that leadership actors are faced with the practical and delicate task of mobilizing a committing response from others as opposed to mere compliance, which will be explored in the articles. To the best of my knowledge, few previous studies have specifically addressed such situated displays of commitment (Clifton, 2009; Huisman, 2001).

On influence

A counterpart to the concept and situated action of "committing to do x", is attempts to oblige, recruit, or influence someone else to take action. Influence is central to the understanding of leadership as a social influence process, and in this dissertation, I am particularly interested in the forms of influence that mobilize commitment to future action. While influence is often studied through questionnaires, e.g., assessing employees' perceptions of formal leaders' power and influence, an EMCA perspective emphasizes that influence does not exist independently of its situated enactment (Clifton, 2009; Knights and Willmott, 1992; Samra-Fredericks, 2005). An EMCA specification of influence is thus *doing influence* as a situated, social accomplishment (Clifton, 2009; Sacks, 1984b), where "doing" underscores the analytical interest in how this social action is produced. In the second paper, I use the metaphor of *pushing* and *pulling* to describe variations in influence attempts, where "pushing" refers to ways of directly asking or suggesting someone or a group of actors to take future action, and "pulling" refers to ways of indirectly inviting others to make an initiative or offer such actions.

In the dynamics of social interaction, subsequent action give meaning and functions to previous ones (Sacks, 1992). In that sense, actors cannot control the effects of their actions, as they are fundamentally entangled with other's actions and responses. Each contribution, action or turn is thus designed in a specific, observable way while simultaneously being formed by the uptake─ the way it is perceived and thus given meaning. In other words, one cannot really know what one has done before it has been displayed in the response and actions of others (Canovan, 1992). Therefore, while attempts to do influence can be observed in single turns, influence is not located in any single action, such as a request, but rather unfolds over the course of interaction.

Furthermore, although leadership as a process of influence is rooted in asymmetrical relations, these relations are not fixed or static from an interactional point of view. As observed in the previously reviewed leadership literature, who leads and who follows ─or who is doing influence ─can be seen as an emerging and dynamic aspect of interactional processes (Clifton et al., 2020; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Larsson and Nielsen, 2021). Drawing on Sacks' (1984b: 21) claim that the machinery of talk has generic properties, influence can thus be viewed as "a fluid property of talk that can be exploited by all participants in a meeting if they are skilled enough to do so" (Clifton, 2009: 61). In the second article, I discuss previous leadership studies on influence, including interactional studies that explore the practices and resources (e.g., knowledge, humor, deontic rights and the construction of a task based "we") that actors can utilize in their attempts to exert influence in situated interactions (Clifton, 2009; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020; Watson and Drew, 2017).

On accountability

Finally, the concept of accountability is central to exploring leadership efforts to mobilize commitment to future action, encompassing the terms "accounting" and "being accountable" to others for actions on a given matter. Accountability is also a core concept in EMCA, introduced by Garfinkel on the first pages of *Studies in Ethnomethodology* to describe the dual nature of human actions as being both ordered and "orderly". This means that actions are carried out by actors in a manner that is self-evident; they are rendered "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., accountable" (Garfinkel, 1967: vii). As anecdotally noted by Scheuer (2012: 74), people do not merely walk down the street; they walk in a way that explains, that is, displays the meaningfulness and reasonableness of what they are doing and what social group they are part of, such as a group of people going to work.

Garfinkel relates accountability to agency in the sense that the enactment of agency relies on the actor's ability to produce recognizable order for others to understand and accept them as credible actors (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008). While accountability and being accountable are thus implicit and integral parts of how actors do what they do in specific situations governed by moral order, Garfinkel (1967) notes that verbally accounting for what one's actions can also occur as an explicit action in itself, often prompted when problems arise in an interaction—such as when there are signs that others do not understand what an actor is doing (Buttny, 1993). One may even contribute to others' accounting to help create a mutually intelligible situation. Garfinkel thus distinguishes between the tacit methods with which interactants make their actions intelligible as they do them and their explicit, verbal accounts of actions—"the work proceeds in one way but is accounted for in another" (Rawls, 2008: 716).

In the dissertation, I draw on both understandings of accountability. Applying the principles of EMCA in my analysis, I regard accountability as an integral part of how actors, turn by turn, make sense of their actions, and as I focus specifically on the situated mobilization of commitment to future action, I study explicit accounting or *accountability work*, understood as the verbal negotiations of who is accountable for what in relation to an organizational issue at hand. This includes constructions of past and future accountabilities and negotiations regarding the reasonableness of past actions. This accountability work is particularly in focus in the third article.

4. Research setting and methodology

This chapter introduces the research setting and methods for collecting and analyzing empirical material. It outlines central elements in the process, the choices I have made, and how these choices align with the principles and standards commonly held in EMCA research.

Organizational settings and access

The data collection for this dissertation took place in two Danish organizations, *Digitalize* and *Learn* (pseudonyms). These organizations were chosen owing to their knowledge-intensive and dynamic work environments, where discussions of future initiatives and responsibilities are expected to occur frequently. Both organizations also feature a relatively flat structure, with large economic latitude in each department and a diversity of delegated roles (e.g., project managers and coordinators) in cross-cutting projects.

Digitalize is a rapidly growing private company within digital commerce, with offices across Europe and over 350 employees. Given their field of expertise, there is immense pressure for innovation throughout the organization. As they continued to hire new people into their growing business, some of the managers I initially spoke with expressed concern such as, "How do we clarify roles, responsibilities and mandates when we pave as we go?".

Learn is a public vocational school with two locations in Denmark, hosting around 1,000 students annually. Reflecting a general shortage of personnel in their field in Denmark, the school faces challenges in recruiting and retaining students. In response, they have had to rethink their admission processes and collaborate more effectively with external stakeholders, amongst other initiatives. One relatively new unit in Learn, which I followed during my data collection, is specifically dedicated to continuously developing initiatives that support student completion.

Two organizations were included to ensure robust data collection throughout the project, even if one of the organizations dropped out along the way. Additionally, studying leadership work and elements that recurring elements in two settings help mitigate the risk of inadvertently focusing on a special or deviant case (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

I utilized my network in UKON to find and gain access to Digitalize and Learn, both of which had previously collaborated with one or more of my colleagues, but I had not been involved with them before. This was important to me as it allowed me to build a researcher-participant relationship as undisturbed as possible by previous and existing consultancy work in the organizations. I arranged meetings with a contact person in each organization—an HR manager at Digitalize and the school director of Learn—where I introduced the project framework and process. A letter containing general information about the project and an invitation to participate was shared with the contact person and subsequently with the participants (see Appendix).

Data collection

In this section, I will first introduce the overall data collection process, which consisted of two rounds, and then elaborate on each type of data collected.

The first round of data collection took place over eight months, from December 2021 to August 2022, and included initial interviews, close observations, and video recordings of meeting interactions among executives, middle managers, and employees at Digitalize and Learn. At Digitalize, a unit specializing in the delivery of digital services, consisting of about 35 people and their two managers agreed to participate, followed by members of the executive board. At Learn, the management team, comprising four department heads, a head of finance, a head of education and the school director, agreed to participate, along with one department, consisting of about 30 people and their department head. During the first meeting with each group, I briefly informed the participants about the project, its focus and frame, that the collected data would be handled with confidentiality and that their participation would be anonymized in the project's publications. I also informed them that each participant had the option to decline to participate and that consent could be withdrawn even after a recording had been made. Based on this information, I collected oral consent. The data collected in this first round forms the empirical basis for the first two articles in the dissertation.

The second round of data collection took place over six months, from August 2023 to January 2024. From the outset, I had planned for the possibility of a second round to gather additional data as needed and to be able to pursue any curiosity that arose from my accumulated knowledge about the organizations and their different spaces for interaction during the first round. Approximately halfway through the project, I decided that this second round would focus on a specific agile unit of nine employees at Learn, *The Help* (pseudonym), which was working across the organization to facilitate and develop ongoing initiatives for student completion. I wanted to study the leadership work and experiences related to the facilitation of initiatives on emerging issues associated with this cross-organizational unit. This involved observations, video recording of meetings focused on the unit's work, and interviews with the unit members and others associated with the unit, including some managers. A general letter containing information about the project and the second round of data collection was shared with the management (whom I knew from the first round) and the members of the unit (whom I had not met before) at Learn (see Appendix). At the start of data collection, I briefly informed the participants about the project, noting that cross-cutting patterns would be collected and at some point shared with them in semi-anonymized form, focusing on patterns across interviews. I also informed them that the identity of the organization and the participants would be fully anonymized in any project dissemination and that each participant had the option to decline to participate. I collected consent from all participants based on this information. During the data collection, I encountered an interesting episode at a management meeting regarding a project called *In Touch* (pseudonym), which was facilitated by the unit. I began asking about this project and the specific meeting episode in subsequent

interviews with the participating managers. This interactional episode became the focus of the third article, supplemented by interview narratives around the episode.

In Table 1 below I present an overview of the data collected, and in the subsequent subsections, I elaborate on the form and purpose of each type of data. As the table shows, the material from Learn make up the majority of the data.

	Digitalize round 1 (Dec. 2021-Aug. 2022)	**Learn round 1** (Dec. 2021-Aug. 2022)	**Learn round 2** (Aug. 2023-Jan. 2024)	Total data collected
Interviews, audio-recorded hours (no. of interviews)	2 (2)	2 (2)	16 (16)	20 hours (20 interviews)
Meeting interaction, video-recorded hours (no. of meetings)	17 (13)	27,5 (18)	8,5 (4)	54 hours (35 meetings)
Informal interaction, video-recorded hours (no. of encounters)	1,5 (4)	3,5 (10)		5 hours (14 encounters)
Other observation, incl. shadowing (not recorded) hours	15	24	12	51 hours
Pitstops, audio-recorded hours	1	2	1	4 hours

Table 1. Data overview

Interviews

I started the first round of data collection with **four initial interviews** in December 2021 and early January 2022. At Digitalize, I interviewed one of the two department heads of the unit I would be observing, as well as a project manager whom I would later shadow. At Learn, I interviewed the school director and conducted a group interview with all four department heads. All initial interviews were conducted and recorded via Microsoft Teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of these interviews was to familiarize myself with the daily practices, meeting arenas, roles, and tasks within the organizational setting, and to collect concrete experiences from these participants regarding how initiative and action on emerging issues were facilitated in everyday interactions. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structed guide (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014) that outlined key topics and questions while remaining open to the tangents the conversation might take. I encouraged the interviewees to describe their daily practices and experiences at a concrete level, aiming to stay as close as possible to practical descriptions and immediate reflections on everyday interactions, rather than to addressing abstract concepts like leadership from the outset. In other words, I sought to elicit responses and stories from a practitioner's perspective through questions such as:

- Please tell me about your practice. What does an ordinary day look like? … What do you do? … What is happening?
- How does it take your energy and effort to facilitate initiative and action from others? … When do you do it during the day? … Can you give an example?
- Where should I look to observe people taking initiative and responsibility for emerging issues in your organization/department?
- Where should I look to see where this is difficult in your organization?… What is it that can be difficult? … Can you give an example?
- What do you think I will notice when I start observing your everyday interactions?
- What structures (e.g., working groups, meetings, etc.) contribute to facilitating initiative and action in the examples you have shared?
- What structures made it difficult?
- What is your organizational culture like in relation to initiative and responsibility for common issues? ... How do you approach this?
- What does all this have to do with leadership?

When asking for concrete examples, I also asked the participants to 'take me there' and describe in detail what happened. I used these interview stories of how initiative on emerging issues could be enabled or challenged in everyday interactions as initial hooks for my observations.

The remainder of the first round of data collection consisted of observations with field notes and recordings (see next section). In the second round, I conducted **16 individual interviews**. These included interviews with the eight employees in *The Help*, the coordinator of the unit, two teachers collaborating with the unit, and five managers involved in the unit's work at Learn. The purpose of these interviews was to study the experiences from within and around this reportedly agile and cross-organizational unit, which had been operational for two years and focused on intercepting problems and developing initiatives to support student completion. I expected this unit to be a place where emerging issues, initiatives, and ideas would be negotiated in everyday practice.

The semi structured interview guide, which includes key topics and related questions for the interviews with the employees in *The Help*, is provided in anonymized form in the Appendix.

As with the initial interviews, I focused on staying close to the participants' everyday practices and concrete examples while exploring their experiences regarding how initiative and responsibility for action on emerging issues are handled and negotiated. I also asked about the background and purpose of the unit's work and its relation to other structures and units within the organization. The eight employees in the unit included teachers and supervisors who had received additional training, such as in Danish as a second language, which addressed a common barrier to students completing their studies.

Since the units' work involved liaising with teaching colleagues outside *The Help*, who were closely connected to the students in the classrooms, I conducted two interviews with teachers who had collaborated with the unit. For these interviews, I adapted the interview guide to focus on the teachers' experiences with initiatives from *The Help*, including how these initiates were started, who was involved, and how they affected their daily routines and practices (for instance, having a language support in the classroom). The purpose of these interviews was to gain perspectives on how the unit's cross-functional work and initiatives were perceived by others in the organization and what roles they were assigned or assumed. At that time, it was not clear to me whether additional interviews would be needed. However, during the simultaneous recording of meeting interactions and initial analysis of both interview and interaction data, I realized that I wanted to zoom in on a specific management meeting situation regarding a particular project in unit, which ultimately negated the need for further interviews.

Finally, I conducted five interviews with the school director (a new director who had taken over from the old one I interviewed in the first round), the head of economy, the head of education, and two department heads involved in *The Help*. I conducted these interviews in connection with the observations at both coordination meetings in the unit and management meetings that had the unit's work on the agenda. I aimed to explore the managers' experiences regarding what occurred at their meetings and to get their perspectives on how initiatives and responsibilities for taking action on emerging problems were facilitated in everyday practice —similar to what I did in the initial interviews (which only one of the department heads had participated in), but with a special focus on the work in the unit (see interview guide in the Appendix).

All the second-round interviews were conducted face-to-face in meeting rooms at Learn and were audio recorded on a Dictaphone. The data from both the first and second rounds were stored on an online CBS account with double encryption, as well as on an external hard drive for backup.

Observations and recorded interactions

During both rounds of data collection, I made observations of naturally occurring interactions, in line with the focus in EMCA, meaning that these were interactions that would have expectedly taken place regardless of my presence and engagement in the setting. This is in contrast to the interviews I made, which can be viewed as researcher-provoked data (Silverman, 2001).

Since I aimed to observe everyday leadership processes surrounding emerging issues, initiatives, and ideas for future action during both formal and more informal or incidental encounters at work, I participated in one department day in Digitalize and two and a half strategy days in Learn. Additionally, I conducted three days of shadowing, following participants around during their day (Czarniawska, 2007), which I will elaborate on below. In total, I completed 51 hours of observation without recording across the two rounds of data collection. The 39 hours of the first round were conducted on department days, strategy days and through shadowing, and the 12 hours in the second round were conducted on a half strategy day in Learn, where I specifically followed *The Help* employees, and over two days in the physical school environment around this unit.

The five hours of **video-recorded informal work interactions**—with "informal" meaning less formalized or planned encounters—were collected during breaks in the staff room in the days of shadowing, where I sat with a group and video recorded after obtaining oral consent, as well as during breaks in meetings and during group discussions at strategy and department days. Although I had to video record more informal interactions during shadowing, I found this to be challenging. In Digitalize, I shadowed a project manager, and in Learn, I shadowed the school director (one day with the previous director and one day with the new one). Prior to these days, the department in Digitalize and the school staff in Learn were informed via email about my presence, and the option to opt out of participation was emphasized. This information was disseminated by the contact persons in each setting and repeated by me during the data collection. For instance, before the first shadowed of the school director, it was announced that I would be bringing my camera to record incidental interactions, and permission would be requested from participants. However, I found it difficult to record incidental encounters in practice, as they were typically brief and occurred suddenly—e.g., a teacher coming into the school directors office to talk. In these instances, I had to choose between interrupting the conversation to ask for permission to record it or simply observing and taking notes. It seemed to cause a relatively large disruption to conversations that in many cases only lasted a few minutes, so I didn't record as much incidental interaction as I had originally intended during these days. Nonetheless, the days of observing provided me with valuable insight and a sensitivity to the overall organizational setting, which I could draw upon in analyzing specific interactions that took place within it (Barfod et al., 2022; Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Samra-Fredericks, 2000; ten Have, 2007; Whittle et al., 2015).

During my observations I took ethnographic field notes (Emerson et al., 2011) in two notebooks, one for each organization, employing slightly different methods depending on whether I recorded or not. In observations without recording, I used field notes to capture relevant information about the organization and to take descriptive notes on interactions that caught my attention. I documented what happened in broad terms and noted the questions they elicited in me, guided by a general curiosity of "why that, now?" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299). For recorded interactions, I used field notes to capture key moments where future actions were negotiated around a topic at hand, carefully noting the time of each occurrence. I organized these notes in an Excel spreadsheet, with each observation represented by a row.

The main part of my data collection consists of 54 hours of **video-recorded meeting interactions**. Meetings serve as central organizational arenas for coordinating actions (Boden, 1994). I initially attended various types of meetings, including project meetings, department meetings, coordinator meetings, and one student council meeting at Learn (including six students aged 18-25 years, for whom oral consent was obtained). During the first round of data collection, I decided to focus specifically on management meetings. As a result, over 40 hours of the total 54 hours of video-recorded meeting interactions were collected from these meetings, with approximately 30 hours coming from management meetings at Learn.

Management meetings as primary setting

I find management meetings interesting as an arena that offers opportunities for actors from different parts of an organization to collaboratively engage with organizational issues. During data collection, I also discovered that management meetings had the advantage of a relatively flexible structure where negotiations on topics and future actions could flow freely. In contrast, many project meetings followed a fixed round-structure, and department meetings, which typically consisted of over 25 participants, were characterized by one-way communication.

A disadvantage of focusing specifically on management meetings is that this approach narrows the study primarily to the leadership work of managers despite the understanding of leadership as not dependent on formal roles. However, management meetings consist of interactions between formal leaders at different hierarchical levels, which has been highlighted in the literature as an important area for further research (Denis et al., 2012: 230). In addition, managerial meetings in Learn were occasionally attended by organizational actors in other roles, such as coordinators and project managers, and thus these meetings provide an opportunity to study the interaction and leadership work of multiple actors from different hierarchical levels and to address 'the ambiguity of the shared-hierarchical-leadership (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018: 716). From an EMCA perspective, as mentioned previously, the primary focus is on how hierarchy and formal roles may emerge as topics, problems, and resources within the unfolding interactions. However, as I will come back to, the third paper also incorporates interviews that provide additional perspectives on the interplay between hierarchy and shared leadership work.

I video recorded all meeting interactions using either a GoPro camera, backed up by an audio recording on Dictaphone, or through Microsoft Teams when I participated online (which was less than a third of the time). Some project meetings were conducted online for all attendants in Digitalize and recorded by themselves to share with employees who could not join: The project leader here sent me a link to the recording through their online platform after the meeting. All recordings I made myself were stored on an online CBS account and an external hard drive.

The presence of the researcher and her camera

Keeping in mind the strict distinction between the phenomenon under study and the researcher in EMCA, I would like to discuss the possibility of me influencing the "naturally occurring interactions" while observing and recording. I chose to use video recordings rather than just audio recordings, as they make it easier to identify who is speaking and provides access to multiple modalities, such as gaze, body movements, and gestures. This enables a moment-by-moment analysis of how the participants visibly orient themselves to each other and their surroundings, as emphasized in EMCA (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Gylfe et al., 2016; LeBaron and Christianson, 2021; Streeck et al., 2011). On the downside, using a GoPro camera (albeit small in size) instead of a Dictaphone or plain observation could risk a greater disturbance of the interactions.

Some social interaction researchers have addressed this potential issue by observing and identifying the participants' reactivity to the camera during a study. For example, they examine how and when participants orient themselves to the camera and analyze its effect on their behavior (Heath et al., 2010). These studies indicate that disturbances are minimized when researchers limit camera movement, for instance by starting the recording before anyone enters the room and stopping after they leave, which also allows for capturing the so-called "boundary moments" of interactions (LeBaron and Christianson, 2021). I have followed this advice on several occasions, arriving early to get the camera ready and set it up from a good distance. These pre- and post-meeting recordings also add some minutes to my recordings of informal interaction, besides the already mentioned pauses during meetings. However, I have refrained from doing this in new meeting settings in order to obtain consent first, and it has also not been possible on some occasions where the meeting room was booked right up until the start of the meeting.

Another, even more central perspective from these studies is that participants' reactivity to a video camera typically decreases over time. This suggests that longer recordings reduce the relative influence of the researcher and camera:

> Throughout our studies of a diverse range of settings and activities we found that within a short while, the camera is 'made at home'. It rarely receives notice or attention and there is little empirical evidence that it has transformed the ways in which the participants accomplish actions. (Heath et al., 2010: 49)

This finding resonates completely with what I experienced during the recordings. As mentioned earlier, I found it difficult to interrupt short informal conversations to ask for permission to record. I generally experienced that the camera and my presence took up relatively more space in these brief interactions, often standing rather than sitting, which contributed to my decision to stop recording these incidental encounters during shadowing. In contrast, I observed that participants tended to ignore the camera after the first five or ten minutes, aligning with Heath et al.'s (2010) findings and other scholars' observations (Vine et al., 2008). In the meeting interactions, the participants typically attended to me and the camera at first, engaging in light chat or joking.

However, once the meeting began, they rarely looked in the direction of the camera. As I became familiar with the typical flow of the meetings, I developed routines to minimize my disruption, such as choosing my seat carefully and checking on the camera as little as possible.

It is difficult to determine whether the influence of the researcher and camera is bigger or less in meetings recorded online. From my observations, when everyone participated online, it seemed like a minimal disturbance to record the meeting and many of the participants were accustomed to it. As mentioned, they often recorded their meetings themselves in Digitalize, which meant that I didn't even have to attend. However, I also conducted a few recordings of management meetings in Learn through a participant's webcam, where some or all of the participants were present in a room, and I was online. This presented the challenge of participants occasionally moving off-screen, such as pulling their chair back, without my ability to adjust the camera angle. Thus, a dilemma arose: I had to decide whether to disturb the ongoing interaction by asking them to reposition the webcam or to refrain from doing so, which risked missing important multimodal details in the recording. I attempted to address this by positioning the camera better (further away) on the following occasions. Generally, I observed that the camera and my own presence occupied the most space at the beginning and at the end of meetings and that the participants oriented themselves minimally towards me and the camera during the meeting.

From an EMCA-perspective, one could argue that although devices and observing researchers add something and may influence the content of conversations, tone, and face work, they do not really influence the fundamental mechanisms and practices of producing a mutually intelligible situation available to participants (Garfinkel, 1967; Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Rawls, 2008). People continue to access and utilize shared ways of doing and recognizing actions, such as greetings (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2013: 1403), and they can be seen as systematically unaware of many subtle details regarding how they routinely engage with tasks and contribute to intersubjective understanding (Barfod et al., 2022; Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage and Clayman, 2010). These details can, however, be captured and analyzed through recordings of real-time interactional dynamics, which offer the particular advantage of providing insight into the normally "'seen but unnoticed' machinery of talk with which leadership is enacted" (Clifton, 2006: 202).

Pitstops

After each of the two data collection rounds, I held a "pitstop" with some of the key participants. In Digitalize, I conducted this pitstop with the unit heads and the HR manager after the first and only round of data collection, and in Learn, I held a pitstop with the management team after each data collection round. The purpose was to provide the participants with insight into some of the data I had collected up to that point, which they had shown interest in, and to jointly watch selected video clips from meetings they had attended. I made an effort to frame these pitstops as a form of joint research curiosity rather than as a means of clarification or presentation of results.

In Digitalize, we saw three clips from monthly business review management meetings held between the heads of department and members of the executive board, the latter of whom could not attend the pitstop. In Learn, we saw three clips from management team meetings in each of the two pitstops where almost all participants were present at the pitstop. At the time of each pitstop, I had just started analyzing the data collected in that round, so it was a good opportunity to ask the participants to consider questions like 'What's happening here?' and 'What's at stake?' as we watched each clip. In continuation of this, they shared what they noticed, and I supplemented with my own immediate observations.

With consent from the participants, I recorded the pitstop meetings on my Dictaphone (four hours in total) and I have used their perspectives as topics to be tested in the subsequent detailed analysis of the meeting interactions. Not only did the participants find it interesting to view their own meeting interactions on video, but also found it interesting to hear their observations. In other words, I discovered that there are some possible benefits to this kind of opportunity, which is quite unique to interaction research, where both researcher and practitioner seem to gain from jointly examining situated practice through video recordings.

The analytical process

In parallel with collecting data and taking field notes on interesting moments of interaction, I also began analyzing and transcribing the data. While Sacks (1992) recommend that the analytical process should start with "unmotivated looking" leading to the formulation of a research question, I leaned on the main idea of the project. However, this idea was refined and developed into the current research question through my engagement with the data.

I reviewed my growing data collection to identify sequences in which future actions and responsibilities related to emerging organizational topics were negotiated among the participants. I created an ongoing overview of such candidate sequences in an Excel spreadsheet and began transcribing them, starting with rough transcriptions and later refining them in more detail using a simplified Jefferson style (2004). This was a slow process, and I found some assistance in the CLAN and ELAN software, the latter of which combines video and transcription, but it is rather complex, and I ended up doing most of the transcriptions by hand. I continuously added details and made adjustments to these transcripts as I repeatedly watched segments of the recording, drawing on the argument that while transcripts are essential, they are also simply representations of data and it is necessary to return to the recording to continuously "confirm or disconfirm their initial findings and subsequently adjust the transcript if necessary (Asmuss, 2015: 289).

I worked iteratively through my recordings and transcripts, guided by the question "why that, now?" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299) in trying to understand what was going on in the interactional displays I had initially categorized as examples of negotiation of responsibility and action. In this process, I drew heavily on the principles of sequence organization, next turn proof procedure, and EMCA literature on conversational structures (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). I had several sessions with my supervisor, Magnus Larsson, where we

analyzed data together for me to get acquainted with the method. In this process, many interesting details and potential avenues for further investigations opened.

As emphasized earlier, EMCA involves an inductive approach, but having some understanding for the field setting in which the interaction take place can also serve as a resource during analysis, where perspectives from outside the interaction can provide topics to be tested (Whittle et al., 2015). In this regard, some scholars argue that EMCA should be considered an abductive rather than inductive research approach (Svennevig, 2001; Wåhlin-Jacobsen, 2018: 88). Following Peirce's (1995) formulation of abduction, this approach starts with observations in the empirical material, which give rise to hypothesis that relate to additional observations. In this process, the analyst can draw on more general knowledge, for instance knowing that some participant is temporarily positioned in a certain formal role. However, it is crucial in EMCA-informed analyses that this external information and the hypotheses generated is treated as topics to be explored and tested with the visible orientations of the participants; anything of significance should be seen and recognized in the talk and action, (Barfod et al., 2022; Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Lynch, 2007).

In the fall of 2022, after completing the first round of data collection, I went on a two-month research stay at the Department of Sociology at UCLA. During this time, I participated in courses and brought my data to data sessions, where I received detailed and insightful perspectives on my initial observations from experienced EMCA researchers and PhD students. Inspired by conversations with Steven Clayman and Tanya Stivers, I began to analyze across data and compile a continuously evolving list of possible patterns. One of the patterns I identified involved what I have called "pushing and pulling for action", which I will elaborate on in Article 2. Another example of a pattern I noticed across instances of interaction was that a kind of check-question (e.g., "Have you had opportunity conversations with her?") often preceded a request or suggestion for future action (e.g., "Why don't you have an opportunity conversation with her then?"). This seemed to serve as a sort of preparatory work to gauge the relevance of making the request. I had a long document where I kept track of references to places in the data where I saw these patterns. Following EMCA logic, no detail can be dismissed as irrelevant or accidental a priori (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018), so I continuously expanded this list of patterns, examples and variations.

This way of working is similar to coding as a commonly used strategy in qualitative research for handling and analyzing data (Gioia et al., 2010; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Mir and Jain, 2018; Saldaña, 2013). However, coding traditionally rests on a priori theoretical assumptions about what to look for and what concepts and categories to apply to the material. From an EMCA perspective, this leaves unobserved a number of possible significant actions and details in how the evolving interaction is reflexively constructed by the participants (Hindmarsh and Llewellyn, 2018). Following this reasoning, Barfod et al. (2022) argue that coding schemes are less equipped to challenge the theoretical assumptions that generated them.

In line with the endeavors within EMCA, I have sought to approach an understanding of each instance of interaction in all its fine-grained, multimodal detail, while paying attention to and trying to identify recurring interactional features and moves across sequences, such as requests, offers, epistemic and deontic stance, beneficiaries etc. (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Heritage and Clayman, 2010). In addition, I have drawn on categories and concepts from the leadership literature, such as claiming and granting of authority (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018) or of leader and follower identities (DeRue and Ashford, 2010), confronting these with my data and analyses in order to challenge and develop the existing theoretical understandings (Barfod et al., 2022). This analysis work has involved ongoing, abductive shifts between zooming in on the rich, context-sensitive details of single instances of interaction and zooming out to examine recurrent moves, mechanisms, and practices while engaging with relevant literature.

In the first two articles of this dissertation, I present the results of analyzing a collection of cases through selected interactional episodes. As previously argued, single sequences of talk are a primary method for demonstrating results in EMCA based publications (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Schegloff, 1987). This approach makes transparent how the analysts arrived as the results and conclusions, in line with what is considered good practice in qualitative research (Silverman, 2014), by demonstrating specific interactional practices and mechanisms through participants' visible orientations in concrete examples.

One challenge I have encountered when presenting the analysis of video-recorded multi-actor meeting interactions, with all the complexity and richness of such data, is the risk of overly long and detailed descriptions. On the one hand, it is essential that the analysis is in-depth and detailed, and on the other hand, a presentation should not become so complicated that the main points are obscured, and it becomes difficult to read. I have therefore learnt that after a thorough analysis and thick analytic description, once I have the main results in place, I should remove as much as possible, but not so much that the analysis loses its thoroughness and credibility. In other words, I have faced the challenges of conducting both rigorous and interesting interaction research.

The third article constitutes a single case study of a specific meeting episode that Brigid Carroll and I found particularly interesting from the data collected in the second round. As I have briefly mentioned, this episode focuses on the agenda item regarding a specific project, facilitated by the employees of *The Help* and their managers. The interviews collected provide background material together with the total data collection from Learn, enhancing my understanding and sensitivity to the organizational setting and in particular the management meetings and the work in the unit.

Additionally, the article supplements the analysis of the meeting episode with extracts from interviews with the coordinator of the unit and with some of the participating managers, conducted immediately after the meeting and specifically addressing what went on. These interviews present narratives of previous discussions about the project in question and of what is at stake for these participants. By using these interviews together with interaction analysis, the third article extend beyond what is typical in EMCA research. In an EMCA perspective, interviews can be useful for gaining knowledge about an organization from the participants' perspective, but in interaction

terms they will always be post-hoc, individual and second-hand "talk of" interactions–distanced from the dynamic unfolding interaction (Barfod et al., 2022; Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Larsson and Meier, 2023). In the article, we handle this combination by treating the interview extracts and the interaction analysis as two distinct data sets and interaction arenas that provide us with different perspectives on the leadership work that is central to our study. Furthermore, we engage with theories of power and compare our findings against these frameworks in our discussion.

This brings us to the presentation of each of the three articles in this dissertation, which will follow in the next three chapters.

5. Article 1: The struggle of leadership work: Three interactional challenges in mobilizing actors to commit to future action

Abstract

Although it is widely recognized that leadership concerns organizing future actions and mobilizing organizational actors to pursue them, our understanding of how this is accomplished in situated work interactions is relatively limited. Recent ethnographic studies have focused on the emergence of direction as a process demanding work and effort. This study explores the work involved in attempting to mobilize actors to act in such direction. Drawing on video recordings of managerial meetings in two Danish organizations, we take an ethnomethodological approach to explore in detail what is at stake in the leadership work of mobilizing future action. Our analysis demonstrates that leadership in these meetings largely consists of what we term interactional organizing work, involving three central challenges: establishing a shared understanding of what the problem at hand is, who owns the problem and is accountable for it, and how the problem should be addressed. Rather than a smooth flow of emerging direction, we see a struggle between different interests with different implications, leading us to suggest that agency be treated as less of an either individual or relational matter and consider leadership to be a collaborative process that builds and grows from individual agencies.

Introduction

Leadership is widely understood as a process of organizing through which direction for coordinated action is established or changed and involved actors are mobilized (Drath et al., 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Hosking, 1988; Yukl, 2013). Studies of the practical accomplishment of leadership have shown how direction of actions emerges through negotiation of expertise (Meschitti, 2019) and relational configurations (Crevani, 2018), and how such direction evolves as a consequence of particularly influential turning points in meeting conversations (Simpson et al., 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020).

However, the work involved in moving from the emergence of direction to mobilizing action along those lines has received less empirical attention. While setting direction is an important element of leadership in the sense of "making others understand and agree about what needs to be done" (Yukl, 2013: 8), leadership also involves settling on "how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (Yukl, 2013: 8). Specifically, it involves mobilizing others to commit to taking action in a jointly articulated direction. A range of theoretical propositions have been presented for how to achieve this (e.g., Ford and Ford, 1995; Grint, 2005; Van Quaquebeke and Felps, 2018), but few studies have explored the challenges involved empirically. What is at stake in such circumstances is not least a fundamental delicacy of leadership, namely, how to motivate someone else's initiative and

committed action without constraining it in the very act of pushing for it. That is, the capacity of leadership to mobilize someone not just to follow, but to take action willingly and committedly.

This study takes an ethnomethodological approach to explore the micro-level details of how this leadership work is accomplished in everyday talk and interaction. Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and the related conversation analysis (Sacks, 1984b) focus on how social and organizational reality is produced through interaction and are thus well suited for exploring the in situ practices through which direction emerges, actions are organized, and actors are mobilized to pursue them. While leadership studies have been dominated by quantitative and psychological approaches, there is a growing call for observational methods and detailed interactional analyses of leadership as a practical and discursive accomplishment and the challenges involved (Clifton, 2006, 2019; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Svennevig, 2008; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). Our study answers this call and the call for the use of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in studies of organizing (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Samra-Fredericks and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2008).

The paper shows that mobilizing future action in the context of management meetings requires a significant amount of what we term the *interactional organizing work* of leadership. Analyzing video recordings of meeting interactions, we find this work to include developing a shared understanding of the problem at hand, who owns the problem and is accountable for acting on it, and how the problem could or should be addressed. In practice, actors often circumvent the work of getting to a shared understanding by developing actions and solutions for a problem, leaving the more basic issues largely unresolved (Wåhlin-Jacobsen and Abildgaard, 2020). However, such practices also tend to make ownership more problematic and mobilizing actors to commit to taking action more challenging. Our study contributes to the literature on leadership as organizing (Crevani, 2018; Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Meschitti, 2019) by providing a detailed specification of what occurs in the interactional organizing work of leadership, going beyond observing the emergence of direction (Crevani, 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020) to specify the work involved in mobilizing actors to *commit* to pursuing agreed future actions.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly review three lines of current leadership studies that are significant but insufficient for understanding the interactional organizing work of leadership. Second, we introduce our ethnomethodological conversation analytic (EMCA) approach for exploring the situated work of attempting to mobilize actors to commit to taking action, conceptualizing commitment as visible displays of *committing*. Third, we present an overview of the empirical setting, data, and EMCA tools. Fourth, we present our findings through three sequences of interaction, and finally, we discuss the contributions and implications of our findings.

Interactional challenges of mobilizing others to commit to future action

A range of authors have emphasized that leadership is closely connected to organizing.[4] Organizing involves identifying and making sense of actions, linking them in so-called double interacts (Weick, 1979), establishing mutual expectations and obligations (Larsson and Lundholm, 2013), and adjusting actions in response to feedback on outcomes (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009). Recent studies have further related the emergence of direction (Crevani, 2018; Drath et al., 2008; Meschitti, 2019) to communicatively produced turning points in conversations (Simpson et al., 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020).

However, the emergence of direction is not sufficient for organizing future actions to be accomplished. Actors also need to commit to take such actions. We suggest that this process of mobilizing someone to take later action is an important, but hitherto less studied, aspect of leadership work. In an early study, Ford and Ford (1995) used speech act theory to develop a theoretical model specifying four types of conversation expected to be necessary for realizing change, which include initiative conversations, conversations for understanding, conversations for performance, and conversations for closure. While extensively cited, this proposed model has not been followed by much empirical research. Research on in situ leadership processes have largely taken three other routes, one focusing on leadership as a collaborative process of organizing, the second focusing on moments of leadership as significant shifts in work interactions, and the third zooming in on even more subtle interactional details of identity negotiation and establishment of mutual obligations. We briefly review these lines of research below.

First, studies of leadership as a collaborative, emergent process have explored situated organizing. Drawing on a strong process orientation, a series of studies on performance in music (Bathurst and Cain, 2013), dancing (Biehl, 2019), ballet, and ice hockey (Ryömä and Satama, 2019) have portrayed leadership as a relational phenomenon (Endres and Weibler, 2017) in which coordination seemingly emerges organically. However, other process-oriented studies have noted that leadership requires work and effort. In a study of work meetings, Crevani (2018) showed that direction emerges from a dynamic process in which "a number of simultaneously existing stories-so-far meet, co-evolve, leave, clash, return, and so on" (89). Similarly, Meschitti (2019) explored how work trajectories in a team shift as a consequence of the ability of participants to mobilize resources (such as expertise) and the resulting relational positioning. These studies demonstrate the ongoing and relational character of situated leadership processes. What is less clear is what exactly is at stake that demands work and effort amid the clash of co-existing stories, perspectives, and positions.

A second stream of research has examined significant episodes in which shifts and changes occur, that have been conceptualized as moments of leadership or turning points. Simpson et al. (2018) studied turning points as particular speech acts in work conversations, where the past, present,

[4] This study focuses on organizing in the sense of organizing actions, leaving out considerations of organizing in the sense of constituting organizations or designing new structures.

and a version of the future are brought together. Buchan and Simpson (2024: 85) traced "re-orientational turning points in an unfolding leadership situation," resulting in re-construction of a challenging situation. In contrast, Sklaveniti (2020) studied turning points as participants' perception of when the direction shifted. In all three studies, a series of turning points were associated with significant changes in direction and coordinated actions. Focusing on action rather than discourse, Lortie et al. (2022) studied turning points as moments in which the ongoing coordination of work shifted from vertical to collective leadership. Moments of leadership are clearly consequential; however, it is less clear from these studies how such significant shifts in direction and workflow are interactionally conceived and actors are mobilized to commit to a particular line of action.

A third group of studies goes some way further to explore the constitution of moments of leadership by focusing on subtle interactional details and negotiations of identities and mutual obligations (Baxter, 2014, 2015; Clifton, 2006, 2009c, 2014; Larsson et al., 2021; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Larsson and Nielsen, 2021; Schnurr et al., 2021; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). For instance, Clifton (2014) explored how voicing the direction of an organization simultaneously involved claiming a leadership identity and constructing an organizational identity, Van De Mieroop et al. (2020) explored the negotiation of informal leadership positions from which the next few actions were organized, and Larsson and Lundholm (2013) explored how organizing actions was accomplished by establishing situated, task-based identities. These studies have demonstrated the extensive effort involved in the subtle identity negotiation that is an important aspect of leadership work.

However, negotiating identities (or relational configurations; Crevani, 2018) is only one aspect of the leadership work of organizing future actions. For actors to be able to commit to taking action, questions such as what is to be done, what is at stake in doing it, and why it should be done would reasonably need to be satisfactorily settled. Insofar as settling such issues involves work and effort in shifting understandings and positions (Drath et al., 2008; Grint, 2005; Yukl, 2013), we consider these negotiations to be a leadership process. In general terms, what remains unexplored by previous research is what the leadership work of organizing involves beyond emerging direction and negotiating identities and relationships. What challenges are at stake in the interactional mobilization of someone to commit to future actions? We take an ethnomethodological approach to explore such challenges.

Ethnomethodological approach

The central aim of ethnomethodology is to explore how social order is produced through everyday interaction as actors reflexively negotiate and establish shared understandings of what is taking place (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009; Rawls, 2008). From this perspective, social order is not seen as a pre-existing state or premised on phenomena outside social interaction such as structural and institutional arrangements but as an ongoing accomplishment (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010).

The primary analytical focus of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EMCA; Sacks, 1984; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012) is on the methods and practices, which are called "ethnomethods" (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008), through which actors contribute to generating shared social realities, crafting each new contribution on the basis of what the evolving interaction has offered thus far. The EMCA approach pays particular attention to subtle details of turn construction as well as bodily movements and other multimodal aspects of naturally occurring interactions (Mondada, 2011, 2019) that indicate actors' in situ understanding of previous turns and contribute to the evolving interaction (Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Schegloff, 2007). By chaining contributions turn-by-turn, a mutually intelligible social situation is constituted. If leadership shapes organizational reality, everyday interaction is a critically important arena in which it should be identifiable (Larsson and Meier, 2023).

The EMCA approach resonates with the relational and processual focus of the previously mentioned leadership literature, but it is distinct in subscribing to a strong emic orientation and its attention to the in situ production of social reality. EMCA explicitly eschews imposing the analyst's preferred theoretical framework (Schegloff, 1997), instead directing attention to how the participants themselves visibly make sense of and reflexively (building on what has happened so far and creatively designing the next turn) contribute to the evolving interaction. Thus, EMCA focuses on sensemaking amid and as *an integral aspect of* work practice (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009), rather than post-hoc reflections; for example, in interviews. Applying EMCA to study leadership entails moving slightly beyond this strong emic orientation, since leadership is introduced by the researcher as a second order concept referring to a complex social phenomenon, rather than as a visible orientation of participants (Clifton and Barfod, 2024). Nevertheless, any analytical claim must be based on a solid understanding of the composition of social interaction (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Larsson and Meier, 2023; Larsson et al., in revision).

The EMCA approach also directs our analytical gaze slightly differently from typical studies of commitment. In the literature, commitment has mainly been approached as a broad psychological state or readiness, defined as "volitional dedication and responsibility for a target" (Klein et al., 2012: 130). Drath et al. (2008), who consider commitment to be one of a tripartite outcome of leadership, alongside direction and alignment, similarly define it as "the willingness of individual members to subsume their own efforts and benefits within the collective effort and benefit" (647). EMCA prompts us to shift perspective to the actual engagement with specific tasks and actions. In other words, we are not interested in psychological states, but the situated practice of individuals *visibly* taking responsibility to pursue a specific task. The visible display of commitment is in fact what actors orient themselves toward in work situations. Consequently, this study considers leadership to be a matter of mobilizing not only acceptance or *complying*, which can be accomplished through commandment and coercion (Grint, 2005), but *committing* as visibly acting as accountable for some future action.

Considerable research employing EMCA has explored how an actor attempts to mobilize or "recruit" another actor to engage in something through everyday interactions. A prototypical

format is requests, in which someone explicitly asks someone else to do something. Studies of requesting have demonstrated that these practices are fraught with tensions related to the entitlement of the requester to ask this of the recipient, who will benefit (Curl and Drew, 2008; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), and who will have ownership of the requested actions (Rossi, 2012). The owner of an action is here understood as "the social entity that established its trajectory, that is invested in its outcome, and that is accountable for it (in positive and negative senses)" (Rossi, 2012: 431).[5] In practice, these sensitive matters are handled through the subtle, "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel, 1967) design of utterances, including avoiding overstepping one's perceived entitlement by using modal verbs (such as "would" and "could") and displaying openness to lack of knowledge concerning the recipient's willingness and capacity to do what is asked (unknown contingencies). In summary, EMCA research on requesting practices has demonstrated that mobilizing someone to commit to an action is an interpersonally complex matter, but something that can be accomplished through a wide range of strategies and movements.

In this study, we are interested not only in how one party works to mobilize someone else to perform already clear (and in EMCA studies often immediate) actions, but the interpersonally sensitive issues of getting another to commit to taking responsibility for future action concerning a matter at hand, although it might be unclear what the action precisely entails. Drawing on the EMCA perspective, we label this the *interactional organizing work of leadership.* This leadership work encompasses not just single acts, but the extensive effort needed to make a future action accepted and aligned with by the recipient(s). From previous ECMA studies of workplace interactions, we know that this involves organizing in the sense of linking actions and actors (Larsson and Lundholm, 2013), navigating interpersonal sensitivities, affiliations, and disaffiliations along the way (Schegloff, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2021), and messy rather than linear phased negotiations of problems and solutions (Huisman, 2001a; Wåhlin-Jacobsen and Abildgaard, 2020). We take the following as our research question:

What central challenges are involved in the interactional organizing work of leadership to mobilize actors to commit to future actions in managerial meetings?

Empirical setting and methodology

Data collection

To explore the question above, we draw on video recordings of recurrent managerial meetings in two Danish organizations, *Digitalize* and *Learn*. *Digitalize* is a private digital commerce company with offices across Europe, and *Learn* is a public vocational school with two locations in Denmark. Data were collected by the first author through close observation and video recording

[5] Again, it is important to note that this concept of ownership refers to *visible interactional displays* rather than the individual psychological experiences that have most often been investigated (Druskat and Pescosolido, 2002; Pierce et al., 2001; Rasheed et al., 2023).

of naturally occurring work interactions at recurrent meetings between executives, middle managers, and employee coordinators in *Digitalize* and *Learn* over an 8-month period from December 2021 to August 2022.

Audio and video recordings are essential for conducting EMCA research as they provide access to naturally occurring interactions and allow for repeated, moment-by-moment analysis of how actors visibly orient themselves to one another and their surroundings and make sense of each other's actions (Sidnell and Stivers, 2012; Streeck et al., 2011). Video recordings are particularly preferred as they allow for fine-grained examinations into the multimodal details of situated social interactions, including speech, gaze, body movements, and gestures gesture (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Gylfe et al., 2016; LeBaron and Christianson, 2021; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010). This study's analysis concentrates on approximately 35 hours of video recordings from 23 formal meetings.

Data analysis

Approaching our data, we combine an EMCA oriented analysis of the sequential organization of recorded interactions with a sensitivity to the larger setting, drawing on our knowledge gained through the 8-month period of data collection. Through close examination of our video data, we chose sequences in which actors are discussing issues that involve future actions for someone to act upon for detailed analysis.

Our analysis of meeting sequences draws on the EMCA perspective of social interaction as sequentially ordered, in which each turn builds on previous turns and projects a reasonable following turn (Schegloff, 2007). The sequential organization of interaction often establishes normative expectations, favoring particular responses to utterances, in what is called preference structures (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). For instance, invitations typically project the expectation of a positive response. We pursue the strong emic orientation of the EMCA approach using the so-called "next turn proof procedure" (Sacks et al., 1974: 728), focusing on how the recipient of an utterance visibly makes sense of it and orients toward it through their next turn.

Examining our collection of recorded meeting interactions, we identified over 70 sequences during which future actions were negotiated and organized. In the findings section below we present our analysis of three selected illustrative sequences, which are transcribed using a simplified Jefferson style (Jefferson, 2004, see Appendix) and provided in their translated English version (the original Danish version is excluded due to space limitations) with participants' names anonymized.

Findings

Given the rich detail in the sequences presented, it should be noted that we concentrate our analysis on the aspects that are particularly relevant to the focus of this paper. We include salient

non-verbal details of the video data, e.g., body language and gaze, highlight main lines and add comments in the transcripts below to help the reading.

At times, mobilizing someone to commit to future actions can be a relatively straightforward affair. The excerpt below is from a meeting at *Learn* between the school director (Erin), three department heads (Conny, Pil, and Sara), and four teachers (Mai, Chris, Sasha, and Ava) who are also internship coordinators and contact persons for students. The teachers have summoned the managers to the meeting and prepared an agenda with several items to be discussed. We enter the meeting after 10 minutes in which the teachers have suggested a need for cleaning up materials on the school's online platform and initiated the leadership work of organizing future actions in relation to this organizational matter. Erin and Conny have agreed that this is needed, and Conny has offered to act on it together with some of the teachers and Pil. In the first line below, Conny returns to this proposal.

		Transcript excerpt		Analytical comment
→	1	**Conny**	**((nods)) Shouldn't we (.) ↑do it then**	Proposal
	2	Pil	((looks up from computer at Conny))	
	3	Erin	Yes.	
	4	Chris	Yes.	
	5	Mai	((nods))	
	6	Erin	It will: be (.) super cool ((nods)) (.) Yes	
→	7	**Conny**	**((looking at Pil)) Are you on board with that Pil?**	Seeking response from Pil
	8		(1.5)	
	9	Pil	Well ((smiles at Conny))	
	10	Erin	Hehe ((smiles at Pil))	
	11	Pil	I'm actually just looking and need to write (.)	
	12		what is it I should ↓write?	
	13	Chris	Hehe	
	14	Conny	Whether we should find (.) uh if you and I should	
	15		find an hour to an hour and a half (.) along with	
	16		some of the ((pointing around)) internship	
	17		coordinators to try out a::nd try looking at the PA	
	18		part a::nd GF part on Canvas and then clean up↓ (.)	
	19		↑together?	
→	20	**Pil**	**.hhhh ↑Yes, it can probably be a little hard to**	Rejection
	21		**find: an hour and a half on this side of before the**	
	22		**summer holidays ((smiles))**	
	23	Erin	°Hehe° ((looking down))	
	24	Pil	But u::m	
→	25	**Conny**	**=Then I could do it for the two of us.**	Offer, committing
	26	Pil	=I think so.	
	27	Erin	Yes ((nodding at Conny)	Agreement
	28	Pil	That would be lovely.	
	29	Ava	That would be great.	
	30	Mai	Fantastic yes.	

Although a lot is going on in this brief interactional episode, it illustrates a case of committing that demands little in terms of leadership work. Of interest is Conny's use of the pronouns "we"

(ll. 1 and 14) and "us" (l. 25). Since no one has yet agreed to be part of the subgroup working on the task with Conny (although they have visibly backed up the idea), the "we" is reasonably heard as indicating that regardless of who performs the task, it is on behalf of the whole group of teachers and managers. In lines 7 and 14–19, Conny explicitly attempts to recruit Pil to join her in working on the task, seeking an active response from her. However, Pil hesitates in committing (ll. 20–22) and Conny then offers to take on the task on behalf of them both ("for the two of us," l. 25). Although she will be the one moving the task forward (including identifying some of the teachers to collaborate with), she has worked to construct a shared ownership (Rossi, 2012). Her utterance in line 25 is reasonably heard as a display of her committing to be responsible for future actions regarding this matter on behalf of the group. This is met by positive remarks from the others, and the conversation moves on to other topics. Although what exactly Conny is to do, the problem it is meant to solve, and who is accountable for what might be less clear to the reader, the important observation is that the participants treat the topic as sufficiently clear to act on, and it is solved "for all practical purposes" (Garfinkel, 1967: 15).

In contrast to the observation above, at times the organizing process involves significantly more leadership effort when trying to mobilize someone to commit to future actions. We next present two sequences in which three central challenges for the interactional organizing work can be identified.

Sequence 2

In the following excerpts from later in the same meeting at *Learn*, we demonstrate how actors engaged in leadership work struggle with the challenges of getting to a shared sense of **what's the problem**, **who owns the problem**, and **what should be done** about it. As we enter the meeting, the interactants discuss students registration in courses using a new online system, which presents some challenges for the teachers when students are absent (sick or on maternity leave), constructing an organizational issue requiring joint consideration, direction, and organization of future actions, i.e., leadership. In the first excerpt below, we focus on how different problem formulations are offered, but none is accepted, and the interactional organizing work is consequently stalled.

		Transcript excerpt	Analytical comment
1	Mai	This example we have a lot of where the student has	
2		been on sick leave i::n this and that internship	
3		(0.5) get started again (.) and basically also in	
4		our system and what we send to the administration	
5		is con(.) > then becomes< connected to a class.	
6	Erin	((nodding)) hye::s	
7	Mai	Because that is what we write (.) must then follow	
8	Erin	=On this and that class.	
9	Mai	On that class, yes. But then when they start an	
10		internship, they're not really ↑on that class.	
11	Erin	No	
12	Mai	hehh (.) They really don't come until they get to	
13		our [school ( )]	
→ 14	**Erin**	**[(Yes) that ann] an error**	Problem candidate 1
15	Mai	.hh we::ll ((shrugs while spreading hands))	
16	Pil	=I really think so. That with (.)	
17	Mai	Yes	
18	Erin	It's hard to be (.) have that sense of community	
19		with something if you're a little outside	
20		((spreads hands))	
21	Mai	Well, that they have ((shakes head slightly))	Rejection
22	Erin	Yes↑	
23		(0.7)	
24	Mai	That's surely the condition of being (.)[fallen ill]	Rejection
25	Pil	[But that]	
26		is how it is when you get sick and have to be moved	Rejection
27		to a new class ((looking from Mai over at Erin))	
28	Mai	Yes	
29	Pil	=I mean it's not [anyone's fault]	
30	Mai	[It is ju::st]	
31	Pil	=it's just how it is.	
→ 32	**Mai**	**What <u>we</u> are pointing out that is to draw attention**	Problem candidate 2
33		**to that we s(.)((makes circular movement with hand))**	
34		**so the task <u>is</u> there(.) and <u>we</u>'ll be the ones to do**	
35		**it↓.**	

In this excerpt, two problem candidates are introduced. The first is formulated by Erin, jumping in to categorize the situation Mai is telling about as "an error" (l.14). While the preferred response would be agreement (Pomerantz, 1984), at best we get an ambivalent reaction, in the form of an audible inbreath by Mai (l. 15) followed by a prolonged "well" and shrug. Erin elaborates by suggesting that the problem concerns a lost "sense of community" (ll. 18–19), presenting a full first candidate problem formulation. This is contested in what follows, as Mai and Pil disagree (ll. 21, 24, and 25–27), both of whom characterize the situation as a condition rather than an error (ll. 29–31). In essence, the first candidate problem formulation is not accepted, the question of **what the problem is** remains open and the realization of future actions calls for more leadership effort.

Mai continues the interactional organizing work by offering a second candidate problem formulation of the task being there and "<u>we</u>'ll be the ones to do it" in lines 32–35. The emphasis on "we'll" suggests that the problem consists in the fact that the task is currently located with the teachers, an issue related to **whose problem it is**. The implication that the problem concerns where

the task is located rather than how it affects students, is left implicit, making the question of what to do with it ambiguous. This third challenge, the question of **what should be done** about the problem at hand, surfaces in the conversation that follows. We skip a few lines of silence and minimal response, after which Erin challenges the teacher's construction of task location as problematic.

		Transcript excerpt	Analytical comment
39	Conny	And that's what makes the most sense isn't it?	Challenge
40	Mai	=∘Yes∘ ((looks at the other teachers))	
41	Erin	Aren't you the ones who know this first?	Challenge
42		(1.2)	
43	Mai	.hhh hhh	
44	Chris	Yes, we're the ones who [know it]	
45	Mai	[It was] ju::st it was	Disagreeing
46		just because we used to run it really that way (.)	account
47		((makes circular hand movement with right hand))an	
48		automatic that followed [the student and then hh]	
49	Ava	[because there were]	
50		all classes inside the system ((hands in levels)),	
51		now we have to go in and search (.) pharmacology	
52		AS twenty-two zero two( ) ((keys with fingers on	
53		the table)) bum	
→ 54	**Mai**	**=It's not the kind of thing that just takes (.)**	Problem
55		**[ten minutes] ((shakes head slightly))**	candidate 3
56	Ava	[( ) bum] So that u:::h that's a lot of clicks	
57		((circular movement with hands))	
58	Conny	May I a::sk ((looking at Erin)) because I don't	
59		know	
60	Erin	Yes	
→ 61	**Conny**	**So could i::t um (1.0) could it be (1.0) ((looking**	Solution
62		**at teachers)) a solution that when you then (.)**	candidate 1
63		**when you got information about a student who then**	
64		**was going into a class**	
65	Mai	((nods slightly))	
66		(1.0)	
67	**Conny**	**.hh That you then u:::h (0.5) got hold of that**	
68		**cla::ss's can you say anchor person or the contact**	
69		**teachers in that class**	
		((lines omitted where Conny outlines the details of the proposed solution))	
80	Pil	So (.) the question is (of course) whether there	
81		should be one more link, whether you are going to	
82		dig up a colleague whom you then have to	
83		[draw tasks to]	
84	Mai	[I don't think so] ((shakes head))	Rejection
85	Conny	No it [gets more hassle?]	
86	Pil	[AND THAT(.)I think] not	Rejection
87	Conny	Okay no it was just u:::m ((leaning back in the	
88		chair)) (1.3) a thought=okay	

In the first lines, Erin presents an argument for the location of the task with the teachers as what "makes the most sense" (l. 39) with a negative tag question "isn't it?", which can work to mobilize support for the claim (Stivers and Rossano, 2010). Support is given, however softly, by Mai (l.

40), and Erin continues by elaborating her argument, asking if the teachers aren't the ones to know first (l. 41), thereby implying that they are the ones who should act on it. In other words, a linkage between *knowledge* of a problem and *ownership* emerges in the sense of being accountable for acting on it. While Chris responds by acknowledging that it is the teachers who know first (l. 44), she does not respond to the first question of whether it makes the most sense. Nor does Mai, who rather signals disagreement, making an account for the state of affairs as changing the teachers' traditional way of doing thing (ll. 45–48), which is supplemented by Ava (ll. 49–53). On this basis, Mai and Ava introduce a third candidate problem formulation (ll. 54–57), co-constructing it as an issue of time and effort. What we see next is Conny bringing the question of **what should be done** to the fore in line 61 and onward. However, the suggested solution is quickly rejected by Pil and Mai (ll. 80–86), both arguing that it introduces more work than it eliminates for the teachers.

The questions of **what the problem is, whose problem it is**, and **what are available solutions** remain unresolved, prolonging the leadership work of producing direction for coordinated action and mobilizing actors to commit to the action. In the final excerpt, the interactants reach a consensus on what the problem is (following some omitted lines elaborating cases and time spent on the task).

		Transcript excerpt	Analytical comment
→ 117	**Mai**	**What is >the big job<, it is that we have to get**	Returning
118		**in behind (.) ((circular movement with hand))**	to problem
119		**[(and)]**	statement
120	Erin	[Behind every] (.) every subject((nodding))	
121	Mai	and register the person to all those subjects	
122	Erin	Yes. But do you have (.) is it hard to have time	Challenge
123		for?	
124		(2.0)	
125	Mai	.hh ◦It can be sometimes◦ hhhehe (.)	
126		[they can pile up]	
127	Erin	[Yes, but I mean] is it problematic, though (.)	Challenge
128		because I also think it sounds smartest that it lies with you, because it is you who get it	
129		((pointing around))	
130			
131	Sasha	◦Yes◦ ((nods))	
132	Mai	Yes (0.5) But at least that's how it IS now (.)	Complying
133		because there is no other option.	

Mai characterizes the task as a "big job" and further emphasizes that "we have to" (l. 117), similar to what she did in line 32. While acknowledging the location of the task, Mai can be heard to reject ownership of it once more, positioning herself as a victim rather than an owner. Therefore, the teachers appear to want relief from the task, or they want something in return for doing it, but do not make any clear requests or suggestions. Simply presenting something as problematic may work to recruit the leaders to offer a solution as the next relevant action (as Conny did earlier), but it also prolongs the struggle to reach a shared understanding and complicates the organizing leadership work. What follows is a series of disagreements, in which Erin challenges the time issue (ll. 122–123) and the problematization of task location (ll. 127–130), asking for an account

for the rejection of ownership. In lines 132–133, Mai acknowledges that "no other option" is currently available, casting herself and her colleagues as mere instruments in carrying out the task, and complying rather than committing.

In summary, the participants in this sequence engage in a leadership process of considerable interactional organizing work that revolves around the three central questions of what the problem is, whose problem it is, and what should be done about it. These issues are clearly interrelated, so that the construction of a problem depends on who is willing to take ownership of it (and vice versa) and any solution needs to be aligned with what the problem is and whose it is. As demonstrated throughout the interaction, one or more of these issues continues to be treated as unresolved by the participants; therefore, the leadership work of organizing future actions and mobilizing actors to commit to them continues, oscillating between attention to each of the three issues in a series of attempts to achieve sufficient clarity and consensus for anyone to commit to an action. We use a final, shorter sequence to illustrate variations in the interactional organizing work of constructing and negotiating ownership, the nature of the problem, and what should be done. While the previous sequence presented a negotiation in terms of trying to avoid ownership, this sequence offers quite the opposite type of negotiation in which an actor claims unilateral ownership of an organizational issue.

Sequence 3

The following excerpt is from a recurrent monthly business review meeting at *Digitalize* between two heads of a unit of 35–40 people (Sten and Kim) and the executive board (COO Jan present in the room, CCO Gerd and CFO Andy participating through screen). We enter the meeting 10 minutes in, when Sten and Kim have shared their people skills development plans. A long silence makes a transition relevant (l. 1), and we then see a delicate construction of problem ownership:

		Transcript excerpt	Analytical comment
1		(1.7)	
2	Sten	(((typing on PC))	
→ 3	**Kim**	**(So) now I think I could be a little perky just**	Unilateral
4		**an' an' ask you three, wi::se heads (0.5), huh**	ownership
5		**uhm, how would you uh, if you, if you were the**	construction
6		**third party (0.5) in this, how would you then**	
7		**advise us**	
8		(1.0)	
9	Kim	to how we should relate to a resource like Michael	Problem
10		Rue, who right now helps (client name)(0.5)	statement
11		immensely (0.5) but has zero billable hours (0.2)	
12		with some totally fundamental things in the way	
13		they succeed?	
→ 14	**Jan**	**=I certainly think that they mu::st (0.2) that**	Solution
15		**they should be billed.**	suggestion

Kim presents an organizational issue regarding handling the costs of an employee doing work for other units, and the situation is delicately constructed as one of advice-giving, placing the

ownership of the problem unilaterally with the unit heads. In lines 3–7, Kim is visibly building up to a social action that he does not treat as typical, carefully designing his turn. First, he uses a self-degrading characterization of being "perky," working to mitigate the interpersonally sensitive nature of what is to come. Second, he (somewhat jokingly) positions the officers as experts ("three wise heads") and places them in a distanced, external position ("if you were the third party"), specifically asking for their advice, thereby attributing high epistemic authority to the officers (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015), while simultaneously downplaying their formal authority and decision making right in relation to the problem at hand.

In other words, Kim can be seen to claim **unilateral ownership** over the problem at hand and to offer the officers a position of advice givers, not owners, in which the officers are invited to assist in determining **what should be done** in relation to the problem, but without being accountable for the realization of those actions. In other words, the officers are being positioned with limited rights and responsibilities in the organizing leadership work initiated by Kim. The offered position is at first largely accepted by Jan, who responds that he "certainly thinks that they must," then stops and rephrases to "should" (ll. 14–15). This repair is hearable as orienting to the way he is positioned as an advisor, suggesting a solution, rather than as a decision maker. Jan next introduces a general "transfer pricing model" that is in the making, stating that it should remedy a problem like the one presented in this case.

	Transcript excerpt		Analytical comment
16	Jan	And I also think that (.) you can then say that the	General
17		(0.2) uh the transfer uh model or transfer pricing	solution
18		model, which will also include how do we trade with	
19		each other (0.2), so that it uh (0.5), it should be	
20		able to remedy something like this.	
		((lines omitted where Jan outlines details of plan))	
21	Jan	When it's over a longer period of time, which this	Specific case
22		is, I definitely think that it should be something	solution
23		that should be registered on the client project and	
24		should be invoiced to the customer.	
25	Sten	°Yes°	
26		(2.2)	
27	Andy	Absolutely, totally agree with Jan. So, you lend	Agreement
28		them to Unit 3, then Unit 3 has the risk of whether	
29		they can (.)	
30	Jan	°Yes°	
31	Andy	=bill him or not, that's not your problem.	Rejection of ownership construction
32	Jan	°No°	
33		(1.2)	
		((lines omitted where Jan further develops details for the planned transfer pricing model))	
34	Jan	If it was, if it was that way around, right? As well	
35		(0.2) [as if it were ( )]	

→	**36**	**Kim**	**[When do we effectuate that one?]**	Shared ownership construction, committing
	37	Jan	>What do you say?<	
	38	Kim	When (.) do we effectuate (.)	
	39	Jan	We have ((hand gesture and gaze toward the screen))	
	40		a task in getting, uh, getting a proposal presented	
	41		to the board in June	
	42	Kim	↑Hm.	
	43	Jan	And get it approved.	

After Jan has described the transfer pricing model in some detail, Andy steps in displaying agreement (l. 27). Both Jan and Andy are hearable stating clear stances, using adjectives such as "definitely" (l. 22) and "absolutely" (l. 27). Then, in line 31, Andy explicitly states that when people are lent to other units, the issue of invoicing is "not your problem," in direct contrast to the previous stance taken by Kim, claiming ownership over the issue. Instead, Andy places ownership with the loaning unit. In these lines, we see a moment of leadership in terms of shifting the construction of (ownership of) the issue, accomplished through interactional organizing work.

Importantly, the interactional organizing work here involves the introduction of a transfer pricing model that changes the context of the presented problem of loaning people across units, preparing the ground for the explicit change of ownership in line 31. Rather than being a matter that the unit heads autonomously manage, a general model is in the making offering rules and procedures for handling the matter. Therefore, it simultaneously represents a solution to the problem and constrains unit heads' autonomy, who now no longer have the same rights and responsibilities in the ongoing leadership work. By introducing the model, the **nature of the problem** is also transformed. It is no longer a matter of relatively idiosyncratic exchanges between business units, handled by the unit heads, but a matter of implementing a new organizational routine and structure across units.

Finally, the new version of the situation is accepted by Kim in line 36, stepping in (in overlap) to ask when they will effectuate the model, now using the pronoun "we", hearable as orienting to it as a shared project and the model as something that is already decided. In this way, he claims partial ownership of the problem as being part of effectuating the solution and visibly *committing* to take action. At this moment, he treats the construction of the problem, ownership, and solution as clear enough to act on; that is, the organizing work is finalized "for all practical purposes" (Garfinkel, 1967: 15) for the moment and the episode of leadership comes to an end.

In summary, this sequence demonstrates that leadership consists of significant interactional organizing work, involving negotiating the nature of a problem, ownership of it, and what should be done. Obviously, many things can be at stake in such leadership processes. While in the previous sequence we demonstrated how leadership work can be challenged by multiple parties not wanting to claim ownership over an organizational issue and by lack of clarity in relation to the nature of the issue, in this sequence, the central dynamic tension instead revolves around several parties claiming ownership over an issue, which is transformed accordingly.

Discussion

The leadership work of organizing future actions and mobilizing actors to commit to them in management meetings often demands considerable time and effort, which we refer to as interactional organizing work. Our analysis shows that this work involves managing the central questions of *what the problem consists of*, *who owns the problem*, and *what should be done about it*. The collaborative mobilization of actors to commit to future action depends on temporarily settling such questions. Notably, handling these challenges does not necessarily mean working out the details. In contrast, our analysis demonstrates that the level of clarification needed is a member's concern (Heritage and Clayman, 2010), that is, a matter of when and how the participants find it sufficiently clear to move on with practical action. Our findings bring substance and detail to understanding leadership as a dynamic and relational process (Endres and Weibler, 2017; Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009) of organizing (Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013), and in particular, to the understanding of leadership as work (Crevani, 2018; Meschitti, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018). Our analysis makes several contributions to the existing leadership literature.

First and foremost, our study extends and brings specificity to the notion of leadership work. Previous studies has almost exclusively emphasized direction setting as central to leadership work. Crevani (2018: 88) argues that "leadership work is about providing or creating direction in organizing processes," Buchan and Simpson (2024: 82) emphasize that "it is the generation of … new directions that constitute leadership work," and Sklaveniti (2020: 548) define leadership as "an ongoing process signifying the pursuit of direction in the production of a space for co-action." Our findings extend this focus by demonstrating the significant effort involved in the so far less focused aspect of mobilizing actors to commit to taking future actions. The identification and analysis of this work is largely enabled by the strong emic orientation of an EMCA inspired exploration, with the focus firmly placed on what the participants are visibly orienting toward and attempting to do (while bracketing theoretically derived expectations on the leadership process and placing less emphasis on the content of talk than on the actions performed). This is a question of not only "the variety of resources involved in this process" (Meschitti, 2019: 624), but of how and to what end those resources might be deployed. We have identified three such central challenges.

The first challenge concerns **what the problem consists of,** aligning with Larsson and Lundholm's (2013) and Crevani's (2018) observations that constructing the issue at hand is an ongoing process. Moreover, our analysis shows that such work involves the moral relationship between a particular actor and the constructed problem in terms of accountabilities, rights, and obligations. The second challenge concerns **who owns the problem** at hand, which involves who is to take action to handle a problem, and more importantly, who is to be accountable for those actions and who is invested in the outcome (Rossi, 2012). Our analysis reveals intriguing variations in the leadership work to establish a shared understanding of ownership and accountability. In Sequence 1, Conny engaged in extensive interactional work to ensure that the task was collectively owned. In Sequence 2, an important matter seemed to be that the teachers

risked being made accountable for a task they would prefer not to commit to, and consequently, they tried to avoid unilateral problem ownership. Conversely, Sequence 3 presented an example of leadership work in the direction of claiming unilateral problem ownership. In the last two examples, the construction of ownership was challenged, and the interactional organizing work of getting to committed action was prolonged. Clearly, this challenge involves not only *obligations* toward other organizational actors in terms of future actions and accountabilities (Larsson and Lundholm, 2013), but also *rights* such as the right to act and to decide *what should be done* in relation to a problem or task at hand. This leads to the third challenge concerning **what should be done**. Close interactional analysis makes it possible to identify this as a separate and distinct question in the organizing work of leadership (in line with the analysis by Wåhlin-Jacobsen and Abildgaard, 2020). Our empirical analysis of this challenge resonates with what Ford and Ford's (1995) theoretical model calls "conversations for performance," demonstrating that this is challenging and demands effort in practice. However, as illustrated by our analysis, it is not always possible or desirable to find out what needs to be done in detail. As noted, what is at stake is participants' own judgement that the question is sufficiently clarified for work to progress.

Taken together, identifying these challenges as central to the leadership process of interactional organizing work significantly extends the notion of leadership work and demonstrates the very process itself. While several studies have observed that shifts and changes occur (Lortie et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2018) or that smooth coordination is realized in the here and now, our close analysis reveals some of the details of how this is realized at the micro-level of turn-by-turn interaction. Moreover, our close analysis demonstrates that not all topic shifts are significant turning points (Simpson et al., 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020). For instance, whereas Sequence 1 ends with displays of successful handling of the issue, the shift in Sequence 2 from attention to what the problem at hand consists of is not oriented to in this way. Instead, the move to other aspects of organizing work is hearable as an attempt to approach the situation from another angle, as the interactional challenge remains. Importantly, the EMCA-informed analysis reveals such differences as a matter of participant sensemaking, as the participants themselves visibly orient to these topic shifts in different ways, regardless of any theoretical characterization of a significant moment. As a result, leadership work that aims to enable future actions emerges as a struggle, where issues of importance for the actors are at stake and the interaction is characterized by clashes, detours, and re-formulations, rather than a smooth flow of coordination and re-orientation (Biehl, 2019; Ryömä and Satama, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018).

Second, our analysis suggests that more is at stake in the work of leadership than identity negotiation and construction, which has been the primary focus of previous studies of leadership in interaction (Clifton, 2014; Schnurr et al., 2021; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). While establishing a situated identity as a leader can be associated with authority and rights to, i.e., shape the direction of the conversation (Van De Mieroop et al., 2020) or influence the formulation of issues (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Meschitti, 2019), our analysis shows that the organizing work of leadership also involves issues such as ownership and accountability in relation to a problem at hand. And while most interaction studies have focused on identity negotiation in the current

conversation, our interest is in the mobilization of actors to visibly commit to *future* actions as a central, albeit underexplored, aspect of leadership that stretches beyond the confines of here and now in projecting future accountability. While a temporary identity claim can be accepted in the ongoing conversation, it does not imply that someone is prepared to be held accountable for actions in the future.

A third contribution to the existing literature concerns the notion and location of agency. While process oriented leadership studies have largely located agency in the flow of interaction (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016; Endrissat and von Arx, 2013; Simpson et al., 2018) and eschew notions of individual agency, our detailed analysis demonstrates that collaborative engagement in interactional organizing work results from a variety of projects that different actors (individual and collective) attempt to pursue, that at times clashes with projects pursued by other actors. This suggests a perspective of leadership as involving individual agency (to pursue specific ambitions and interests) that plays out on the social arena of dynamic interaction, in which "[a]gents are in constant interaction, exchanging information, learning, and adapting their behavior in locally coherent ways" (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009: 618). In our analysis, the collaboratively accomplished leadership work of mobilizing committed action results from tensions and friction, where moral positions, responsibilities, and accountabilities are at stake. Rather than treating agency as either individual or relational, our analysis strongly suggests considering the collaborative process as consisting of a series of individual agentic moves. Therefore, our perspective challenges the distinction made when "the focus is on the work achieved socially rather than on what leaders do" (Crevani, 2018: 87). While we certainly agree with the futility of a priori defining some actors as leaders and attributing all agency to them, we suggest a nuanced understanding of the leadership process as consisting of nothing else than what actors do. As individual contributions that emerge from attempts to pursue a variety of interests clash and are reacted to, a social process of interactional organizing work emerges.

Conclusion

Leadership as an organizing process centrally involves the interactional work of mobilizing others to commit to future actions. Rather than a smooth process of organically emerging direction (Biehl, 2019; Endres and Weibler, 2017; Ryömä and Satama, 2019), this study demonstrates leadership as entailing a *struggle* with different interests and implications that involves handling questions such as what the problem consists of, what should be done about it, and the ownership and accountability for acting on it. The identification of these three questions throws light on the effort needed for leadership to result in the mobilization of actors to visibly commit to future action. Our study extends and brings significant details to existing literature on leadership as organizing work (Crevani, 2018; Meschitti, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018). While clashes, frictions, contestations, and reconstructions have previously been identified, the analysis presented here adds an important understanding of what is at stake and what challenges demand effort. In conversational dynamics, topics emerge, change, disappear, and re-emerge as the work shifts between the central questions. Clearly, it is through close analytical attention to ongoing interaction that such details of organizing work can be identified.

Our findings raise several questions for future research. While our study has identified three core challenges, studies can possibly extend these to other contexts. Moreover, while our study focuses on management meetings with a particular, relatively free-flowing interaction format, other interactional environments such as project meetings and informal one-on-one conversations could yield deeper insights into the dynamic relationship between the challenges. Finally, while our study has revealed some of the interactional complexities involved in ownership constructions for the first time in leadership literature, many questions remain. For instance, the extent to which ownership can be shared and how different accountabilities can co-exist, merge, or conflict over time, which would bring insights into the dynamics of shared and distributed leadership (Denis et al., 2023).

6. Article 2: The balancing act of leadership work: Pushing and pulling for action in the effort to elicit a committed response

Abstract

Influencing organizational actors to take initiative and committed action on emerging issues is a key element of leadership work. While there is a growing realization in the leadership literature that interpersonal influence is a situated, interactional achievement, we still know relatively little about how it is accomplished. This study explores video recordings of "call to action" sequences, where leadership actors attempt to influence others to commit to taking future action on issues raised during management meetings in two Danish organizations. Drawing on ethnomethodological conversation analysis, I analyze the micro-level practices and adjustments involved, demonstrating that the interactional environment provides various opportunities and resources for actors to collaboratively accomplish or resist influence and that leadership actors work to continuously *strengthen or soften* action calls to elicit a committed response. Two overarching practices are central and used alternately depending on uptake: *pushing*, which involves directly calling on an individual or group to take future action, and *pulling,* which involves attempts to elicit initiatives and offers to take action from others. I conclude that influencing others to commit to future action on organizational issues is a complex interactional process that requires improvisation and adaptation from leadership actors to balance the strength of their action calls in situ. Rather than discrete acts, tactics or generalized techniques, it is this in situ balancing of pushing and pulling that makes influence attempts successful in practice.

Introduction

At the core of leadership is the question of how organizational actors are mobilized to take effective action on emerging issues. This topic has evolved over the past decades of leadership research, as the focus on individual leaders has been challenged by approaches that view leadership as a social process of mutual influence through which direction is produced and future actions are organized (Drath et al., 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Hosking, 1988; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Yukl, 2013). In line with these developments, interpersonal influence is understood to occur in the unfolding dynamics of social interaction, where actors affect each other's actions in complex ways that may or may not result in a shared sense of what should be done by whom. Leadership research has however lagged behind in studying interpersonal influence processes as they evolve in situated interactions at work (Clifton et al., 2020; Knights and Willmott, 1992; Larsson, 2017; Larsson and Meier, 2023; Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Uhl-Bien and Carsten, 2018). As a result, we have little empirically based knowledge of the actual work and interactional complexities involved in a critical aspect of leadership: influencing organizational actors to take future actions they might not otherwise have taken. Such knowledge is crucial for understanding leadership work in practice and moving leadership development

beyond the functionalist focus on individual leaders and idealized skills (Carroll, 2019) towards addressing the mutuality, complexities, and adaptations involved in situated influence processes.

In the leadership literature, a dominant strand of social psychological research treats influence as a set of behavioral tactics (rational persuasion, inspirational appeal etc.), typically studied through self-reports and questionnaires, rather than as situated social accomplishments that should be studied through observation and interactional analysis (Higgins and Judge, 2004; Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl, 2015; Yukl and Falbe, 1990). More recent leadership research often locates interpersonal influence in specific communicative acts or language use that are abstracted from their interactional occurrence, such as noble language (Joullié et al., 2021), respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke and Felps, 2018), and turning point speech acts (Simpson et al., 2018). The problem with such abstractions is that they tend to black-box the actual processes and messy details through which influence is realized in situ (Knights and Willmott, 1992; Larsson and Alvehus, 2023; Nicolini, 2012). To understand how leadership mobilizes committed future actions, we need to examine the interactional details involved. Some process-oriented studies bring us closer to the situated accomplishment of influence (Clifton, 2009; Crevani, 2018; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Lortie et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020), but the practices and adaptations through which leadership actors attempt—and occasionally succeed—in mobilizing others to commit to take future action on current issues, remain largely unexplored.

A central complexity in this matter lies in the broad agreement that leadership, unlike commandment and coercion, is distinguished by its ability to mobilize willing commitment rather than forced compliance (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Grint, 2005; Joullié et al., 2021). A crucial question, therefore, is how actors can request someone else's initiative "without constraining it in the very act of pushing for it" (Nielsen and Larsson, in revision). And whether those calling for action are seen as leaders rather than bullies or dictators (Joullié et al., 2021: 3). Studying the in situ action-mobilizing work of leadership thus involves exploring how influence attempts are adapted or balanced during interactions to elicit not just compliance, but a committed response.

In this study, I draw on ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA; Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks et al., 1974) to examine the situated practices and adjustments involved in the leadership work of influencing others to commit to future action on organizational issues. I find that the interactional environment offers various opportunities and resources for leadership actors to accomplish influence and that they continually work to either *strengthen or soften* their calls to action to elicit a committed response. Two overarching practices are central and employed alternately during these influence processes: *pushing*, which involves directly requesting someone or a group to take some future action, and *pulling*, which involves attempts to elicit initiatives and offers from others to take some, often less specified, future action. The study contributes to the literature on leadership as a process of influence and organizing (Clifton, 2009; Crevani, 2018; Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Meschitti, 2019), by demonstrating the

improvisation and balancing work that leadership actors engage in—*across* distinct acts and resources deployed—to mobilize committed future action.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: First, I review the contributions of two key streams of process-oriented leadership research that, while significant, do not fully capture the work involved in influencing organizational actors to commit to future action. Next, I introduce the EMCA approach I take to explore call-to-action sequences, where leadership actors prompt others to commit to future action. Then, I outline the empirical setting and data and present the findings through two selected meeting episodes of varying lengths. Finally, I discuss the contributions and implications of the findings for the leadership literature.

Process-oriented studies of interpersonal influence

To understand leadership work in practice, it is essential to explore leadership processes in situ, where "influential 'acts of organizing' contribute to structuring interactions and relationships" (Hosking, 1988: 147). This section briefly reviews two streams of research that study leadership as a situated interpersonal influence process through which direction is produced and actions are organized.

First, several studies have examined leadership as the in situ production of direction in the flow of conversation and action (Crevani, 2018; Lortie et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020). Drawing on Austin's speech act theory and Mead's notion of turning points, Simpson et al. (2018: 651) identified 253 instances in management meetings where "the remembered past and the anticipated future were immediately adjacent in the same speech act" and coded these speech acts into pre-defined categories of performative effects, such as "problematizing" (recognizing an unsatisfactory present situation) and "committing" (specifying required action). Sklaveniti (2020) argued that turning points are not individual actions but co-actions and explored the responsive interplay of invitations, exploration, and affirmations at turning points in work meetings. Crevani (2018: 89) explored how direction emerges in meetings where "a number of simultaneously existing stories-so-far meet, co-evolve, leave, clash, return, and so on", altering the space for co-action. Lortie et al. (2023) examined how turning points manifest as reorientations in the flow of collective action within hierarchical teams.

While this research brings us closer to understanding situated accomplishment of influence and contributes to our understanding of leadership as constituting significant moments of change, it also presents some challenges. In studies such as Simpson et al. (2018), specific speech acts are coded separately from the interactional process in which they occur, making it unclear how these conversational turns are responded to and whether they lead to actors visibly committing to take some action. As Larsson and Alvehus (2023: 92) argue, the complex interactional process through which these turning points are produced—essentially the process of leadership itself—is thereby left out. Other studies have paid attention to the unfolding interactional process (Crevani, 2018; Lortie et al., 2023; Sklaveniti, 2020) but focus on changes in flow of action here and now rather than on influence directed at future actions. Furthermore, this research generally adopts a strong

process approach, studying leadership "in the sense of what 'unfolds'; rather than 'who" produces it, or 'what' its impact is" (Sklaveniti, 2020: 562) and emphasizing "what does the process of leadership do to organizing practices" rather than "what do individuals do in the process" (Crevani, 2018: 84). However, even though these studies turn the analytical gaze away from individual actors and discrete effects, they do not entirely escape individual turns and contributions to the evolving interaction. Focusing solely on process risks overlooking the variety of projects and interests pursued, as actors are "adapting their behavior in locally coherent ways" (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009: 618). Rather than viewing leadership as a radically fluid phenomenon of co-action, I approach the process of interpersonal influence as consisting of individual moves adapted to the unfolding interaction.

A second stream of leadership research has more extensively explored the strategies and resources individual actors use in interactional processes to accomplish influence (Clifton, 2009; Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Meschitti, 2019; Van De Mieroop, 2020; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020; Watson and Drew, 2017). For instance, some recent studies have examined how shared leadership, understood as interactional episodes where "individuals mutually seek to influence one another by actively engaging in joint making meaning" (Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020: 571), is discursively negotiated and collectively achieved alongside hierarchical asymmetry. These studies have shown that positioning through deontic stance and status (Van De Mieroop, 2020; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020), claiming authority using resources such as expertise and speaking on behalf of others (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018), and efforts to resist asymmetry (Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020) are central. Other studies have demonstrated the use of a range of personal resources (e.g., knowledge, sense of humor), social resources (e.g., formal roles), and discursive resources (e.g., announcing, co-authored talk, exclusionary laughter) by actors to position themselves and others (Meschitti, 2019) and to get others to commit to a particular version of the future organizational reality in decision making (Clifton, 2009). Some of these resources serve multiple functions. For example, humor and the generation of joint laughter can be utilized to create solidarity (Holmes and Marra, 2006), reduce hierarchical asymmetry and tension (Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009), enable discussion of problematic topics (Kakalic and Schnurr, 2021), and achieve otherwise unacceptable strategic ends (Watson and Drew, 2017). Finally, Larsson and Lundholm (2010, 2013) have shown how actors construct and use situated social identities, such as a shared "we," working on a task together, to influence organizing processes.

This second stream of research has demonstrated that the "perceived legitimate right to influence and decide in organizational matters" (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018: 696) is not a fixed entity or property, but something negotiated in situ. Accordingly, influence can be seen as a fluid property of talk and action, which "can be exploited by all participants in a meeting if they are skilled enough to do so" (Clifton, 2009: 61). Together, these studies highlight a variety of resources and strategies used by actors to claim, grant or resist influence in sensemaking and decision-making processes. However, particularly relevant for leadership to have an effect beyond the current interaction are the efforts aimed at influencing actors to commit to *future* action on an organizational issue, which this literature has not adequately addressed. Nor has it explored the

delicate work involved in eliciting not just compliance but a *committed* response—that is, how leadership actors adapt and balance their influence attempts to avoid both rejection and submissive acceptance. If leadership is distinguished by its capacity to elicit initiative and willing engagement, it should be observable in everyday interactions. This leads to the research question guiding this study:

How do leadership actors balance their attempts to influence others to take future action on organizational issues in order to get a committed response?

To answer this question, I explore the interactional details of "calling for action" episodes in management meetings, where one or more parties call for future action from others. In this endeavor, I draw on ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA), which, as I elaborate below, is a suitable approach for exploring the practical methods through which actors are encouraged to act.

Ethnomethodological conversation analysis

Ethnomethodology is the study of the situated practices through which actors produce social order in everyday interactions (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008). In this approach, social order is viewed as a practical problem and an ongoing accomplishment of the members of a social interaction rather than an analytical problem requiring a sociological explanation in terms of structures or institutionalized norms outside the interaction (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009). The analytical gaze is thus directed at the sensemaking displayed by the participants themselves during interaction, making visible the "seen but unnoticed" machinery of talk in interaction (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1984b). As formulated by Nicolini (2012: 134–135),

> [ethnomethodology (EM)]'s aim is to provide convincing accounts of the methods used by members to produce and reproduce organization and society, and to uncover the work necessary to the concerted production of intelligible forms of activity. The business of EM is thus re-presenting the accomplishment of (work) practices "from within."

Drawing on ethnomethodology and the derived conversation analysis (Sacks, 1984; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012), phenomena such as interpersonal influence can be viewed as situated accomplishments (Lynch, 2007), and influence practices as local, competent "doings" of knowledgeable actors (Clifton, 2009). EMCA has a strong emic focus, meaning that any analytical claim, including those about complex social phenomena such as leadership and influence, must be based on the understandings displayed by the interactants themselves in the evolving interaction (Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Larsson and Meier, 2023; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009; Schegloff, 2007).

Unlike some lines of speech act theory and research (e.g., Simpson et al., 2018) that attribute action properties to individual utterances, EMCA focuses on how the recipient of an utterance visibly makes sense of it through their next turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 728). According to EMCA,

the performativity of utterances and the formation of social-communicative actions generally cannot be determined solely by their design and construction, as the uptake and interactional environment make them work in particular ways. In other words, a single act or utterance has no inherent effect; rather, its impact is "co-constructed by speaker and recipient in their successive turns at talk, meaning that the action performed by an utterance is partly determined or ascribed by the interlocutor as displayed in the response" (Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015: 2). While interactants use the resources of language, body, interactional environment, and position to make their actions intelligible to other actors (Schegloff, 2007: 14), the way of responding—for example, reluctantly accepting—gives meaning and function to an action (Sacks, 1992), such as persuasion. In sum, from an EMCA perspective, influence cannot be located in single acts; it is an interactional phenomenon, co-constructed by speaker and recipient, and it must be analyzed in its sequential context.

In the field of EMCA, extensive research has explored the dynamics of one actor trying to recruit another to take some action, for example, by gesturing, pointing or requesting them to do so (Curl and Drew, 2008; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014). Studies of requesting practices reveal that getting someone else to do something—although often immediate and specific in these studies (e.g., to pick something up) —is a complex matter involving issues of rights and obligations. Questions arise about who deems an action necessary, who stands to benefit, and who assumes responsibility (Clayman and Heritage, 2014). Interactants manage these delicate issues through careful turn design, including the use of modal verbs (e.g., "could you") to avoid overstepping perceived entitlements and accommodate potential contingencies. Requests can be delivered in more or less intense formats, depending on the degree of necessity built into the design (imperatives being the strongest; Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015: 2), reflecting the requester's understanding of the situation in terms of own entitlement to make the request and the recipient's capacity and willingness to grant it (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008). Given the interpersonal complexities of making even simple requests, offers are generally preferred in social interaction (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Schegloff, 2007). Thus, rather than making a direct request, actors may invite others to present an offer or initiative, for example, by presenting a problem in a way where the recipient will clearly be able to help, which might prompt an offer (Jefferson and Lee, 1981; Schegloff, 2007). Besides requests and offers, calls to action sequences may include other social actions, such as proposals and suggestions. These actions can be differentiated in terms of who is projected to be the agent (you, we, me) and who stands to benefit from it (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), which in turn is negotiable and malleable through the interaction (Clayman and Heritage, 2014).

In this paper, I study the efforts of leadership actors to influence someone or a group of actors to visibly commit to taking future action in organizational matters, which may involve beneficiaries, contingencies and accountabilities that are not clear. I will use the metaphor of pushing or pulling to describe variations of calls to action, with *pushing* referring to direct ways of calling (requesting, suggesting, proposing) someone or a group of actors to take some future action, and *pulling* referring to indirect ways of inviting someone or anyone to make an initiative or offer to act. Of particular relevance in this study is whether the interaction leads to someone or a group of

actors *committing* to take future action on an issue at hand. While commitment is often defined as a psychological state of volitional dedication to a target or an organization as a whole (Drath et al., 2008; Klein et al., 2012), from an EMCA perspective, it can be seen as an in situ social action of visibly engaging in and acting as accountable for the pursuance of specific tasks and actions (Nielsen and Larsson, in revision). Settling whether someone is committing, rather than resisting or reluctantly accepting—that is, complying—is an inherently local matter. Although previous EMCA studies of work meetings have pointed out that constructions of commitment to future action are fluid in the sense that decisions may be undone (Huisman, 2001), committing can be seen as a situated, action-based promise that this person is willing and ready to take future action in relation to issues at hand.

Empirical setting and data analysis

To study the leadership work of influencing others to commit to future actions, I draw on empirical material collected through an eight-month ethnography conducted in 2021-2022 in two organizations in Denmark, Digitalize and Learn (pseudonyms). Digitalize is a fast-growing private company in the field of digital commerce and Learn is a public vocational school with two sites in Denmark. The collected material includes initial interviews, close observation, field notes, and video recordings of naturally occurring work interactions between top managers, middle managers, and specialists in both organizations. The analysis for this paper focuses on approximately 40 hours of video-recorded interaction, primarily from managerial meetings. Video recordings offer the advantage of allowing for repeated, close examination of various modalities of social interaction—such as speech, gaze, body movements, and gestures—and enable a detailed, moment-by-moment analysis of how participants orient themselves to each other and their surroundings and make sense of one another's actions (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; LeBaron and Christianson, 2021).

Analyzing the data, I draw on the EMCA principle that social interactions are organized sequentially, where each turn builds upon the preceding ones and projects what constitutes a reasonable next turn (Schegloff, 2007). The sequential organization of social interactions often sets up normative expectations, favoring specific types of responses, such as an answer in response to a question. These are referred to as "preference structures" (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). Furthermore, informed by the strong emic orientation of EMCA, I focus the analysis on how participants visibly make sense of the evolving interaction, as displayed through their responses to previous turns, also known as the "next turn proof procedure" (Sacks et al., 1974). I combine detailed sequential analysis with sensitivity to context, drawing on the knowledge I gained through the eight-month ethnography.

In my collection of video material, I identified over 60 instances where actors call for another actor or actors present to take some more or less specified future action in relation to existing tasks, emerging issues or changes to be made in the organization. I have excluded instances where the action called for is to be carried out immediately and does not clearly imply future actions, such as taking the minutes of a meeting. In the following, I present my findings through the analysis of two selected call-to-action episodes of varying length and form. For presentation purposes, I have chosen two episodes from the same meeting context—weekly management meetings in Learn.

Findings

The extracts from the two meeting episodes below have been transcribed using a simplified Jeffersonian (2004) system (see Appendix) and are presented in their translated English version (Danish lines omitted due to space limitations). In the rich material presented, I focus on aspects and social-communicative actions particularly relevant to the topic of this paper, including a few notable nonverbal details, such as gaze direction and bodily movement. Key lines are highlighted in bold.

The meetings are attended by the school director, Mia, and three department heads: Alice, Norma, and Robin (all pseudonyms). Norma is temporarily acting as head of education until a permanent hire is made, and this position plays a central role in both episodes. While Norma holds this temporary role, she is considered Alice's formal leader.

Episode 1: Pulling, pushing, and balancing the strength of calls to action

The first interactional episode is relatively brief, with a call to action accepted and committed to in under 30 seconds. However, a closer examination reveals a variety of interactional moves and resources at play. Most notably, this episode illustrates how Alice and Mia collaboratively call for action from Norma, demonstrating how influence is accomplished through the practices of pulling and pushing, as well as resources to adjust the strength of the call for action. The extract begins after Mia has finished talking about three candidates for a vacant position of head of economy, and the ensuring silence makes a transition relevant:

		Extract 1	Analytical comment
1	Mia	.HHhhh Super exciting (0.5) Yes.	
2	Robin	((nods))	
3		(3.0)	
4	Alice	Um:: ((coughing, pointing and looking at Mia)) I was	
5		just thinking, now you say 1:1. (1.2) Is(n't) it Norma	
6		I have 1:1 with, because we haven't um::	
7	Mia	((nods))	
8	Alice	↑Yes ((looking at Norma))	Pulling for
9	Mia	It actually is ((looking at Norma))	a response
10	Alice	[↑Yes]((looking at Norma))	or an offer
11	Norma	[∘↑Mm∘] ((small nod, looking at Alice))	
12	Alice	=↑Yes ((looking at Norma))	
13		(1.5)	
→ 14	Alice	**((leaning forward toward Norma)) Then I need to get**	Pushing for
15		**invited ((smiling)) [hhHIHHEHE]**	action
16	Mia	[And I actually] should	
17	Norma	((smiles at Alice))	
→ 18	Mia	**And I actually should invite <u>you</u> to a meeting, Norma**	Broadened
19	Norma	Mm.	push for
20	Mia	We don't have that in the calendar, do we?	action
21	Norma	No ((shakes head slightly))	
→ 22	Mia	**That um (.) You're just getting an invitahhtion hhheh**	Committing
→ 23	Norma	**Yes=↑thanks (.) and then you get one of me ↑Alice**	Committing
24		**((smiling))**	
25	Alice	HehehHH yes thanks ((coughing))	

Leading up to a direct push for action in lines 14-15, there is a series of turns. Initially, Alice draws on something Mia said earlier in the interaction to make the topic of the 1:1 conversation relevant (l. 4). Alice then asks whether it is Norma with whom she has the 1:1 with, extending her question with the account "because we haven't", hearable as they have not done or planned it yet. Notably, Alice directs this question to Mia rather than Norma, and one obvious reason could be that the constellation is new, and Alice is orienting to Mia as the formal authority in the matter. As Mia nods affirmatively, Alice agrees and turns to look at Norma (l. 8). Mia further confirms, saying, "It actually is" while also looking at Norma (l. 9), thereby orienting toward her as a possible next speaker. In these few lines, Mia and Alice collaboratively invite Norma to respond.

What follows is a minimal, confirming response from Norma (l. 11), a third agreeing "yes" from Alice, and then silence (ll. 12–13). While no call for action has been clearly articulated yet, in the context of the account made by Alice in line 6 ("because we haven't"), these pending moves from Alice and Mia can reasonably be heard as softly *pulling* for Norma to do something more than she has done, such as making an offer to invite Alice for a 1:1 conversation. As mentioned earlier, requests are generally burdensome social actions and offers are preferred (Clayman and Heritage, 2014; Schegloff, 2007). However, as we witness here, attempts to elicit an offer are not always successful. In the absence of a response from Norma, Alice makes a straightforward request, *pushing* for action: "Then I need to get invited" (ll. 14–15). Although she does not use the direct pronoun "you", Alice is being rather direct (gazing and leaning toward Norma) and showing high entitlement to make this request. Immediately after delivering the push, Alice smiles and laughs, which can be heard as an attempt to affiliate and mitigate the potential threat to Norma's autonomy

(Holmes and Marra, 2006), which is answered with a smile from Norma (l. 17). In these lines, then, Alice makes a *strong* push for action and *softens* it with smiles and laughter.

Meanwhile, Mia takes the floor, initiating an acknowledgment that she has not invited Norma to their 1:1 conversation either, claiming that she should (l. 18). She goes on to check with Norma that they have not scheduled it yet (l. 20), orienting to her as knowledgeable on the matter and inviting an affirmative response, which contributes to making this future action relevant (l. 21). In this sense, Mia invites Norma to co-construct the push for action Mia is making toward her. Mia then delivers a verbal promise, visibly committing to the future action of sending Norma a calendar invitation (l. 22). She smiles and laughs while doing this, further working to affiliate. In these lines, Mia constructs the situation as one where not only Norma, but also Mia, is called to act in relation to their unplanned conversations. This broadening of the call to action can be seen as *softening* the push toward Norma, making it less direct by including herself. At the same time, these moves set up an expectation that Norma will make a similar promise, as evidenced by the response. Norma, who has been relatively passive up to now, responds with appreciation and explicitly commits to sending Alice an invitation as well (l. 23), to which Alice responds with gratitude and laughter (l. 25). At this point, they treat the topic as sufficiently settled and move on in the meeting.

In sum, this excerpt of just 30 seconds of interaction illustrates a series of situated moves that contribute to making the call to action successful. First, we see a question from Alice about the current status of the topic at hand, which serves both to gather information and to make the subsequent call to action toward Norma relevant, drawing on Mia as an authority in the matter. Using the resources of gazing and silence, Alice and Mia collaboratively pull for Norma to step in, while not making a clear call for action. Next, Alice delivers a direct push, with the resources of gazing and leaning working to *strengthen* the push, while smiling and laughing work to *soften* it. Finally, Mia initiates an action call directed at herself, equivalent to the action requested of Norma, thereby softening the directness of the call by broadening it. At the same time, her committing works as a resource to elicit a similar response from Norma.

Episode 2: Balancing work in the face of resistance and compliance

In the following longer meeting episode (divided into smaller extracts), we see another form of pulling, here as a clearly articulated call to action along with a range of different moves and resources utilized by the participants to strengthen and soften action calls. Most centrally, this episode shows how the balancing act of influencing others to take future actions can extend over long periods of interaction as participants treat both rejection and complying responses as insufficient in the leadership work being done. The topic on the agenda in this episode is the planning of subjects and classes for the next school year, led by department head Alice. Just prior to the extract below, Alice has been telling her colleagues about an upcoming planning meeting she has with the teachers (one of whom, Allan, is mentioned) based on the subjects the students choose. In the first lines, Alice makes an open statement that she needs help in connection with the meeting. As it is not specified who she envisions delivering the help nor what actions could

be involved in the help being called for, this call to action remains somewhat open-ended. In this way, Alice is *pulling* for any of her colleagues to offer assistance:

		Extract 2		Analytical comment
→	1	Alice	**But but I just need some help from you=I have asked**	Pulling
	2		**Allan to convene a meeting and there I need some of**	for action
	3		**you or one of you to::**	
	4		(2.0)	
	5	Alice	Yes (0.5) help into this	
	6	Robin	Yes	
	7	Alice	=I don't know how you choose it and what are the	
	8		options and	
	9		(2.5)	

Apart from Robin's acknowledgment of the call being made (l. 6), there is no immediate response or offers, and the relatively long silence in line 9 can reasonably be heard as a tacit rejection or, at best, hesitation. Alice briefly shifts to talk about the troubles involved and their temporary lack of a coordinator to handle such tasks, accounting for why help is needed (a few lines omitted). As Alice finishes speaking and another long silence occurs (l. 26 below), Robin repeats the pull for action in a new construction. This time the call is more specified, focusing on who will be attending the meeting, though it still lacks a clear recipient (l. 28):

		Extract 3		Analytical comment
	23	Alice	↑Well::: I mean .hh it's very much like that, you	
	24		know.	
	25	Alice	Mm.	
	26		(2.2)	
	27	Alice	>Well<	
→	28	Robin	**But who's going to go [along to that?]**	Pulling
				for action
	29	Alice	[It was just an] ( )	
	30	Robin	Yes	
	31	Alice	I don't know.	
	32		(2.5)	
	33	Norma	But is it (.)	
	34	Alice	=Who knows anything about that? Heheh	Pulling
				for action

By reorienting to the call to action being made by Alice, Robin takes co-responsibility for making the influence attempt successful, but without offering to step in herself. Thus, Alice and Robin are now collaboratively pulling for someone to offer to help. Alice initially responds to Robin's pull by repeating her inability to decide who it should be (as seen in ll. 7–8 earlier). In line 34, she turns the question of who should do it into one of "who knows anything about that". That is, she uses epistemic status (Heritage, 2013; Heritage and Raymond, 2005) as a resource in her effort to elicit a response.

What happens next is a brief exchange between Norma and Alice about the purpose of the upcoming meeting (l. 35), after which Norma suggests that a third party not present, namely the new head of education, should step in (l. 37–38). In doing so, she pushes the responsibility for

action onto the person who will take over the position she is currently holding. However, a contingency arises as Alice states that the subjects must be chosen before the new head of education arrives (ll. 39–40). This is followed by silence and tense laughter (ll. 41–46), where Alice and Robin visibly orient to Norma as the one who should respond. Then, Mia makes a direct *push* for action toward Norma:

		Extract 4	Analytical comment
35	Norma	Is it to look ahead toward spring or what is it?	
36	Alice	It is to find out what they can choose next year.	
→ 37	Norma	**((nodding)) Then I think it will be the new head of**	Third party
38		**education who has it in their portfolio.**	action call
39	Alice	=Mn. The problem is just that they must be decided	
40		before the new head of education starts	
41		(1.7) ((Norma and Alice looks at each other, Mia looks	
42		at both))	
43	Alice	Hehehh	
44	Mia	°Hehh° ((smiles slightly)	
45	Norma	Mmmm ((smiles slightly))	
46	Alice	(2.5) ((Alice and Robin looks at Norma)	
→ 47	Mia	**Can't you go along, Norma?** ((looking from computer up	Pushing for
48		at Norma))	action
49		(1.5)	
50	Mia	As head of education for uh:	
→ 51	Norma	**Ye:::s I can, but there's no reason why I start get-**	Hesitation,
52		**ting into everything [to be part of a single meeting]**	rejection
53	Mia	[No, then you might hand it over]	
54		I mean (.) yes (.) If it is prior to (.) ((shrugs))	
55		(2.8)	
56	Mia	When do you say it is? ((looking at Alice))	

The negatively formulated question, "Can't you" in Mia's push (l. 47), can reasonably be heard as an orientation toward possible contingencies regarding Norma's capacity to take action, which may explain the lack of offers. After another silence, Mia adds "As head of education" (l. 50) as an account for why it should be Norma. By doing so, she is drawing on a resource that Norma herself has made available to *strengthen* the push for action—namely, her position as head of education. This resource would not have been as strong had it not been presented by Norma herself during the interaction.

Norma responds with a prolonged "yes," showing hesitation and signaling that a dispreferred response is coming up, preceded by a "but". She continues by saying that she sees "no reason why" she should "start getting into everything" (ll. 51–52), thus orienting to the task being more complex than just attending the meeting. She frames efficiency and the time limits of her constituted role as contingencies and reasons for rejecting the request. As Mia replies in overlap, suggesting that she might "hand it over" (l. 53), she *hold the push* by addressing these contingencies. Mia then reorients to the question of timing (l. 54) while shrugging, which can reasonably be seen to *soften* the push. Still, the preferred next response would be an account for why Norma cannot or will not do it, if still not accepting. Instead, we get another long silence (l. 55), and Mia returns to ask Alice when the meeting will be. As it has not yet been scheduled, the discussion continues.

After eight minutes of further discussion without resolution, including talk about the involved teachers and what structure they could have for such planning in the future, Alice appears to start rounding off the topic with a slightly tense laugh (1l. 501–502). In response to Robin's contribution that she can return when she knows the time of the meeting (l. 504), Alice emphasizes that "whatever the time," she needs to be able to bring someone with her (ll. 506–507), thus *holding the pull* for action from her colleagues. Agreement and silence make a transition relevant, but Alice is not quite ready to close the topic. She them makes a more direct *push* for action, first toward Norma in a soft construction, stating that she does not know if it should be her (ll. 513–514), and next toward the whole group (using the plural pronoun "we" while looking around), stating what she thinks they "need to have a talk about," thus specifying some of the actions involved in the call to action (ll. 514–517):

		Extract 5		Analytical comment
	501	Alice	I'll grab (you) (1.5) ((slams hand on table)) hehe	
	502		when I know something more about (.)	
	503	Mia	Yes but we must ha::ve	
	504	Robin	When you know the time, right?	
	505	Mia	Yes	
→	506	Alice	**Yes, but in any case, whatever the time, I need to**	Pulling for
	507		**bring someone with me**	action
	508	Robin	=Yes	
	509	Mia	Yes ((scratches head)) do that.	
	510	Norma	Mm (.) .hhyes	
	511		(2.5)	
	512	Mia	Is that a good enough answer?	
→	513	Alice	Yes, but I think maybe (.) **I don't know if it's you,**	Pushing for
	514		**((hand gesture and glance towards Norma)) but I think**	action,
	515		**that we need to have a talk about how we approach**	specifying
	516		**holding the meeting and ((looks around))(.)** who should	
	517		bring what↑ (.) so we can ↑make some decisions? ( )	
	518	Norma	But but will that meeting (.) u::m it depends on when	
	519		the meeting is? ((smiles, shakes head slightly))	
	520	Alice	Well, either way, something has to be prepared	
	521	Norma	°Yes° ((small nod)) but it depends on whether it's me	
	522		or someone else who is going to it (.)[so does it lie]	
	523	Alice	[That's what]	
	524		I'm asking about ((looking around and back at Norma))	
	525	Norma	=uhm before the first of October?	
	526	Alice	Yes ↑it will ((nods))	
→	527	Norma	**(.) Because the: then it's me u::m (.) who goes along.**	Acceptance,
	528		(3.5)	complying
	529	Alice	Yes, but not only with, also helping to find out what	
	530		it is we are going to do (.) ( )	
	531	Norma	Mm ((nods))	
	532	Mia	**We could also spend some time in a management meeting**	
→	533		**where we sit down and do it together**	Broadening
	534	Alice	Yes, I just don't know where to find the information,	
	535		so what can they choose, what should they choose?	
			((lines omitted where Alice and Mia talk about inviting Ann, who knows about that, to a meeting))	

	556	Alice	↑Yes. I'll try to gather information from Ann.	Committing
	557	Mia	=Do you collect them, or do we call her for a meeting?	
	558	Alice	U::hm (1.5) I'll try to ask her first.	
	559	Mia	Okay, so you talk to her first	
	560	Alice	=and then I'll see if she should come to a meeting	
	561	Mia	Yes and then you call a meeting where we are here?	
→	562	Alice	Yes ((nods)) ↑yes	
	563	Norma	**Otherwise ((looks at Alice)) we can take the meeting**	Offer
→	564		**with her (0.5) so we do it the two of us.**	
	565	Alice	**Yes (0.5) I think that might be best.**	Acceptance
	566	Norma	Mm. ((nods))	
	567		(2.5)((Mia and Robin looking at Norma and Alice))	
	568	Alice	Yes	
	569	Norma	Yes	
	570	Mia	Good	

We here arrive at a form of acceptance from Norma. After an exchange between her and Alice regarding the timing of the meeting, which, according to Alice is before the end of Norma's term as head of education (first of October, ll. 518–526), Norma hesitantly makes the passive inference, "then it's me u::m (.) who goes along" (l. 527). This is reasonably heard as *complying* rather than actively and willingly committing to do it, and importantly, the others do not treat this acceptance as sufficient. After a long silence, Alice elaborates that there is more to the task than just attending the meeting, and Mia suggests making it a shared task at a later management meeting (ll. 528–533). Mia thus contributes to *softening* the call to action by broadening it to the whole group. This is followed by an exchange between Mia and Alice (lines omitted), supplemented by Norma and Robin, about inviting a teacher, Ann, to the subsequent management meeting, as she is knowledgeable about the legislative framework for how students should choose subjects. Here, Alice visibly *commits* to reaching out to Ann, outlining in detail what she will do in collaboration with Mia (ll. 556–562). Interestingly, Norma then makes an active offer to help, suggesting that they meet with Ann together, "so we do it the two of us" (ll. 563–564), which Alice immediately welcomes (l. 565). At this point, the participants treat the topic as sufficiently settled to move on in the meeting and the leadership work of mobilizing future action on the issue at hand is complete for now.

In summary, this episode demonstrates how the leadership work of influencing actors to commit to future action can extend over long periods of interaction, where a variety of pulls, pushes and resources (e.g., formal position, epistemic status, laughter, shrugs, gaze) are applied in the effort to *balance* the strength of influence attempts to get a committed response. Other resources are utilized to *resist* influence attempts (e.g., silence, time/efficiency contingencies). Similar to the first episode, where the topic was made relevant by referencing something said earlier in the interaction, this episode shows how moves and resources become relevant from inside the interaction. For example, Mia's push for action toward Norma, strengthened by the resource of formal position, is made relevant by Norma herself. We also see actors contributing to calls to action initiated by others, collaborating to accomplish influence—for instance, Robin and Alice collaboratively pulling for action and Mia and Alice working together to develop a solution that involves future actions by Alice and the entire leadership team. There appears to be a tendency to move from open-ended pulling to increasingly direct pushing in the absence of responses or offers,

strengthening the call to action. However, we also see instances of *softening* a push, using nonverbal devices such as shrugging and by verbally broadening the call to action include the whole group. Finally, this second episode highlights how a hesitant, complying response can be treated as insufficient, with participants seeking alternative solutions. That Norma makes a self-initiated offer in the end may point to several things. One is that resisting allows actors time to consider a call to action, explore their options, and—at least in this case—ultimately, make an active offer and commit to future actions on their own initiative.

Discussion

This study brings attention to the in situ leadership work of influencing actors to commit to future actions on organizational issues and empirically demonstrates that this work involves continuously adjusting and balancing influence attempts based on uptake and response. The interactional environment provide a range of opportunities and resources for actors to collaboratively accomplish or resist influence, and leadership actors work to alternately *strengthen* and *soften* calls to action to elicit a committed response, distinct from mere compliance and rejection. Two overarching practices are central to this work: *pushing* as direct ways of calling for one or more actors to take some future action and *pulling* as indirect, open-ended ways of calling for someone or anyone to offer to take on often less specified future actions. These findings offer several contributions to the existing literature on leadership as a process of influence and organizing (Clifton, 2009; Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013) and as work (Crevani, 2018; Meschitti, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018).

First, the close analysis of calls to action episodes shows that influencing others to take actions they might not otherwise have taken unfolds over the course of the interaction rather than being achieved through a single act. While some process-oriented leadership studies have treated interpersonal influence as episodic, focusing on specific communicative acts and turning points as relatively bounded moments of change (Lortie et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2018), an EMCA-based analysis reveals the in situ orientations of leadership actors and the *extensive, ongoing work* involved in accomplishing influence. This analysis demonstrates that various moves and resources are made relevant within the interaction itself, highlighting the local and situated nature of interpersonal influence in practice. These findings provide empirical substance to the critique of abstracting single social acts, such as behavioral tactics and speech acts, from the actual processes and messy details through which influence is realized in situ (Knights and Willmott, 1992; Larsson and Alvehus, 2023; Nicolini, 2012). In other words, they underscore the importance of close interactional analysis in leadership studies to capture the complexity and work involved in mobilizing future actions.

Second, this study demonstrates that the leadership work of mobilizing committed future action largely consists of *adjusting and balancing* influence attempts according to the responses and course of interaction. While previous interactional research has identified a range of strategies and resources utilized by leadership actors to exert influence (Clifton, 2009; Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Meschitti, 2019; Van De Mieroop,

2020; Watson and Drew, 2017), this analysis shows how leadership actors work across the repertoire of available moves and different resources to balance the strength of calls to action in their efforts to elicit a committed response. This improvisational, balancing work of leadership may involve a combination of moves and resources working to strengthen or soften influence attempts. Furthermore, the strengthening and softening extends beyond the choice of linguistic format and the necessity built into it, which has been highlighted in EMCA literature (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008) to encompass various nonverbal action (e.g., gazing and leaning to strengthen; shrugging, smiling, and affiliative laughter to soften), discursive and social resources (e.g., epistemic status and formal position to strengthen), and broadening of calls to action (softening by making them less direct, although committing oneself may put pressure on others to do the same). This suggests that the strength of calls to action can be varied both in terms of *necessity* built into formulations and body language and in terms of *directness*, with the practices of pushing and pulling constituting more and less direct ways of calling for action. These aspects or dimensions interact in complex ways (e.g., Alice making a strong and repeated need statement during the second episode, emphasizing necessity, but without directing it at anyone in particular), and with multiple actors interfering and contributing to the ongoing work by softening, strengthening, resisting and (re)constructing calls to action.

Third, the study extends previous work on the situated constructions of commitment to future states of affairs in decision-making (Clifton, 2009; Huisman, 2001) by specifying *committing* as a visible social action, where actors actively engage in or offer to take future action (Nielsen and Larsson, in revision), rather than as a psychological state of dedication (Klein et al., 2012) or general readiness to act for the benefit of an organization (Drath et al., 2008: 647). This analysis demonstrates that leadership actors orient to and make an effort to elicit an active, committed response from other actors in calls to action, treating both rejection and hesitant, reluctant acceptance (i.e., the act of complying) as undesirable and, to some extent, insufficient. This provides empirical detail to the understanding of leadership as distinct from commandment and coercion (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Grint, 2005; Joullié et al., 2021) while also raising questions about how far efforts to elicit a committed response go in different contexts and when a complying response is treated as sufficient if committing cannot be attained.

The second episode illustrates the very practical challenge of getting someone to do something willingly, as no one committed in a large part of the exchange. The practice of pulling for self-initiated offers from others can be seen as a way of managing this challenge and the delicacy involved in the action-mobilizing work of leadership. However, pulling also opens the possibility of minimal or no response, as seen in the second episode. The practice of pushing, on the other hand, involves taking a deontic stance—claiming the right to propose or decide what others should do (Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015). By direct pushing Norma, Mia will get an answer, but she also risks getting a rejection or a flat, compliant yes. In sum, what leadership actors are dealing with in these everyday interactions is the delicate balancing act of influencing other's future actions—being transparent enough to elicit a response but pragmatic and open enough to maintain agency with the other person.

A practical implication of this study is that generalized techniques and tactics to influence others are not in themselves sufficient for leadership actors to succeed in mobilizing others to commit to future action. Instead, this leadership work is highly situated and improvisational, as a critical aspect of interpersonal influence consists of continuously adapting and balancing influence attempts according to the actions of others in the evolving interaction. Consequently, leadership development should move beyond a functionalist focus on idealized skills and techniques (Carroll, 2019) to address the mutuality, complexity and continuous adaptations inherent in situated influence processes.

Conclusion

This paper presented a study of the in situ leadership work of influencing organizational actors to commit to take future action on organizational issues in managerial meetings. While previous process-oriented research has emphasized specific communicative acts and turning points (Lortie et al., 2023a; Simpson et al., 2018) and identified a wide range of strategies and resources utilized to accomplish influence in work interactions (Clifton, 2009; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Meschitti, 2019; Van De Mieroop, 2020), this study highlights that this leadership work centrally consists of balancing the strength of influence attempts through the practices of pushing and pulling. Influencing others to commit to future action is a complex and delicate matter, requiring continuous improvisation and adaptation from leadership actors in their efforts to elicit a committed response. It is this balancing work, rather than distinct actions or techniques, that in practice makes influence successful.

These findings extend our understanding of leadership as a process of influence and organizing (Clifton, 2009; Hosking, 1988; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013) and as work (Crevani, 2018; Meschitti, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018) and raise several questions for future research. One central question is how the balancing work of mobilizing future actions varies across different interaction environments and contexts, including the extent to which efforts to elicit a committed response go and the patterns that emerge regarding when and how complying is treated as sufficient. Future research is also needed to further explore the dimensions of necessity and directness in calls to action as well as their dynamic interaction. Finally, an interesting avenue for future research could involve exploring how balancing work unfolds over time and across multiple interactions.

7. Article 3: Acting in concert: Four practices of accountability work in plural leadership

Abstract

How is accountability shared between multiple leadership actors and what challenges are involved? While leadership research has long moved beyond focusing on individuals to study leadership as a relational and distributed process, core phenomena such as accountability have not received sustained attention. In this study we take a leadership-as-practice approach and draw on Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault's theorisations of power to explore and re-theorise accountability as the combined practice of multiple leadership actors in the context of power asymmetries. Drawing on data collected during a 14-month ethnographic project at a vocational school in Denmark we apply conversation analysis to unpack the fine-grained details of accountability work in video recorded management meeting interactions and supplement our analysis with participant narratives from interviews. Our analyses reveal four central practices of accountability work – qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising – and demonstrate the conflicts and struggles involved for leadership actors to move from past to future and from individual to shared accountabilities to act in concert amidst hierarchy. These findings extend and bring significant detail to existing literature on plural leadership and dynamics of power, providing a practice-based perspective on accountability in the plural.

Introduction

The growing interest in plural leadership over the past decade is illustrated by the proliferation of descriptors available to describe such leadership – collective, shared, distributed, relational – alongside bodies of theory – discursive, process, practice, complexity – that seek to offer frameworks, models and typologies of leadership attributed beyond a single individual (Bolden, 2011; Denis et al., 2012, 2023; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). At the same time, central leadership phenomena such as accountability and authority persist in being treated as 'thing-like' that can be moved around and possessed by the individual, constraining the redefinition and retheorisation of leadership being pursued across these approaches. There is an invitation here to move beyond individualistic and functionalistic conceptualisations of such core concepts to be able to engage with how leadership moves across, in-between and through multiple leadership actors located at different levels of organisational structure and hierarchy.

Accountability is perhaps the concept and phenomenon associated with leadership that struggles most to escape the individualistic grasp. Much leadership research appears to assume that accountability is an individual attribute that requires 'someone to be answerable to someone else' (Melo et al., 2020: 2). No better in popular literature, where it is used to make heroic claims about the achievements and failures of individual leaders and how they should be held accountable (Connors et al., 1998; Dive, 2008). Such individualistic treatments in mainstream leadership

literature and research fail to offer insights into contexts where multiple leadership actors share overlapping accountabilities, where accountability is distributed across organisational roles and levels and in the complexities of partnership, power-sharing and boundary crossing contexts with plural and competing accountability demands. In other words, a plural approach to leadership needs to move beyond accountability as individually owned and enacted to explore and re-theorise it in terms of the combined practice of multiple leadership actors in the context of power asymmetries, which is the purpose of this inquiry.

To do so, we take a leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) approach. While it is only one of the theoretical approaches that holds an understanding of leadership as a relational accomplishment of multiple actors, L-A-P's particular relevance lies in its interest in identifying the situated practices through which leadership and related phenomena are accomplished as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared understandings' (Schatzki et al., 2001: 3). L-A-P focuses on moments and turning points in which change occurs and action shifts in trajectories of organising that are indicative of leadership and identifies the practices that enable it (Raelin, 2023). With this approach, accountability is located in the 'ongoing dialogical accomplishment of meaning' (Simpson, 2016: 168) between multiple leadership actors. This study seeks to theorise accountability beyond an individual attribute and identify the interactional practices that constitute it.

Any exploration of accountability must be attuned to power given the imperative of being held to 'account' that is at the heart of the construct itself. In this inquiry we draw on both Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault's theorisations of power – a combination that, while unusual in leadership studies, has become increasingly common in what has been labelled an Arendt 'renaissance' over the last decades (Leonard, 2023: 393). An empirical study in dialogue with Foucault and Arendt's theories of power seems well equipped to respond to the challenge that 'one of the current fault lines in the quest to illuminate the nature of leadership lies in the relationship between hierarchical leadership and more plural forms' (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018: 694). A few recent studies have demonstrated that hierarchical–positional power in practice coexists with and even contributes to the emergence of collaborative, collective or distributed power dynamics (Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Lortie et al., 2023; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020). Thus, in this study of plural accountability, we pay attention to power dynamics and in particular 'what the formal leader does during moments of shared leadership', which still escapes research scrutiny (Lortie et al., 2023: 17). We set out to answer the following research question: What central practices are involved in the accountability work of plural leadership actors and how is hierarchical power navigated in these practices?

To unpack central practices of what we term *accountability work*, referring to the situated efforts through which leadership actors construct and negotiate accountabilities of organisational issues beyond the individual, we draw on substantial empirical material collected during a 14-month ethnographic project at a vocational school. Our analysis focuses on excerpts from a management meeting episode that was specifically oriented towards challenging and resetting the accountability of one of the school's programs. We take a conversation analysis (CA) informed

approach to analyse the fine-grained details of accountability work in these meeting interactions, complemented by participant accounts from interviews. Our primary aim is to enhance our knowledge of how leadership actors collaboratively navigate accountabilities, providing leadership research with a practice-based perspective on plural accountability and acknowledging the complexities of a construct that is so indelibly embedded in power.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First we review practice-oriented literature on leadership in the plural and present Arendt's (1970) concept of 'acting in concert' in combination with Foucault's (1982) theory of power. Next we review literature on accountability and central tensions inherent in the concept. We then provide an overview of the empirical setting and introduce our CA-informed approach before presenting our analysis and four central practices of accountability work: qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising. Finally, we discuss our findings in relation to the presented theory and offer perspectives on the complexity of how accountability is collaboratively and communicatively constituted.

Leadership and power in the plural

A unifying factor in the various plural notions of leadership (e.g. shared, distributed, collective, collaborative and relational) is that they all emphasise the combined dynamics and influence of multiple leadership actors (Denis et al., 2012; Yammarino et al., 2012). In other words, they shift the unit of analysis from the formal leader to a group of actors enacting leadership. As Fletcher (2004: 650) stated, plural conceptions of leadership:

> reenvisions the 'who' and 'where' of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down and across the hierarchy. It re-envisions the 'what' of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions, and it articulates the 'how' of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning.

In relation to these concerns our gaze is directed towards the interactional dynamics, negotiations and practices that constitute the 'how' of accountability in situated talk and action. The field of L-A-P encompasses interactionally attuned research that aims to identify the very practices that constitute the 'how' of plural leadership and to develop existing and new leadership constructs accordingly. For instance in a study of middle managers engaged in an internal leadership development program studying, Carroll and Simpson (2012) refined the construct of framing by demonstrating the practices of kindling (creating new frames), stretching (developing frames) and spanning (connecting frames) that enable managers to accomplish collective action. In another study, Ramsey (2016) developed the construct of 'conversational travel' to capture how conversational interactants work through turning points, develop multiple trajectories from these and 'bundle' responses (offers, blocks, acceptances) to advance leadership purposes within conversation. Such practice approaches focus on what leadership actors *do* communicatively and collectively to accomplish leadership.

However, several authors have contended that the literature on plural leadership practices has failed to adequately account for the dynamics of power and that in-depth analyses are needed (Bolden, 2011; Denis et al., 2012; Fairhurst et al., 2020; Gordon, 2010; Gronn, 2009; Hatcher, 2005; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020). Accordingly, Denis et al. (2012: 269) have called for research that makes conflict and clashes visible, arguing that plural leadership brings its own kind of romanticisation, tending towards a 'naïve democratic ideal in which leadership is an organizational quality shared by all' (274). Similarly, Collinson (2018) and Collinson et al. (2018) have criticised the plural leadership literature (and L-A-P specifically) for neglecting asymmetry and conflict through the language of collectivism and process, with the effect that 'fundamental issues of hierarchy, power and control tend to be at minimum downplayed and, in some cases, even disappear from view altogether' (Collinson, 2018: 368). Denis et al. (2012: 271) have specifically called for research that examines how the emergence of plural leadership interacts with formalization of leadership roles and ongoing structuration of power relations.

Some recent practice-oriented studies have answered this call. In an ethnographic study of a newly established leader team Holm and Fairhurst (2018: 717) found that shared and hierarchical leadership coexist in 'fluid, contingent, and deeply intertwined dynamics'. The authors used the lens of authoring to show how 'the perceived legitimate right to influence and decide on organizational matters' (Holm and Fairhurst, 2018:696) is negotiated through claiming, granting and resisting authoring acts in meeting interactions, with hierarchical position being one resource of authoring amongst others, e.g. expertise. Studying everyday interactions in interprofessional health care teams, Fox and Comeau-Vallée (2020) found that in this context, shared leadership tends to occur before decision-making and requires concrete effort from the interactants, in which those 'in superior positions of influence must mindfully relax the hierarchy whereas those in inferior positions create moments of sharing leadership through resistance and struggle' (587). In a study of work processes in haute cuisine kitchens, Lortie et al. (2023: 14) found that 'the hierarchical way of working dissolves to leave room for collaborative leadership', particularly when unstable, uncertain and intense challenges require leadership input from multiple sources. In contrast to images of smooth coexistence, Van De Mieroop et al. (2020: 510) demonstrated that 'formal leadership based on positional authority can be in conflict with informal leadership that draws on locally emergent authority' in work meetings. This highlights the issue with the prevalent 'positivity bias' that tends to downplay conflict in plural leadership (Denis et al., 2012; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018: 694).

While the above contributions have primarily focused on negotiations of authority, we propose accountability as a central but overlooked phenomenon at the core of the complex interplay between the formal and informal, positional and emergent and individual and collective in plural leadership. We first turn to Arendt's work for a useful understanding of power in relation to accountability work of plural leadership actors. In Arendt's (1958, 1970) seminal theorisation, plurality is a fundamental condition of human life and power is an inherent potential for people to 'act in concert':

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with […] disappears, 'his power' also vanishes (1970: 44).

According to Arendt then power is a potentiality of the group and thus inherently collective. Acting in concert is not without struggle, though, as every action triggers processes that are beyond the actors' control. Furthermore, it is a 'living power' in the sense that it arises among people acting together that vanishes as soon as they disperse (Volk, 2016: 552). Arendt acknowledged that macro or structural power, which she refers to as 'collective power that is generated in public spheres' (Allen, 2002: 144), can be understood as supplying actors with resources from which we can draw in 'struggles to resist the strategic, dangerous power relations that, in part, have made us who we are' (Allen, 2002: 145). In Arendt's view all forms of (formal and informal) power are manifestations of living power and can be withdrawn when people stop giving their support. This distinguishes power from domination, coercion and violence, which can co-exist with, but also work against, living power (Arendt, 1970; Canovan, 1992). While acknowledging that Arendt's theorisation of power has been characterised as normative, positive and emancipatory (Volk, 2016), her work has been subject to a recent revival reconsidering the more critical aspects of it (Allen, 2002; Firth and Carroll, 2016; Volk, 2016; Leonard, 2023). Consequently, Volk (2016) argued that Arendt's theorisation allows for criticising 'identifiable constellations of power and processes of power formation' (550) as it relies on the 'ability to engage, both expressively and responsively, in an honest discourse and a sharp, debate between conflicting – and possibly even incompatible – views' (555).

We combine Arendt's theorisation with that of Foucault given the inevitable centrality of the latter's work in identifying the 'strategic, dangerous power relations that, in part, have made us who we are' (Allen, 2002: 145) and more sustained and relentless criticality of them. Considering the sheer breadth of Foucault's oeuvre – much of which is beyond the scope of this inquiry – we particularly draw from his theorisation into pastoral power (Foucault, 1982). Foucault developed this construct alongside his theory of governmentality as part of what is considered to be his later work. Unlike Arendt Foucault never directly evoked leaders or leadership; however, pastoral power focuses on how 'subjects in their power relationships with one another can appropriate, adapt and alter the modes of rule to which they are subject' (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1305). As with this study's inquiry, Foucault's focus is on power amidst 'the coexistence of multiple truth claims' and 'the work involved in reconciling these discourses, or alternatively in selecting one over another, at the level of the community of interdependent actors' (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1305). Foucault's pastoral power offers an alternative conception but is not unrelated to Arendt's plural power. As Leonard (2023: 394) noted, both theories of power emphasise its relational, performative and generative character, but differ in that Foucault considers power to be ubiquitous, pervasive and linked to force, while Arendt sees it as arising from collective political action and distinct from violence. Allen (2002) highlighted two key similarities that form the basis

of our inquiry: both theories agree that 'power emerges out of interactions among agents and that it exists only in its exercise' and that 'power plays a crucial role in the formation of individual subjects/agents' (142). The main difference that fosters a need for a dialogue between the two approaches lies in the fact that Foucault considers power to be strategic and is sceptical that 'it is possible to break free of the forces that simultaneously constrain and enable us', while Arendt views power as communicative and is hopeful that collective power, 'acting in concert', can offer a resource to resist such forces (Allen, 2002: 142). We propose that strategic and communicative power intersect in accountability work.

Theorising accountability

Accountability is a complex concept that is not easily defined. Indeed, it has been described as 'elusive' (Sinclair, 1995), 'ever-expanding' (Mulgan, 2000) and 'aporetic' (McKernan, 2012). In its basic form, accountability refers to the giving and demanding of reasons for conduct (Garfinkel, 1967; Silverman, 1975). The word 'account' has roots in the Old French noun 'acont', meaning counting or reckoning of money to be paid, and the Old French verb 'aconter', meaning to count, to render account or to tell a story (Kamuf, 2007; McKernan and McPhail, 2012). Furthermore, as accountability involves the sense that someone is answerable to others and liable to be called to account, it embodies a complex system of rights and obligations (Roberts and Scapens, 1985). Thus, we have at least three central meanings of accountability: to be able and obliged to count, to tell a story and to answer to others for one's actions.

Tensions exist across these different meanings in which 'counting' and keeping account may be considered accurate and objective practices in contrast to 'telling a story'. Therefore 'answering to others' can be understood either as presenting facts and evidence or as offering a first-person narrative for others to believe. Such tensions have also been found in coexisting but contrasting discourses of accountability in interviews with CEOs (Sinclair, 1995), one in which accountability is a technical property of a role, structure or system, and another in which accountability as an ambiguous, anecdotal phenomenon. In an influential paper within accounting literature, titled 'Accounterability', Kamuf (2007) called for a 'counter' practice to the dominating regimes of calculation, marginalising the narrative mode of accountability. Kamuf (2007) suggested that we think of accountability as a testimony to others, not as a proof, but as *promise*. Other accounting literature has argued that giving and receiving accounts is a fundamental activity through which selves and communities come to be (McKernan, 2012; Schweiker, 1993; Shearer, 2002). Therefore, accountability can be considered a testimonial and generative process through which we make ourselves and our behaviour intelligible as we tell stories about ourselves that relate to the stories (communities) that we are part of.

Accountability shares a discernible resemblance to other complex concepts, most notably ownership, responsibility and power, and we will here briefly clarify how we approach them in this paper. First, while the concept of ownership is often used to describe a subject's feeling of possessiveness towards a material or immaterial target (Baer and Brown, 2012; Guarana and Avolio, 2022; Pierce et al., 2001; Rasheed et al., 2023), accountability is understood as a social

obligation. The concepts are related in the sense that accountability may be seen as a display of 'responsiveness and ownership of outcomes' of actions and work done (Sinclair, 1995: 233). Second, although attempts have been made to distinguish between them (McKernan, 2012; Schlenker et al., 1994), accountability and responsibility are widely used interchangeably in reference to the state of being answerable to others in relation to social, moral or legal codes, providing a basis for judgment (Mero et al., 2014). An interesting paradox observed by McKernan (2012) is that both concepts imply following social or legal rules, while also being prepared not to follow them, as 'there can be no real personal responsibility or accountability in the absence of autonomy' (260). Finally, accountability is often linked to power in the sense of enforceability; that is, actors called to explain and justify their actions to others may face sanctions if their accounts are deemed unacceptable (Goetz and Jenkins, 2002). According to Newell and Bellour (2002), a central function of accountability is to ensure that people who exercise power on behalf of others are held accountable for their actions. Thus, power is associated with those who demand accountability (as a right or ability to hold others to account) and those who are obliged to provide it (Goetz and Jenkins, 2002; Newell and Bellour, 2002). Overall, accounting can be considered a politically driven process, and accountability gaps may emerge when rights to demand and obligations to provide account are not clearly established.

With all these tensions and applications at play, the exploration and construction of accountability beyond individual obligations is still missing. We come close in the conceptualisation of accountability as a social-generative process through which people tell stories about themselves that relate to the stories (communities) they are part of. Furthermore, we note Carroll's (2016) and Lloyd and Carroll's (2022) work on 'co-responsibility' at the intersection between leadership and partnership. This concept draws on moral philosophy (Apel, 1993; Issacs, 2011; Strydom, 1999) and shifts the emphasis from responsibility to responsibilit*ies* that are located within collective action, where 'responsibilities are distributed amongst people in connected endeavours' (Carroll, 2016: 41). Lloyd and Carroll (2022) extended this work by drawing on Young's social connection model in which 'responsibility is always a shared social practice' (159) and a form of collective scrutiny and structural justice that requires stakeholders to be active in the networks and structures they traverse to achieve more equitable and progressive outcomes. These contributions have provided insights into how responsibility can be redefined as the property of collectives, although neither of them theorised co-responsibility in the context of plural leadership nor offered empirical analysis of the interactional efforts and practices involved.

Analytical approach and empirical setting

To conduct a detailed analysis of how accountability is produced in situated interactions between shared leadership actors, we apply the principles of conversation analysis (CA).

CA-informed analysis of accountability work

CA originates from ethnomethodology and focuses on the tacit methods actors use to create social order through social interactions (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2008; Sacks et al., 1974).

Accountability is a core concept in ethnomethodology that was used by Garfinkel (1967) to refer to the dual nature of human actions being ordered and 'orderly' (1), meaning such actions are performed by actors in a way that is self-explanatory or 'account-able'. While accounting is thus an implicit and integral part of how actors do what they do in specific situations that are governed by moral order (e.g. walking down the street in a way that indicates you are going to work), it can also be made explicit and verbal, not the least of which is when there are signs that we do not understand what each other is doing (Buttny, 1993; Garfinkel, 1967; Scheuer, 2012). Applying the principles of CA, we draw on the understanding of accountability as an integral part of how actors make their actions mutually intelligible, while our particular analytical interest concerns the explicit work of leadership actors in constructing and navigating the past and future and individual and shared accountabilities in relation to an organisational issue at hand.

In CA, social interaction is considered to be sequentially organised, with each turn building on the previous one and projecting reasonable and preferred next turns (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). When analysing interactional display, we pay attention to both the content and design of each turn and to the interactional environment and subsequent turns to determine whether participants have achieved an intersubjective understanding or if misunderstandings have occurred, as indicated by attempts to repair and account (e.g. 'It was not to argue'). This method, known as the 'next turn proof procedure' (Sacks et al., 1974), highlights the strong emic focus of CA, emphasising participants' displayed understanding of what is going on amid practice (Llewellyn and Spence, 2009) rather than later reflections or the possible thoughts and emotions behind the display. Any analytic claim is thus built on the understandings and orientations that participants display turn-by-turn (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1997, 2007).

Data – recorded meeting interactions and interviews

We draw on ethnographic data collected by the first author over a 14-month period in 2021-23 at a large vocational school in Denmark, *Learn* (pseudonym). These data include field notes, observations and video recordings at recurrent project and management meetings and participant interviews in relation to those meetings and projects. Out of this collection, we zoom in on a video recorded episode at a management meeting where the accountability work involved in a leadership process concerning a student absenteeism project, *In Touch*, was particularly evident. In CA (Schegloff, 1987; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012) and leadership studies based on CA (Gadelshina, 2020b; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2015), it is common to conduct detailed examinations of single episodes within a larger data collection. A guiding principle is that even in the smallest sequence of interaction, one can identify phenomena that are systematically organised by the participants (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 88). Furthermore, single case analyses offer depth and fine-grained detail that can 'confirm, challenge or nuance theoretical assumptions in leadership research' and while not oriented towards generalisation such inquiries can cumulatively provide thick descriptions of phenomena such as plural leadership in practice (Van De Mieroop et al., 2020: 511).

Although CA studies generally focus on naturally occurring interaction and consequently favour audio and video recordings over other methods, sequential analyses of naturally occurring interaction have been combined with ethnographic methods in broader studies of organisational phenomena (Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010). These approaches are seen as 'not competing but complementary methodologies' (Samra-Fredericks, 2000): 251) that allow for a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied with a sensitivity to the larger context in which the analysed talk is embedded (ten Have, 2007). In this study we supplement our detailed analysis of meeting interactions with extracts from participant interviews, providing us with a different perspective on and version of accountability work. Indeed, we consider the interviews to be separate (research-initiated) interactions and independent contexts in which accountability work occurs between the researcher and participant (Potter and Hepburn, 2012; Silverman, 2017). All but one of the interview extracts included took place immediately after the meeting episode in focus and offer *retrospective accounts* of the accountability work that occurred at the meeting (accounts primarily presented by the participants themselves but prompted by the interview interaction). While post hoc accounts of experiences cannot be used to make direct claims about talk-in-interaction that are not based on situated displays (Greatbatch and Clark, 2018: 89), they can illuminate aspects of accountability work that may not be visible during the interaction such as what is at stake for the participants involved. Inspired by ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), we approach experiences as social constructions and ongoing accomplishments of social interaction (Emirbayer and Maynard, 2011). Consequently, and slightly different from traditional thematic coding, we analyse post hoc accounts in interviews as articulations and new versions of the experiences that were constructed through the meeting interaction, which both the researcher and participant have some memory of and epistemic access to. In summary, we are interested in the different perspectives that detailed interactional analysis and interview accounts together provide for understanding a case of accountability work in plural leadership.

Analysing plural leadership actors' accountability work

In the following, we present four extracts from an episode of a management team meeting at *Learn*. The recorded interactions were transcribed using a simplified Jefferson (2004) notation style and are provided in translated English versions (from Danish). Present at the meeting were department heads Mark, Ann, Sara and Jens, school director Helle, head of education Johan, and head of economy Erik (all pseudonyms). In the meeting episode, the project *In Touch* is on the agenda, put there by Mark, who, together with Sara and Jens, is involved in *In Touch* on a daily basis. Ann takes minutes of the meeting.

Interaction data are rich in detail, and we will focus our analysis on aspects that are most relevant to our focus on accountability work (i.e. the situated efforts of multiple actors to construct past and future and individual and shared accountabilities in relation to an organisational project, *In Touch*). We include a few noticeable non-verbal details in the transcription, e.g. gaze direction, and highlight key parts in bold. Five extracts from interviews with some of the meeting

participants and the coordinator of *In Touch*, Maiken (not present at the meeting), are presented along the way in less detailed transcriptions.

We enter the meeting after a break, leading to the agenda item of *In Touch*. Mark has prepared a PowerPoint presentation and '*In Touch* 2023 version' is visible on a shared screen. In Extract 1, Mark is visibly working to deliver a constructive problematisation of *In Touch.*

Extract 1. Opening accountability talk

1	Mark	Well, what I've put on it's about our In Touch arrangement (.) and
2		there is no doubt that our In Touch u:m model (.) which I understand
3		you Helle have brought from X school (.) and I have also talked to
4		↑Lis [who also has]
5	Helle	[Hehehehe]
6	Mark	Hehe a little share in it
7	Helle	=Many of us (.) have it as **our dear child**, I hear hehe
8	Mark	**It has done a lot of good, and that's not to deny In Touch** as (.) as
9		a concept or as a model ((looking at shared screen)) .hh but the way
10		I have experienced some things and also talked to some people
11		>including Maiken with whom we have also discussed these things< .hh
12		**we could perhaps u:m consider a '23 version of it.** (0.5) And then
13		you can say, it's still an In Touch model and it's still as we say
14		absence is something we address (.) and then I would say, well, then
15		maybe a few more words are added (.) it's also something we reflect
16		upon and it's also something we act on. **Of course you can say** that
17		((looks at Helle)) we have probably done that with the model we have
18		had now↑ but **there are just some disadvantages u::m as we see it (.)**
19		in another modern context which (.) ↑could be interesting to talk
20		about changing ((changes to slide with bullet points)). U:m there is
21		still a continued focus on following up on absenteeism and of course
22		also limiting absenteeism. After all, that was the original idea
23		behind In Touch. But it's also more of an exploratory approach to
24		the ↑causes of absence with a goal of helping students to better
25		participation opportunities ((read from slide)) if you want to use a
26		more modern term, how do we give these students better opportunities
27	Helle	It was the same before.
28	Mark	It was the same before.
29	Helle	Yes ((nods))
30	Mark	((Looks from the screen to Helle)) And that's probably how you'll
31		think about a lot of what I say (.) that it was the same before
32	Helle	Yes
33	Mark	=Then I can only say (.) now that I've been here 10 months, I see
34		some things, and of course this is also some of the things I'm also
35		expressing here (.) **it's not a criticism** of [(some model)]
36	Helle	[No, not at all] and I -
37	Mark	=that might be u:m 15 years old or 10 years old or something
38		(.)but but there might just be some
39	Helle	=Just tell it like it is ((quick hand movement)) because I know that
40		it never came into the house here from the start as (.)
41	Mark	Heh okay, so it's not someone, **it's not something**
42	Helle	No, not at all, I don't take it in
43	Mark	**=criticising your child (or what to say) hehe**

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44  Helle   No, not at all. Just ((moves hand forward)) hehe take it away hehe
45  Ann     Hehe
46  Mark    And what is also in it, is something more relationship-based and
47          action-oriented in relation to the student's completion ((looking at
48          the screen)). So, you could say (.) we have the lowest absenteeism
49          (.) but are we also the ones with the best completion rate?
50  Erik    Mm ((nods))
51  Jens    Mm
52  Mark    So then we can turn the focus a little bit in that direction.
```

The accountability work begins with Mark acknowledging Helle for bringing 'our *In Touch*' (l. 1) to the school and an employee, Lis, for having a 'little share in it' (l. 6). Therefore, while Mark initially orients to the project as shared (using the pronoun 'our'), he also displays an orientation to Helle and Lis as having a special ownership and to Helle as being accountable for initiating the project at the school. Helle's metaphor of 'our dear child' (l. 7) further frames a strong devotion and relationship to the project to be discussed.

Mark next initiates a concern or critique in relation to *In Touch*, which is presumably shared by other department heads (using the pronoun 'we' in ll. 12, 18), and he does so in a really sensitive way through significant preparatory hedging and assuring (e.g. 'It has done a lot of good, and that's not to deny *In Touch*', 'it's still as we say', 'there are just some disadvantages', ll. 8, 13, 18). Mark then directly addresses Helle as if to anticipate any objections ('Of course you can say', l. 16), positioning her as particularly accountable for *In Touch*, not only as it was initiated, but also as it is. Indeed, Mark frames his comments explicitly as 'not a criticism' (l. 35). Just a few minutes into the interaction, we witness delicate work to navigate individual accountabilities in relation to what is oriented to as a shared project. By all accounts, Mark has thoroughly considered how he would present these concerns and ideas.

Meanwhile, Helle is signalling a green light for Mark to continue and 'tell it like it is' (ll. 39–40, 44), reassuring him that she doesn't 'take it in' (l. 42). However, what was initially called 'our dear child' by Helle here moves to a new framing by Mark of 'not criticising your child' (l. 43). Thus, the metaphor of a shared child is replaced with Helle's child. While Mark attributes special accountability to Helle for the project as it has been up until now, he also includes the whole leadership team as decisive in the matter and accountable for whatever they end up deciding as a future solution through his use of 'we' in lines 12 ('we could perhaps consider'), 26, 49 and 52. In summary, the delicate work of leadership actors navigating past and present and individual and shared accountabilities associated with a school project emerge for joint consideration and qualification in this extract. We next turn to accounts from interviews and relate them to what occurred in this first part of the meeting interaction.

Interview extracts. The following extract is from an interview with the coordinator of *In Touch*, Maiken, that was undertaken one week before the meeting (all other extracts are from interviews immediately after the meeting). In an account of her work and freedom of action, Maiken offers an institutional narrative of past efforts to contest and change *In Touch*:

Interviewer: How much freedom of action would you say you have in relation to what you spend your energy and time on in your work?

Maiken: I think I have a lot of freedom of action when it comes to smaller development tasks within reason, such as initiating activities. I mean *In Touch* is really a closed country. I can only say that I've gone into this with persistence and curiosity, but also a belief that we can talk management up on this. Because there's something we might be able to gain that I think we're losing out on today… That's how I've felt and everyone has laughed at me. All my colleagues have said, 'yes, yes, we've tried that a thousand times, and we're not getting anywhere with it'. The others who have been part of *In Touch*, like, well, I haven't met anyone yet who thinks it's God's gift. …The story is – and I've only been told this by colleagues who have been here for a long time – that it's something the school director has decided or invented, and it's a bit difficult to change the director's good idea. That's the narrative that exists. But whether it holds up in reality, I have no idea.

Interviewer: You haven't discussed it with her?

Maiken: No, I haven't. I actually think that Helle is very open, and the door to Helle is always open. I sit in the same corridor as Helle, so it's not really like that. But maybe I'm a little afraid of it, because I also, well, you know. It's really stupid not to ask her, I realise that. But it's kind of like that.

In this narrative, Helle is being positioned as the originator and protector of the project, invoking her identity and authority as school director ('the director's good idea'), and the project is identified as a 'closed country', with a series of failed past attempts to initiate change ('we've tried that a thousand times', 'we're not getting anywhere with it'). The narrative seems to be used by Maiken to account for her own passivity or resignation and she paints the picture of a series of tensions in feeling 'freedom of action', seeing that 'the door…is always open' but feeling both 'a little afraid' and 'stupid' in not being able to engage in any progression of this work, constructing further perils in navigating accountabilities, ownership and authority.

While in Maiken's account *In Touch* is a 'closed country', we get a slightly different narrative from Helle in the following extract from an interview immediately after the meeting:

Interviewer: So, what did you experience at this meeting?

Helle: I actually think it was a good meeting. Now the last point here, with Mark, it was actually a really good example, I think, of how you do something and then it doesn't make sense anymore. And then that he has actually been out and talked to the people, including himself, that it's all about. And then found out that there is something here that needs to be looked at again. …I've been very much like a leader in it, and said, we just have to do this. Because it just doesn't make sense, what we're

doing here with, as I also mentioned, 80 percent absenteeism. A lot of students who came out and didn't pass their exams and did really badly…

Interviewer: May I ask, what were you concerned about doing in the interaction?

Helle: I was listening, well, I listened to what he was saying. And he was also afraid that I would be upset that he wanted something else with it, I think. He really needed the space to tell me how he felt about it.

Interviewer: How did you sense that?

Helle: Well, he started by saying, that I know it's your child, can I go in and touch my child? Then I allowed him to do it pretty quickly by saying, 'you can do that'. But he did it a couple of times during the conversation, or said something, and you could say that he could also think it. Because I also sometimes just, oh, I could hardly stand it, and so I also tried to correct some of that, or at least the understanding of why it had turned out the way it had along the way.

In this interview, Helle delivers an explanation of how and why she was quite directive about the project in the beginning and paints a picture of the emotional work going on in the interaction, telling us how she struggled to give Mark the space he 'really needed', while she 'could hardly stand it' and felt an urge to correct or at least give an account for the way things had turned out. The negotiation of ownership emerges once again when Helle articulates that the project as *her* child who is brought to the table in the meeting and Mark is asking if he could 'go in and touch my child'. This personal narrative provides some perspective to what we also see play out at the meeting as visibly incredible vulnerable (e.g. displayed by little laughs in l. 43–5) and therefore requiring a lot of work from the participants. The first two interview extracts add to the understanding that sharing and shifting accountabilities is not a smooth or straightforward process but rather deeply personal, emotional and relational work.

Finally, before we move on in the next meeting episode, we share an extract from an interview with department head Jens later the same day, offering further perspectives on the difficulties associated with the discussion at the meeting, both for Helle as one that has 'helped bring this in and helped invent it' and for the group of department leaders, challenging *In Touch*:

Interviewer: It's interesting how you get to talk to each other about such things.

Jens: Yes. When you get home and watch the recording of Marks' presentation today, it's also interesting what's at stake with how Mark keeps saying that this is not a criticism, and Helle keeps playing the game of I don't take it that way either. But it's a picture of the fact that we've actually tried that a few times. It hasn't been a criticism either, it's been a concern, but it's been taken really hard. So, it's also setting up some kind of parameter for what kind of premise I'm presenting this on. And Mark was a little apologetic at first, even though it was strong, and it was factual, what he

presented it was well-considered, and it was a recognition that *In Touch* is a good thing, but now needs an update to reflect reality.

Interviewer: Mm. Yes.

Jens: And it's kind of funny, the thing about, and it's also difficult when you've helped bring this in and helped invent it, right? So, it's a bit like a child we go in and say, you have a wonderful child, but the clothes, new colours are needed.

In this account, Jens describes a 'game' playing out at the meeting with a distinction between 'criticism' and 'concern' at its core. We are offered another historical narrative of how it has previously 'been taken really hard' by Helle, anchoring an ongoing tension between care, appreciation and recognition ('you have a wonderful child') and challenge, change and progress ('new colours are needed'). The negotiation at the meeting is portrayed as both strategic and communicative as Jens credits Mark for offering a 'strong', 'factual' and 'well-considered' response. In summary, this extract depicts the difficulties of interfering with a project born and raised by someone else and the precariousness of accounting for competing narratives that an initiative ('child') can be both 'wonderful' and require 'an update'.

We rejoin the meeting about seven minutes in, after Mark has just presented some student cases that illustrate the shortcomings and lack of elasticity in the current *In Touch* model.

Extract 2. Staging conflicting accountabilities I

1		((Everyone looks at the screen))
2	Mark	It says in our In Touch rules that students without employment must
3		be expelled after 60 lessons of absence (.) so there is no elasticity.
4		If, on the other hand, the student is employed, it is a matter between
5		the school and the employment authority and the student (.) and we
6		have many examples of students with an employment contract who
7		continue their education when they are absent for more than 100
8		lessons (.) whereas students without employment contract are expelled
9		at 60 lessons
10	Helle	Mm ((nods))
11	Mark	**And there I commit u::hm disobedience daily** ((briefly looking at
12		Helle who still looks at the screen, then back at screen))
13	Jens	((looking briefly from the screen over at Mark))
14	Mark	And I have done so since I arrived, because I simply think that it's
15		ridiculous (.) because we have many students who, even if they reach
16		60 lessons, are students who can easily complete an education and
17		become good students, become good social workers and so on.
18	Helle	.hhh ((still looking at the screen))
19	Mark	I don't really want to commit unfairness or illegalities, but I also
20		think this is unfair and incomprehensible discrimination. And it's
21		also something the teachers say (.) couldn't we just say that they
22		have the same conditions(.) um. So that's why ((points at the screen))
23		I have a proposal that we introduce an internal overall evaluation

What emerges in Extract 2 is a carefully constructed account and testimony from Mark to the group and Helle specifically (l. 12), orienting himself as being answerable to her. The core of the testimony is that he 'commits disobedience daily' (l. 11) and he draws on both student cases and teacher statements to justify it (ll. 16–7, 20–2). We note that some tension is visible in the interaction, e.g. the persistent gaze on the screen and an audible inbreath from Helle (l. 18). The emotional strength of the terms used by Mark to categorise his actions is striking ('disobedient', 'illegal') and the rules broken ('unfair', 'incomprehensible'). Therefore, the rules' incomprehensibility seems to match the severity of his actions. To justify his deviant actions, Mark makes a case predicated on co-existing, conflicting accountabilities to leadership colleagues, to established rules, to students and to teachers. Disobedience seems more understandable in this impossible setup constructed and disputed by Mark.

We skip around 25 minutes, where Mark continues his presentation of ideas for developing the current *In Touch* model with an overall student evaluation and where Helle shares some of the original ideas behind *In Touch*, emphasising both what she hears from student councils about what still works and what she recognises as what does not. We re-enter the meeting as Jens, similarly to Mark, admits to circumventing the rules, telling the unique story of a student (Mia).

Extract 3. Staging conflicting accountabilities II

1	Jens	I have Mia who has started an August class, which is actually 63
2		lessons now and I should throw her out ((looks from the screen to
3		the others, primarily Mark)). Mia is (0.5) is going to start the
4		October class (.) uh and lives over in X ((area)), I think it's
5		called, over in that slightly disadvantaged residential area and
6		has a starter home, which is conditional on (.) you can only live
7		there if you are in education. **And knowing that (.) she has to**
8		**start on the October team, on October 25th, I won't throw her out**
9		**now even if I had to do it** =She (.) she is allowed to continue, and
10		she is not allowed to have any more absences and I have weekly
11		conversations with her to follow up on whether she is doing her
12		schoolwork, (.) uh because I think it makes sense
13	Mark	((nods))
14	Jens	If I were to follow those rules, I would have had to kick her out
15		(0.5) ((looking at Mark))
16	Helle	°Mm° ((looking at Jens))
17	Jens	It just creates so many other annoying things and this overall
18		evaluation can do just that. (0.5) She won't be able to continue
19		professionally, but then another plan has been made for her
20		((looking at Helle)). But I could also have had a student who could
21		have easily continued in the August class, even with a lot of
22		absences (.) to have that option I just think it's super important
23	Helle	((nods))
		((lines omitted, where Helle suggests that the department heads prepare a proposal for a new version of In Touch))

46	Mark	At 45 I've started using my formulation, which is (.) uh I should
47		say according to the rules that at 60 lessons, you're out ((waves
48		hand to the side)) but I sa:y when you reach 60 lessons, we'll have
49		a meeting and then we'll have a chat, but then you're seriously (.)
50	Ann	Mm in danger
51	Mark	=on the way out (.) [so that I emphasise the seriousness of it]
52	Ann	**[but that's also my rhetoric]**
53	Mark	=but I also say (.)
54	Helle	so it's also [in that way very smart]
55	Mark	[we have to look each other] in the eye
56	Jens	**Yes (.) yes, we have the same approach, Mark.**
57	Helle	Yes (.) and I think it's (.) in that way it's very smart that there
58		are three u::h red yellow green hehe
59	Jens	Yes
60	Mark	Mm ((nods))
61	Helle	=or whatever you can say, right, because then the seriousness also
62		becomes u::h and it's still (.) I mean it's still (.) 14 days IS a
63		lot of absence in 3.5 months, so
64	Mark	=it is

What was first presented as individual deviant practices becomes evident as a common practice among department heads in Extract 3. The standout discourse here is one of seriousness, which is used by Mark twice ('seriously' in l. 49 and 'seriousness' in l. 51), by Helle (l. 61) and responded to with agreement by Ann ('but that's also my rhetoric', l. 52) and by Jens ('yes, we have the same approach', l. 56). What emerges with this discourse is the accountability work of affirming that there is no loss of standards and the seriousness that comes with it in the deviant practices revealed. The importance of holding both standards and seriousness is explicitly affirmed by Helle who argues 'it's still' (repeated) 'a lot of absence' (ll. 62–3) regardless of whether the 60 lessons requirement is met. We note that both Jens and Mark makes a clear effort to demonstrate that they are dedicated and not relaxing standards of student achievement in their accounts, 'having weekly conversations to follow up' (l. 10) and 'we'll have a meeting and then we'll have a chat' (l. 49). Helle visibly approves such accountability in her repeated response of this being 'very smart' (ll. 54, 57). Thus, through the detailed work of accounting for multiple conflicting considerations (extract 2) and for commitment to the central standards of *In Touch* (extract 3), the parties appear to approach one another despite the revelations of deviant practices. Overall, in these two pieces of interaction, we see a number of individual accounts of alternative approaches coming together towards a shared account.

Interview extract In the following interview extract, however, Helle characterises Mark and Jens' deviations from what they have agreed as 'not so cool' and 'a little disobedient':

> Interviewer: I heard both Mark and Jens say we do something different in practice?
>
> Helle: Yes. And that. It's not that cool either. Because it hasn't been discussed here, because we've kind of agreed on something else. So, they, so, you could say that they have also been a little disobedient in relation to that. I think that's probably why it's also coming out, to get some kind of legitimisation. Um. Of the problem. And then you also get absolution. Or at least get it said. 'It doesn't work very well either'. But

> um. So, the whole thing about getting to say, well, okay, I've actually done something… then you naturally could have gone to me. You know what, I just did something 'aber dabei', is that okay, or something.
>
> Interviewer: But I don't see you commenting on it, you actually leave it alone?
>
> Helle: Yes. That's what I'm thinking, that's part of the problem. Which they then do something about. Yeah, I would never say that. I simply don't need to do that. But I think it's cooler that he says it. Because then umm. We all do things once in a while. Well, yes, we do. But I actually think it's cooler that he says it. And then I think okay. So, he has had. Or he has. I mean, he needed to tell me that he couldn't quite be faithful to what we actually agreed.

Noteworthy, in this account, Helle uses the terms 'legitimisation' and 'absolution' with their 'coming out' in the need to 'at least get it said'. While also arguing that they 'naturally could have gone to me', Helle offers the perspective that this all needed to be aired publicly and that her response to such an airing is crucial ('I would never say that', 'it's cooler that he says it').

In the final meeting extract (Extract 4), following directly from the previous dialogue, we see Helle, along with the rest of the group, visibly committing to the idea that change is necessary.

Extract 4. Moving from past deeds to future commitments

1	Helle	**Couldn't you ((looking at Sara, Mark, and Jens)) with Maiken involved**
2		**(.) couldn't you make a proposal that we brought to this again before**
3		**we set it completely free?**
4	Mark	Yes ((nods))
5	Sara	((nods))
6	Jens	Yes
7	Helle	I would like us to do that, so that it is communicated properly, and
8		we do it at the right time. Because it is in any case, back to **the**
9		**old In Touch**, because it is in fact also one of the things that may
10		not have been communicated properly since we end up in the detention
11		mindset (.) That was certainly not what was intended.
12	Mark	No.
		((lines omitted where they talk about ideas for the new model, based on what they have discussed previously))
41	Helle	**But um mega exciting↑ ((spreads hands out, nodding))**
42	Eric	Mm. Cool.
43	Ann	Exciting ((looking at Mark))
44	Helle	**And it's also cool to challenge it (.) in the way that u::h (.) that**
45		**if something doesn't ↑work**
46	Mark	Yes
47	Johan	Mm ((nods))
48	Helle	**we shouldn't just keep doing it (.) if it doesn't work and it doesn't**
49		**have that effect u::m (0.5) so it was, it was really good.**
50	Erik	It works (.) it's just with some adjustment, right?
51	Helle	Yes
52	Mark	Yes=yes ((nods)). Yes but u:m focusing on it having an effect.

```
53  Sara   What do you think from here Mark, because I'm kind of thinking,
54         should Jens and I (.) and you and Maiken?
55  Mark   I've also just spoken to Maiken, she just wasn't able to join us
56         today, but um (.) maybe we should ((points towards Sara and Jens))
57  Jens   Really like to
58  Helle  But wouldn't it be great to have a thematic meeting where we have it
59         on again
60  Mark   Yes
61  Helle  =where Maiken is also involved, because she is also the one who will
62         be driving it
63  Jens   =Yes, of course (.)that makes sense
64  Helle  And then we may need to do something special for the contact teachers
65         (0.5) some kind of setup to prepare them for how they can act in it.
66  Ann    Mm. Yes↑ Period.
67  Mark   It sounds good.
68  Ann    I have written ((looking at computer)) Jens, Mark, Sara and Maiken
69         qualify the new thoughts and then take it to a thematic meeting.
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Asking the involved department heads to develop a proposal for a new *In Touch* model together with Maiken, Helle displays acknowledgement of the experiences and perspectives that have been put forward and that she is ready to forgive, move forward collectively (using the pronouns 'us' and 'we', e.g. ll. 7, 48) and draw learning from what has taken place ('if something doesn't work, we shouldn't just keep doing it', ll. 45, 48). This is further displayed in the subsequent concluding remarks, where Helle visibly treats what has happened at the meeting, and the challenge of *In Touch* specifically, as acceptable, even 'mega exciting', 'cool' and 'really good' (ll. 41, 44, 49). With the use of the term 'the old *In Touch*' (l. 9), the current model is now constructed as a thing of the past and the proposal to be made a thing of the future. In addition to Helle, several others visibly contribute to the co-leadership process of developing a shared understanding of what needs to be done (e.g. ll. 50–6).

Different types or levels of shared accountabilities are constructed in this extract. On the one hand, a subgroup of the management team is asked, and they visibly commit (ll. 4–6, 53 and onwards) to being specifically accountable for the task of developing the proposal, as a form a distributed responsibility. By working out the details of how they will approach the task in front of the others (e.g. ll. 52-6), they display an action-based promise to do it. On the other hand, the whole management team is oriented to by Helle and others as being accountable for making final decisions when the proposal is to be brought to a later meeting (ll. 1–3, 58–63) and for communicating it 'properly' and 'at the right time' in the organisation (ll. 7–8). As Helle accounts for the current situation caused by the old model not being properly communicated (ll. 9–11), she holds herself accountable to the others for what has happened, but not necessarily the only one to blame. Furthermore, several key actors outside of the meeting are oriented to as parties accountable for developing future *In Touch* practices that need to be involved and mobilised in the process (Maiken, ll. 1, 53–5, 61, 68 and contact teachers, ll. 64–5).

Interview extract In the extract below, Jens presents a clear expectation from the meeting that he, Mark, Sara and Maiken will work on the proposal and it will be accepted by the others:

> Interviewer: So, a lot of things ended well or how did you experience it?

> Jens: Yes. So, I have a picture that now I can go back with Mark, and with Sara and Maiken, who is like coordinator for these teachers who are part of *In Touch*. Now we will actually describe how we think it can be really, really good in the future, and what it is we would like to try out. And it will be accepted. I mean, there will be no doubt that it will be commas that will be adjusted. And it's also an expression that then Helle has some satisfied employees who, like, she also has an experience of how *In Touch* has been a little thwarted among teachers. Now you can kind of say now you get the direction you want, then you can also say, then you must also stand up for it to succeed. So that's why we get it the way we want it with the, at least a, maybe a kind of underlying contract: then it's also your responsibility that it's going to work. And I'm fine with that.

In Jens' account, the department heads got the direction they wanted, and with that comes a new and shared accountability in that they must 'stand up for it to succeed'. If Helle was considered the initiator and main responsible for *In Touch* in the past, this has now changed, according to Jens, and a large part of the responsibility now lies with the heads of department.

Discussion

This inquiry set out to identify the central practices through which multiple leadership actors 'work' accountability between them and how hierarchical power is navigated while doing so. We offer four key contributions to the existing literature (Denis et al., 2012; Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Lortie et al., 2023; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020).

First, our detailed analysis of a meeting episode in a school management team reveals four central practices of accountability work that construct accountability beyond the individual, which we term qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising. We will unfold these practices empirically (where they emerge in the meeting interaction, supplemented by interview accounts) and theoretically. The practice of *qualifying* was used by leadership actors to initially broach shared and individual accountabilities in terms of the project to be discussed. Qualifying is essentially a balancing act between creating enough visibility to put a matter to account while not risking being shut down. Accordingly, in the first meeting extract, we see Mark tiptoeing between what is 'ours' and 'yours' as he goes to great lengths to qualify his action as 'not denying' and 'not criticising'. This is further constructed as a high-risk endeavour in the interviews, describing the initiative as a 'closed country', originally 'the director's good idea' and one that has so far been difficult to challenge as 'it's been taken really hard'. The fine lines that qualifying must tread also appears in Helle's interview narrative of how she 'could hardly stand it' and the tension between giving space alongside correcting the record to reclaim the original intent and process of the project. Therefore, qualifying seems to be a difficult interactional accomplishment between those wishing to broach the risky conversation (Mark), those who support having it but have been 'warned away' in the past (Jens, Maiken) and those required to give permission for that conversation to advance (Helle). Qualifying appears pivotal to first get accountability talk on the

agenda and second to establish enough goodwill for the leadership actors to move sensitive issues forward together.

The second practice, and counterpart, is what we term *disputing,* which signifies a degree of defiance without enacting direct opposition, avoiding open debate but interjecting counterviews into the process. First, in the meeting, Mark and then Jens dispute the need to expel students after exceeding their threshold of absences on the grounds that some students would ultimately succeed with more time and that a different evaluation process could be more effective. In doing so, they introduce a conflict between accountability to the established policy and accountability to the students. This conflict evokes a paradox in which accountability involves following rules whilst also being prepared not to follow them (McKernan, 2012: 260). Helle responds minimally in this part of the interaction and according to her post-hoc sensemaking, there is a need for the dispute to be aired openly and for her to give it space.

The discursive cluster of 'disobedience' (used by Mark in the interaction), 'legitimisation' and 'absolution' (used by Helle in the interview) evoke both archaic and institutional religious ritual (the Catholic rite of the confessional), which speaks directly to the role of hierarchical power in resetting the trajectory of an individual and the collective of which they are a part. In Foucauldian terms, disobedience is a 'reflective indocility' (Newman, 2022: 130) or a disinclination to be a conforming subject that can be linked with parrhesia or the willingness to speak candidly and boldly (135). Foucault (1999) connected parrhesia to risk, courage and truth but ultimately to criticism in which parrhesia 'is always a "game" between the one who speaks the truth and the interlocutor' that involves a power imbalance between the two. As a duty in service of the overall 'truth' of an endeavour and relationship, parrhesia is critical to accountability. Following this theorisation, we can view Mark and Jens as engaging in parrhesia and Helle as in a position to offer censure or legitimisation, opting for the latter. Absolution further relates to pastoral power as the 'active, intersubjective work of intermediaries and communities in adopting, adapting, contesting and remaking regimes of truth' (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1306). Central to such work is 'counter-conduct' (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1305), seeking to occasion 'alternative relationships of rule' requiring adaptation, development and change. The disputing that Mark, Jens and others practice can thus be considered a counter-conduct that is responded to as appropriate for their joint accountability towards the project.

Finally, what we term *forgiving* and *promising* appeared in extension of each other as central practices of accountability work in the closing meeting sequence. We use the concept of forgiveness to refer to visible efforts to accept explanations for deviant practices and engage in the development of future accountabilities, and the concept of promising to refer to acts of visibly and verbally committing to future accountabilities and agreements. The practice of forgiving is evident in a number of places in the meeting interaction, particularly when Helle acknowledges that elements of the old programme 'may not have been communicated properly' and Mark acknowledges that such failures of communication were not intended. While the term forgiveness is ours, according to Foucault (1982) pastoral power prioritises the reintegration of those who dispute and deviate, with the need to renew legitimacy, particularly after episodes of counter-

conduct. Such reintegration and renewal occur through a combination of ongoing 'surveillance and discipline' in terms of the adaptation that arises and the confirmation of 'self-reflexive, self-governing subjects' that aligns with the governmentality thesis whereby actors learn to govern themselves (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1298). The practice of forgiving therefore constitutes an acknowledgement of both past transgression and future movement.

The practice of promising is accomplished in several ways at the meeting: in the proposal and visible support to hold a thematic meeting to structure a new process, in the attention to a special set up for contact teachers and, most importantly, in terms of sharing accountability as Helle is now part of a broader 'us' that, with a group of department heads as frontrunners, will work out a solution for the *In Touch* programme and a new set of norms 'where something doesn't work'. Hence, the practices of forgiving and promising made it possible for the leadership team to move from individual accountabilities to more shared constructions of various types (the whole team and the subgroup of department leaders).

Collectively these four practices reflect the complexity, and work involved in the communicative constitution of accountabilities beyond the individual. In the episode analysed, leadership actors used these practices to manage the difficult work of addressing a sensitive topic and to move from past transgressions to future agreements and shared commitments.

Second, and in response to the last part of our research question about navigating hierarchical power, our analysis shows a central tension between obedience and disobedience in accountability work that is not only at the core of all four practices identified above, but critical to engaging with power. In terms of the four practices, qualifying prepares the foundation for a conversation about disobedience, disputing occasions disobedience, forgiving bridges obedience and disobedience and promising establishes the guidelines for future obedience. However, this movement is neither sequential nor linear. For instance, while the practice of disputing exposes disobedience in relation to past agreements and promises, at the same time, confessing it is also a token of obedience in the sense of acknowledging these actions to be wrong (in the accountability relationship to co-leaders) and showing adherence to some central aspects of the previous agreement (e.g. taking students' absence seriously).

This tension and even paradox between obedience and disobedience is critical to Foucault in the sense that subjectivities are constituted 'in continuous networks of obedience' in which instances of disobedience ultimately become a submission to a new truth regime (Martin and Waring, 2018: 1293). In relation to Arendt, the meeting episode constitutes a practical example of the pluralistic understanding of power as dependent on support, as opposed to domination demanding obedience. The support involved in power 'is never unquestioning', it can be legitimately withdrawn, and power is 'living' in that sense, according to (Arendt, 1970: 34)

> It is the people's support that lends power to the institutions… and this support is but the continuation of the consent that brought the law into existence… they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.

In Arendt's (1958) work, forgiving and promising are emphasised as faculties of action that serve to remedy the irreversibility and unpredictability of human action. While forgiving releases an actor from the consequences of past actions, allowing for new beginnings (240), mutual promises create 'islands of security' amidst the unpredictability of future actions (237). Although vulnerable to disruption, forgiving and promising essentially enables actors to wield power collectively, according to Arendt (Canovan, 1992: 192). Our meeting episode provides a very concrete example of how the practices of qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising can play out and remedy the fundamental tension between obedience and disobedience towards multiple accountabilities, as illustrated in Figure 1. Our analysis provides practice-based evidence that this is no straight-forward affair, it requires effort and emotional work of the involved actors to move from past to future accountabilities.

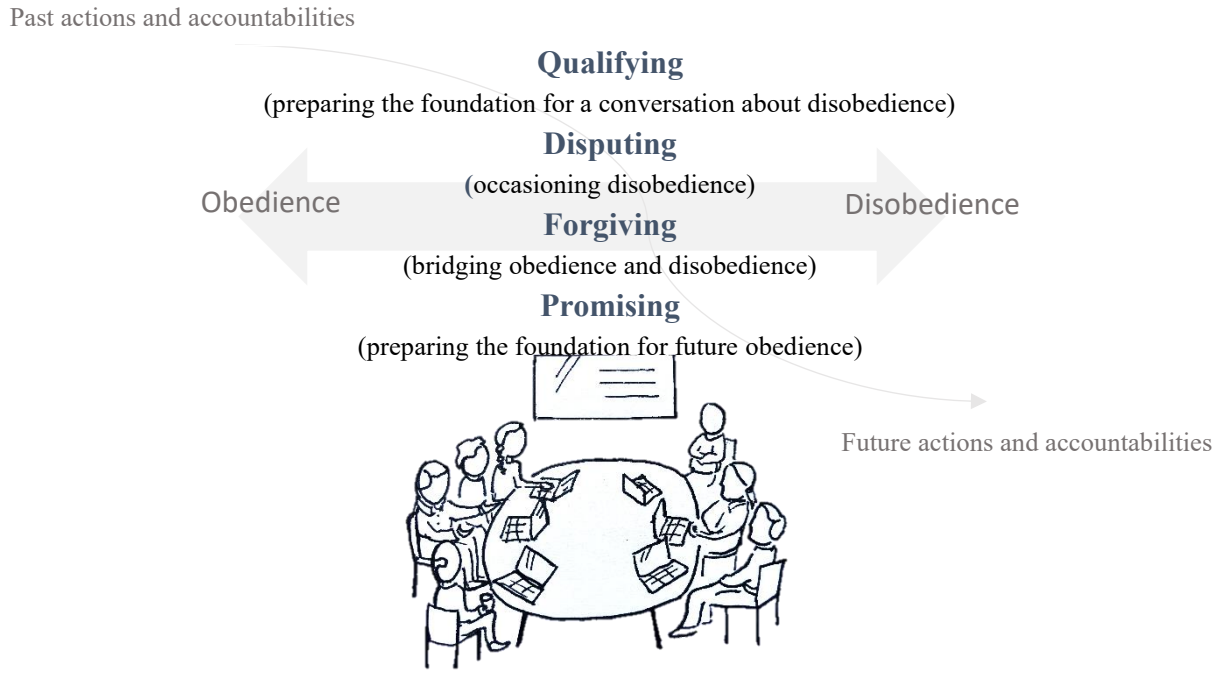

Figure 1. Practices of accountability work

Third, our inquiry into accountability work and identification of the practices that accomplish it have a number of implications for understanding accountabilities beyond the individual and add to an overall understanding of the dynamics of power in plural leadership. In contrast to the dominating entitative approach and language of 'taking', 'accepting', 'holding' and 'enforcing' accountability, our interaction analysis demonstrates how accountability work is collaboratively accomplished, and collective accountabilities are created. In this work, new subjectivities emerge, e.g. Helle as part of the 'we' of the next iteration of *In Touch* and a team that doesn't persist with what isn't fully working. This shift redirects attention to what happens in-between leadership actors to constitute accountability; namely, at least four communicative practices of qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising. These practices establish relationships and power. In terms of the former, Arendt understands plurality as an inescapable human condition

in which acting in concert demands that actors 'negotiate our concurrent existences and make them complementary' (Hayden, 2012: 244). More specifically, this means that the 'existence of others demands that I question my relation to those others and evaluate the interactions that transpire' (Hayden, 2012: 243). Thus, at the meeting, the practice of qualifying involves negotiating the fine line between critique and improvement, whilst in the subsequent interview, Helle talks about struggles to keep her response generative and the need to work through accompanying feelings of defensiveness. Similarly, the practice of forgiving acknowledges the loss of an old 'truth' (*In Touch* is working effectively) and the need to establish a revised truth regime (*In Touch* can work with student absences more proactively) in ways that honour the past but move to future change (identifying miscommunication, not failure, as the issue). To Arendt, sensitivity, defensiveness, generativity, loss and movement are moral, ethical and political endeavours that require the ability 'to live with, not merely among' plural actors (Hayden, 2012: 241). It is this 'living with' that marks the importance of a practice orientation to plural leadership and the significance of the four accountability practices contributed from this research.

Finally, in terms of power, the four practices constitute resources, problems and solutions that are available for the actors to draw upon in the leadership process. For instance, Mark uses the practices of qualifying and disputing to initiate a difficult conversation concerning *In Touch*, bringing dissent and deviance into the open to move a sensitive and stagnant issue forward. Both practices constitute problems for Helle as they create critical moments in which she can choose to try to shut down the space of critique or offer the legitimacy for it to continue. The practice of forgiving offers a solution that allows Helle to re-integrate those who chose to dispute and for the leadership team to reset their relationship to become a group that is collectively accountable for the next iteration of *In Touch*. At no point does Helle give up her formal authority, cede her institutional position or relinquish her role, but she achieves moments of acting in concert with the other actors within the interaction. We see such moments when the department heads jointly mark the relevance and actuality of change as they also reveal deviant practices, and when the management team commits to future actions and accountabilities. Such moments do not negate macro, structural and hierarchical asymmetries but rework them in situ. In the meeting episode, the participants show an orientation to Helle as having special responsibilities and rights in relation to the project because she was its initiator. While some of the interview narratives refer hierarchical position explicitly (e.g. 'the director's good idea', 'then Helle has some satisfied employees'), such orientations are much more subtle in the meeting interaction (e.g. Mark's gaze at Helle admitting his 'disobedience') and hierarchical asymmetry is not drawn upon as a resource. Instead, Helle visibly engages in the practices of forgiving and promising, accepting explanations for deviant actions and developing future accountabilities. In doing so she makes a clear effort to enable a plural leadership process, an effort she unfolds in the interview as both important and difficult (e.g. 'I could hardly stand it'). In summary, reworking accountabilities beyond the individual can clearly be a difficult task that requires dedicated effort from all actors involved, regardless of position, to enable moments of *acting in concert.*

Conclusion

The accountability work of plural leadership actors involves four central practices that construct accountability beyond the individual: qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising. In the analysed meeting episode, these practices enabled the collaborative negotiation of past and future, individual and shared accountabilities and allowed the leadership actors to navigate the fundamental tension between obedience and disobedience in the moment. This study sheds light on the struggle, effort and emotional work involved in plural leadership in practice and contributes to our understanding of these leadership processes beyond naïvely democratic and romantic constructs (Collinson et al., 2018b; Denis et al., 2012). Our analyses demonstrate that many interests and sometimes conflicting accountabilities are at play and that some formal leaders may well struggle to create space for plural leadership while others may struggle to take that space. Still, our case appears to be one of successful plural leadership amid hierarchy and reworking of accountability by balancing appreciation and defensiveness towards what is and still works with concerns and counterviews regarding what is needed (qualifying and disputing) and balancing forgiveness of past transgressions with promises of new obligations. The practices of qualifying, disputing, forgiving and promising may be applied by leadership actors in various hierarchical positions to move from the past to committed future actions, from individual accountabilities to establish a collective pathway. While future research is needed to further validate the identified practices and explore their interaction and use in different settings, we find them and Arendt's pluralistic concept of power suited for establishing a much-needed vocabulary of plural leadership. Our study extends and introduces significant details to existing literature on plural leadership and the dynamics of power, providing leadership research with a practice-based perspective on plural accountability.

8. Discussion and conclusions

> "I feel that if something like this is to live, it must also make sense to those who are involved in it. Because I can't be there. I can't, well, even though there are some ambitions, and I need to talk about those ambitions, because I hope they can use some of it—but I also feel that it's no use me sitting and holding on to something if they don't think, well, if it's misunderstood or it doesn't work in the context it's in now. So, it's a bit of a negotiation. And I'd rather have something happen that they have ownership of than doing something because they have to, because I've said so."
>
> — School director, *Learn*

Most organizations today operate in complex, changing environments with continuously emergent issues and shifting tasks, requiring adaptation and initiative from organizational actors on a daily basis. This dissertation set out to examine the situated leadership work of multiple actors who make sense of emerging problems and negotiate future actions, and specifically the challenges and efforts involved in mobilizing situated commitment to such actions. A primary aim has been to contribute to the understanding of leadership as a practical, discursive, and interactional accomplishment (Carroll et al., 2008; Clifton, 2009; Crevani, 2018; Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013), and to provide empirical evidence of the complexity, struggle, and conflict involved in collaborative leadership work (Collinson et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2012). The quote above from the interview with the school director from Learn did not find a place in the third article, but it nicely tells a story about the leadership work between multiple actors at different hierarchical levels that has been the focus of this dissertation. This includes dilemmas involved in negotiations around initiatives and future actions, as well as efforts to balance interests and ambitions with an attention to the sensemaking and ownership of the involved actors.

In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the three articles presented and their findings. Then, I will revisit the overall research question and discuss the answers provided collectively by the three articles, along with their theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. Finally, I will address some limitations of this research and suggest avenues for future studies.

Summarizing the three articles

In the first article, Magnus Larsson and I studied central interactional challenges involved in the collaborative leadership work of mobilizing actors to commit to future actions on issues at hand. Drawing on EMCA and video recordings of managerial meetings, we explored in detail what is at stake and requires effort from the involved actors. Our detailed analysis demonstrates that the leadership work in these meetings most evidently consists of *interactional organizing work*, involving three central challenges: establishing a sufficient common understanding of what a

given problem consists of; of who owns the problem and is accountable for dealing with it; and of what should be done about it. Our findings suggest that the mobilization of future action depends on temporarily resolving such questions. Furthermore, our analysis demonstrates that this collaboratively accomplished leadership work is characterized by tension, friction, and struggle, where moral positions and accountabilities are at stake, and different interests are being pursued by both individual and collective actors. This led us to problematize descriptions of leadership processes as a smooth flow of emerging direction, as well as conceptualizations of agency as either individual or relational. Instead, we suggest that we approach leadership as a collaborative work building on and growing from individual agencies.

The second article focuses on central influence practices involved in the leadership work of mobilizing organizational actors to take future action. I picked up the thread of the interactional complexity of leadership introduced in the first article, namely, how to influence others to take future actions they might not otherwise have taken, without constraining their initiative and agency in the process. The EMCA-informed analysis of call to action episodes at management meetings demonstrated that the situated leadership work of mobilizing future action involves *ongoing adjustments and balancing of influence attempts* to elicit a committed response from the involved actors. Various resources, moves, and strategies are utilized by actors to collaboratively accomplish influence by strengthening and softening the necessity and directness of calls to action depending on the uptake. The analysis suggests that two overarching practices are central: directly *pushing* and indirectly *pulling* for action. The improvisational and balancing leadership work was found to cut across the use of distinct strategies and resources to accomplish or resist influence. This led me to conclude that interpersonal influence is a complex, interactional accomplishment that cannot be reduced to any single actions or idealized tactics, abstracted from the messy details of in situ leadership work. The article suggests that leadership theory and research should address the mutuality, messy details and continuous adaptations involved in leadership work.

In the third article, Brigid Carroll and I pursued a particular aspect of leadership work that was also found central in the first article, namely, the question and construction of accountabilities, which we refer to in the article as *accountability work*. Within the framework of plural leadership, we specifically explored the situated efforts of leadership actors to construct accountabilities of organizational issues beyond the individual, and the power dynamics involved. We utilized video-recorded material and interviews as complementary methodologies in this article, zooming in on one particular meeting episode in a school management team and supplementing our interaction analysis with post hoc account from interviews. Our EMCA-informed analysis of the meeting interaction suggests that at least four practices are central in the accountability work of plural leadership: *qualifying, disputing, forgiving* and *promising*. These practices enabled the leadership actors to initiate and navigate through a difficult conversation around a sensitive topic, balancing between acknowledging and challenging each other's position, opening up talk about deviant practices and conflicting accountabilities and moving from past transgressions to develop future commitments. The analysis demonstrates that tension and struggle is part of this work, and the interview extracts added perspectives on the personal and emotional efforts involved. In particular, the analysis reveals a tension between *obedience and disobedience* to be navigated by the

leadership actors through the four practices. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's and Michel Foucault's theorizations of power, we argue that this meeting episode constitutes a practical example of Arendt's idea of pluralistic power as "acting in concert", which appeared as momentary achievements in the meeting interaction. Our findings suggest that these moments do not negate macro, structural, and hierarchical asymmetries but rather rework them in situ, where actors struggle to make and take space in the leadership process. We conclude that the plural leadership work of moving from individual to shared and from past to future accountabilities demands dedicated efforts from the involved actors, including navigating tensions, conflicts, and power dynamics, while also affirming that this work can indeed be accomplished.

Returning to the dissertation's research question

This dissertation has offered an EMCA-based specification of a broadly acknowledged outcome of leadership work, namely commitment. Rather than viewing commitment as a psychological state of dedication or broad readiness to act for the benefit of an organization (Drath et al., 2008: 647; Klein et al., 2012), it has studied the leadership efforts leading up to *committing* as a situated, action-based promise that someone is willing and ready to take some future action in relation to pressing issues and has shown examples of leadership actors' visible orientation towards committing, treating hesitant acceptance (complying) as insufficient. This extends the limited previous work on decisions as situated commitments (Clifton, 2009; Huisman, 2001) and provides leadership research with a concept of committing as and an observable, interactional achievement.

Returning to the overall research question, this dissertation has examined the leadership work involved in mobilizing such situated commitment from actors to take future action:

How is commitment to future action mobilized in leadership work?

Overall, the dissertation has demonstrated that mobilizing actors to commit to take future action requires significant effort from leadership actors and include struggles, tensions, and conflicts with different interests at play, challenging the romanticized notions of leadership processes as smooth and harmonious movement toward shared direction. The three articles together establish several key aspects of this mobilizing leadership work, including construction of problems and solutions, claiming and granting ownership of the problem at hand, the negotiation of individual and shared accountabilities related to it, and the balancing of push and pull for action from other actors in a way that fits the unfolding interaction. I will elaborate on each of these aspects in turn.

First, **constructions of problems and solutions** have been demonstrated to be central aspects of the mobilizing leadership work, which is in line with previous practice-oriented studies of leadership (Crevani, 2018; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Wåhlin-Jacobsen and Abildgaard, 2020). Leadership actors engage with the challenge of reaching a sufficiently shared understanding of the issue at hand and what the available solutions may be. This dissertation suggests that the mobilization of committed future action depends on the temporary settling of

these matters. Sometimes, the construction of an organizational problem may be enough to elicit an offer from someone to take future action that is accepted; at other times, the mobilization of committed future action involves substantial efforts from leadership actors to work out an adequate understanding of what the problem is and what should be done about it for someone to be able and willing to commit to take action along those lines. The dissertation's analyses of situated meeting interactions demonstrate, however, that this understanding need not be a full agreement or "happy ending" (Crevani, 2018) in terms of a shared sense of direction. Rather, it is what the participants treat as a sufficiently clear understanding to move forward with practical action. Furthermore, constructions of problems and solutions have been shown to be closely related to constructions of ownership, another central aspect of leadership work, as positions of ownership entail certain rights and obligations regarding defining and deciding on future actions.

Consequently, the construction of ownership, and specifically negotiations involving **claiming and granting ownership***,* has emerged as another central aspect of mobilizing committed future action. In contrast to the widespread psychological understanding of and research on ownership as a subject's feeling of possessiveness toward a target (Baer and Brown, 2012; Druskat and Pescosolido, 2002; Guarana and Avolio, 2022; Pierce et al., 2001; Rasheed et al., 2023), this dissertation has studied ownership as an in situ construction (e.g., verbally through pronouns such as "ours" and "yours", and through the use of metaphors such as that of a parent-child relationship) and as a visible display of investment in a problem or topic and its outcome. If ownership of a topic is not constructed, it can lead to actors' complying if not rejecting to take future action on the topic, whereby the leadership work is hindered or stalled, as exemplified in Article 1.

Rossi (2012: 431) relates ownership to the actor who establishes the trajectory of an action here and now, which, in this dissertation's focus on the organizing of future actions, pertains to determining what these future actions should consist of. In line with this framing, I have found that leadership actors orient themselves toward those positioned as owners of a problem or topic at hand as the ones to decide the details of what is to be done, while others may give input and advice (cf. Article 1's analysis). This orientation also seems to apply in instances of a shared ownership construction, such as in the episode in Article 3, where some members are assigned a special responsibility for taking action on a shared problem and these parties are granted certain rights and obligations to work out the details of what they will do (the proposal they will make and when and how they will make it). Meanwhile, other actors who are also positioned as owners in the shared constriction contribute to the planning of their next shared future action (a thematic meeting). The clarification and construction of ownership of a topic at hand is thus a significant aspect of the interactional mobilization of commitment to future action on such a topic and this clarification and construction requires effort from the involved leadership actors.

Third and closely related, **negotiation of individual and shared accountabilities** is another central aspect of the situated mobilization of committed future action. As situated and discursive phenomena, accountability and ownership appear as two sides of the same coin in actors' situated displays of investment in a problem, project, or action. However, while ownership can be seen as displays or constructions of an invested relationship between some actor(s) and a problem or topic

at hand, accountability can be viewed as displays of a moral relationship between the involved actors (Garfinkel, 1967; Samra-Fredericks, 2010), and a social obligation to account for the actions, projects or problems that one "owns".

This dissertation shows examples of linkages between knowledge about a problem and accountability for acting on it in negotiations of what should be done by whom. For instance, in the second meeting episodes in both Article 1 and Article 2, the question of who knows about a problem—or knows about it first—is used as a resource to set up expectations for these individuals to act and a form of ownership in relation to emerging organizational issues. This matter is related to the question of epistemic primacy (Heritage, 2013; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stevanovic and Svennevig, 2015a), while not necessarily anyone's obligations or right to know, but rather the obligations derived from "knowing about things and issues" as an organizational actor. The dissertation has shown that constructing individual and collective accountabilities is a central and delicate part of mobilizing committed future actions that includes the difficulty of handling coexisting and sometimes conflicting accountability relationships and an accompanying tension between disobedience and obedience. In the meeting episode analyzed in Article 3, the leadership actors struggled to create a shared understanding of a sensitive topic and what needed to be done, and to move from constructions of past ownership, actions and accountabilities to project future ones. Accountability work consisted of *qualifying* and *disputing* in relation to the project at hand, as well as *forgiving* and *promising* to move from past deeds to mutual commitments on shared future action. While the third article conceptualizes mutual promising as a practice that constructs accountability beyond the individual, promising is also a manifestation of the leadership outcome of someone visibly committing to future action, marking the achievement of leadership work.

Finally, **improvisation and balancing** have been found to be consistent aspects, or even characteristics, of mobilizing committed future action. These elements specifically address the interactional challenge of influencing others without constraining their own initiative in the process. During the accountability work in the meeting interaction in Article 3, the leadership actors made notable efforts to balance qualifying and disputing, acknowledging and challenging, appreciation and defensiveness, as well as what was constructed in the interviews as giving space and taking space in their efforts to move from past to future commitments. This further points to the moral dimension of mobilizing leadership work.[6]

More specifically, it has been shown that leadership actors continuously balance the strength of calls to action based on the uptake in an effort to elicit a committed response from other actors. This balancing involves a variety of verbal and nonverbal moves (e.g., gazing, leaning, shrugging, smiling, laughing) and resources that work to strengthen or soften the action call. The findings in

[6] A connection may here be drawn to Goffman's (1955, 1967) concepts of "face" and "facework" and EMCA-based studies of interactants' ongoing moral-relational efforts to evaluate and maintain a positive image of the individual in relation to the others, which involves a fundamental dialectic and dynamic interplay of connectedness and separateness (Arundale, 2010; Samra-Fredericks, 2010).

Article 2 indicate that the strength of calls for action varies most evidently in terms of directedness and necessity, which can be enhanced or decreased by multiple parties during the interaction.

Of these two dimensions, necessity aligns with EMCA literature on variations in linguistic formats of requests (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008), where directives (e.g., "do x"), need statements (e.g., "I need to get invited" in episode 1, Article 2), interrogative requests (e.g., "Can't you go along?" in episode 2, Article 2) vary in terms of built-in entitlement and necessity. While the practical effect of specific utterances and social actions cannot be decided a priori and detached from interactional display, as emphasized in this dissertation, directives can be said to aim, by design, at compliance rather than committing, as "they embody no orientation to the recipient's ability or desire to perform the relevant activity" (Craven and Potter, 2010: 419). The possibility of the request not being granted is simply not built into the design. While previous research has shown that directives manifest occasionally in small requests for immediate action in informal contexts (Childs, 2012; Curl and Drew, 2008; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), particularly when actors are engaged in joint activities (Rossi, 2012), directives appear rarely in this dissertation's collection of negotiations on future actions in work meetings. More research is needed to explore this and the observed orientation towards committing in different work settings.

Regarding the dimension of directedness, I have found that balancing is accomplished through the practices of *pushing* (specific actors) and *pulling* (for anyone to take initiative), constituting more and less direct ways of calling for action. This can include the use of pronouns or names, broadening of action calls to include more actors (making it less direct), and embodied movements (e.g., gazing, leaning), among other resources. Thus, the improvisation and balancing involved in mobilizing committed future action has been shown to cut across the distinct moves and resources utilized to exert influence, which has been the focus of previous interactional research (Clifton, 2009; Fox and Comeau-Vallée, 2020; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Meschitti, 2019; Van De Mieroop, 2020; Watson and Drew, 2017).

In summary, this dissertation suggests that ongoing improvisation and balancing of influence attempts are crucial for how leadership actors accomplish the complex task of mobilizing committed future action. Leadership actors face the challenge of effectively pushing and pulling for action in a way that fits the situation while maintaining a visible orientation toward eliciting an active and committing response from other actors, rather than mere complying. Balancing between making space and taking space, qualifying and disputing, and defending and letting go is essential for plural leadership actors as they transition from past commitments to future ones.

Implications for theory

De-romanticization of leadership—it's complex and mundane interactional work

While the leadership literature in general (Meindl, 1995; Meindl et al., 1985) and pluralistic and processual approaches to leadership specifically (Chreim, 2015; Collinson et al., 2018; Denis et al., 2012) have been accused of romanticization, the findings of this dissertation contribute to de-

romanticizing the situated work of leadership actors in collaboratively mobilizing future action. The detailed EMCA-informed analyses of turn-by-turn sensemaking and displayed orientations reveal that this leadership work primarily consists of dealing with disagreements and ambiguities regarding the nature of the problem, negotiating ownership along with accompanying rights and obligations, and navigating multiple accountabilities, all while balancing through interactional complexities. This paints a picture that is far from romantic; it is both incredibly mundane and complex interactional work, involving ongoing struggle and effort from the actors involved.

These findings provides plural leadership theory with key empirical detail and an expanded vocabulary for what is at stake in leadership collaborations in practice. The identification of a central dynamic tension and balancing act—between qualifying and disputing, acknowledging and challenging, pushing and pulling—in leadership work underscores the relevance of equally balancing the focus on agreement, collaboration, coordination etc. with a focus on disagreement, conflict, miscommunication, ambivalence, dissent etc. in leadership theory to challenge the normative pictures of how leadership collaborations should be (Denis et al., 2012; Holm and Fairhurst, 2018; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020; Lumby, 2013). Excessively positive images and discourses create unrealistic expectations of leadership actors' work in practice and can contribute to suppressing disagreement and conflict that does not fit into discourses of harmony and empowerment (Humphreys and Rigg, 2020). This dissertation suggests instead that disagreement, dissent, and disputing play a central role in leadership processes and the development of existing practices, suggesting that these elements can be viewed as necessary components rather than collateral damage. This aligns with theories such as Uhl-Bien and colleagues' framework of organizational adaptivity, in which leadership entails enabling "adaptive spaces" for engaging in conflicting as well as connecting in the search for adaptive solutions to emerging problems (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018; Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009), and Tourish's (2014: 81) argument that

> Recognising the co-constructed nature of organisations and leadership processes, theories of leadership and followership should place more emphasis on the promotion of dissent, difference, and the facilitation of alternative viewpoints than the achievement of consensus.

Highlighting the importance of tension and disagreement in leadership collaborations and processes of change ─and acknowledging the difficulties involved in working with it ─paves way for more realistic descriptions, rather than misplaced ideals of full agreement and happy endings (Crevani, 2018). However, romanticization lurks around the corner in the notion that leadership is distinct from other phenomena, such as commandment and coercion, due to its capacity to mobilize willing commitment rather than compliance (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Grint, 2005; Joullié et al., 2021). This distinction tend to portray leadership as inherently good and right as opposed to less desirable methods of mobilizing action.

While influence in a sense is always normative─favoring some options over others─the fact that someone commits to take future action does not imply that the mobilization is without negotiation, persuasion, manipulation, and power dynamics. From an interactional perspective, each action

and response gives meaning and function to previous ones (Sacks, 1992). Thus, we may study how participants visibly make sense of what is going on as for example legitimate or illegitimate attempts to persuade, and how this may vary across different settings.

Some common notions of commitment, such as Drath et al.'s (2008: 636) definition—"the willingness of members of a collective to subsume own efforts and benefits in the benefit of the collective interest and benefit,"—tend to frame commitment a more-or-less general state (rather than dynamically changing phenomenon) and to entail a romanticized ideal of organizational actors' unambiguous dedication to an organization. In contrast, the EMCA-based specification of committing as a social action proposed in this dissertation does not carry such a psychological load; it does not inherently imply whether a person is positively disposed toward other actors or the organization as a whole. Instead, it represents a situated, action-based promise that someone is willing and ready to take future action, which is also what actors in practice orient toward.

This dissertation has demonstrated central challenges, practices, and struggles involved in mobilizing commitment to future action, however temporary and reversable it may be if achieved. In the pursuit of commitment, various forms of resistance and rejection (as shown in Article 2) or even disobedience to what was once promised if it no longer makes sense (as shown in Article 3), become acceptable responses and practices. Additionally, committing can occur in different ways and can sometimes be more ambiguous than at other times; thus, there are gray areas between the actions of committing and complying that actors attempt to clarify. More research is needed to explore differences in how committing and complying are oriented to and pursued by actors in different settings, including when a complying response is treated as sufficient.

Leadership work as a central site for constructing and deconstructing agency

Since leadership is widely considered to concern influence and change, it is also seen as "nearly synonymous with the term 'agency' or 'action'" (Fairhurst, 2007: 12). While part of the romanticism charge against leadership literature has focused on the excessive and one-sided attribution of agency to individual leaders, neglecting the contributions of followers (Bligh et al., 2011; Meindl, 1995; Shamir et al., 2007), recent process-oriented studies have abandoned the idea of individual agency. Instead, they view agency as "manifest in the continuously unfolding movements of social engagement, in those turning points in which the flow of practices is re-directed (Crevani, 2018: 104; Crevani and Endrissat, 2016; Lortie et al., 2023; Sklaveniti, 2020).

This dissertation proposes an interactional middle ground where agency is approached as both individual and relational. Drawing on Garfinkel, agency can be conceptualized as action capacities enabled by "being in organized relationship with others" (Rawls, 2008: 717). The interaction analyses of leadership work presented in the three articles reveal that actors engage in various initiatives and projects during the dynamic process. This suggests that leadership can be seen as a collaborative process consisting of individual agentic moves—such as constructing problems, claiming or rejecting ownership, and pushing and pulling—adapted to the unfolding interaction. This perspective involves not only agentic efforts to mobilize others to act, but also the agentic

efforts of those actors who are mobilized through the process. Actors who commit to future action can likewise be viewed as "leadership actors", as they clearly contribute to achieving commitment to future action and may even initiate the leadership work themselves. Furthermore, the dissertation posits that leadership work involves shared projects of actors and collective agency during moments of co-action or "acting in concert" (Arendt, 1970). This includes construction of shared ownership and accountabilities related to the topics at hand, as well as instances where multiple actors commit to joint future action through mutual promises.

Thus, this dissertation suggests that we view leadership work as a primary process through which "the space for possible action" (Holmberg, 2000: 181) is constructed, shaped and changed. Essentially, agency can be seen as located in the individual and collective spaces for action and accountabilities that leadership actors jointly create and carry forward. In this sense, as spaces for action are also restricted or closed during the process, leadership work becomes a central interactional site for constructing and deconstructing agency.

Leadership as improvisational art

The leadership literature has a long and persistent tradition of identifying effective leadership behavior in distinct actions and techniques, such as influence tactics (Higgins and Judge, 2004; Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl, 2015; Yukl et al., 2008; Yukl and Falbe, 1990), transformational behavior (Avolio and Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985; Lowe et al., 1996) or communicative techniques (Joullié et al., 2021; Kramer and Crespy, 2011; Van Quaquebeke and Felps, 2018). However, the detailed interactional analyses presented in this dissertation suggest that leadership in practice is accomplished through improvisational work adapted to the unfolding interaction and actions of others. While single techniques and tactics, or even repertoires of techniques, can be useful in the mobilization of committed future action, they are neither sufficient nor efficient on their own. Their effectiveness depends on the where, how, when, and who—that is, on the situated details of an interactional context. Literature that emphasizes abstracted behavior and techniques fail to capture the situated adaptations that, in practice, makes them efficient. Hence, this dissertation recommends that leadership theory more thoroughly address the local and improvisational nature of how leadership is realized in practice, and the reflexivity and skillful adaptivity with which leadership actors make use of emergent resources and overcome interactional challenges.

Implications for research

In continuation of the above points, this dissertation proposes that leadership research should engage with the actual processes and situated details of how leadership is accomplished in situ. Although interaction research is growing alongside process- and practice-orientated approaches (Clifton et al., 2020; Larsson, 2017; Larsson and Lundholm, 2013; Schnurr et al., 2021; Van De Mieroop et al., 2020), the vast majority of leadership research is still conducted at a distance from situated practices and relational dynamics, relying on surveys, interviews, focus groups or other methods (Knights and Willmott, 1992; Larsson and Alvehus, 2023; Nicolini, 2012).

As this dissertation shows, detailed analysis of everyday interactions can help demystify leadership and challenge romanticized ideals through more realistic depictions of how leadership is accomplished and challenged in situ. This approach brings leadership research closer to the mundane and messy realities of disagreements and discomfort, power struggles, ambivalences, and conflicting accountabilities, as well as efforts to forgive, to make mutual promises and agreements that leadership actors navigate in practice. Close analysis of both breakthroughs and breakdowns in leadership processes is precisely what interactional research can offer.

EMCA has proven to be a particularly relevant analytical approach for making leadership processes visible. As demonstrated in this dissertation, fine-grained analyses of participants orientations' in work interactions allow for identification of hitherto unexplored aspects of leadership work, such as the challenges involved in the mobilization of committed future action. Furthermore, EMCA-based analyses makes visible how actions are adapted and fitted into the unfolding interaction, where past actions constitutes the immediate context in relation to which any new contribution is made sense of. These analyses make visible how individuals are clearly agentic, but how that agency is contextual and firmly embedded in the ongoing interaction, allowing for a nuanced view of agency in leadership work as both individual and collective and bound to the evolving relational process, as proposed here. Finally, this dissertation illustrates how detailed interaction analysis can be combined with other methods, such as interviews. Although findings from methods distanced from in situ interaction cannot be directly applied to interaction analysis, this combination allows for complementary perspectives on research topics and a sensitivity to the broader context in which the analyzed interactions take place.

All in all, this dissertation recommends that leadership researchers seize the opportunity to incorporate interactional analysis in their designs to get close to the actual processes and relational dynamics involved in leadership work.

Implications for practice

How can leadership theory and research provide insights into the complexities and challenges of leadership practice? As demonstrated in this dissertation, reality is often more complex than the normative ideals and prescriptions suggested by leadership literature (Larsson and Meier, 2019). It is reasonable to assume that the closer leadership literature aligns with the messy, real-life interactions in which leadership occurs, the greater the opportunity for meaningful contributions to and dialogue with leadership practice.

Practice-based portrayals of leadership work in practice, such as those presented in this dissertation, may help practitioners let go of idealized images and expectations of what it should look like and accept the difficulties and conflicts involved in leadership work. Practitioners may be encouraged to create space for tension, difference, and dissent as elements necessary to leadership processes and development of existing practices. Concepts such as those introduced in this dissertation—claiming and rejection of ownership, pushing and pulling for action, shared and conflicting accountabilities, making and taking space, constructing and deconstructing agency,

and moments of acting in concert—may be helpful for practitioners in navigating the mundanity and complexity of everyday leadership work. They may inspire them to ask new questions about their practice, such as what spaces for action are being opened or closed in everyday interaction.

This dissertation suggests that succeeding in leadership is less about knowing and applying some general principles or techniques, and more about reflectively and adaptively engaging in interactional work together with others, enduring ambivalences and tensions associated with conflicting accountabilities, unclear ownership and detailed, balancing and improvisational work. These findings suggest that leadership development should move beyond a focus on idealized skills and techniques (Carroll, 2019) to address the co-constructions, interpersonal complexities, tensions, dilemmas, and continuous adaptations inherent in leadership work. As Tourish (2014: 81) has claimed, there is "no essence of leadership divorced from particular social, organizational and temporal contexts and therefore no set of best practices that can be universally implemented."

This dissertation acknowledges the value of having a repertoire of tools and techniques but emphasizes that the interactional dynamics and the *situated and adjusted use* of techniques and available resources should be put in the foreground. Practitioners may train their interactional attention, reflectivity and adaptivity by analyzing interaction cases and by experimenting, observing, reflecting, and talking about what is going on amidst the dynamics of leadership work. In other words, they may become researchers in their own practice.

Limitations and avenues for future research

The research presented in this dissertation has several limitations. Firstly, the data was collected in two knowledge-based organizations in Denmark and the findings cannot simply be transferred or generalized to other contexts, as there may be significant differences in how leadership work plays out across organizational settings and cultural environments. For instance, there may be significant differences in the extent to which a committing response is pursued in calls to action. Nevertheless, the findings from the first two articles are based on collections of instances and the fact that the demonstrated challenges and practices have been found in more than one organization suggests that they are not merely isolated instances of mobilizing work. Still, the collected data is limited in scope and number of recorded meetings.

Another limitation is that the data is primarily collected in managerial meetings, while there may be significant differences in how mobilizing leadership work is accomplished across different arenas within an organization (such as differences between one-on-one meetings and multiple-actor meetings) that I haven't explored in this dissertation.

Additionally, the interaction analyses here presented are primarily concerned with sensemaking in situ. While I have explored committing as a social action that sets up expectations and future accountabilities, I haven't explored how leadership actors follow up on promises and hold each other to account across interactions. Combining interaction analysis with ethnographic methods, such as observation and interviews can alleviate the restricted focus on situated talk and action,

enhance sensitivity to context, and allow for discussions of both interaction analyses and other observations and findings (Clifton and Barfod, 2024; Greatbatch and Clark, 2018; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Samra-Fredericks, 2000; ten Have, 2007). Still, the dissertation remains very narrow in its focus in terms of the wider organizational, historical, social and cultural context.

Looking ahead, this dissertation opens several interesting avenues for future research.

First, more interactional studies could explore the leadership work of mobilizing future action in diverse organizational and cultural contexts to verify, challenge or extend the conclusions of this dissertation. Exploring how the balancing work of influencing others to take action varies across organizational settings, including potential differences in the idealization and orientation toward committing rather than complying and the legitimacy of more or less direct influence attempts, could yield valuable insight. Future research is also needed to validate and further explore the identified practices of accountability work, as well as their dynamic interaction and use in different settings. While this dissertation primarily focuses on management meetings characterized by a relatively free-flowing interaction format, exploring other interactional settings—such as project meetings and informal one-on-one conversations—could provide further insights into the dynamics of practices and challenges involved in the mobilization of committed future action.

Second, an interesting avenue for future research, which has been out of scope for this dissertation, is to explore the role of material objects or "material agency" (Cooren, 2018; Cooren et al., 2012; Cooren and Fairhurst, 2009) in mobilizing committed future actions. For example, studying how objects such as calendars and meeting minutes retain and extend situated commitments over time.

Third, research is needed to explore patterns of leadership work over time and across interactions. This includes examining how leadership actors hold each other accountable for mutual promises, how different constructions of ownership and accountabilities evolve, co-exist, converge, or collide over multiple encounters, and how the balancing work among various leadership actors interrelates and changes throughout social interactions. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the complexities and dynamics of plural leadership in practice (Denis et al., 2023).

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Appendix

Transcript notation in the three articles

(1.5)	approximate length of pause in seconds
((nodding))	nonverbal activity
[yes]	overlapping utterances
=	latching onto previous utterance
↑	rising intonation
:	sound stretching
we	stressed word
(...)	inaudible speech
>however<	spoken faster than surrounding talk
°okay°	spoken more softly than surrounding talk
.hh	audible inhalation
hh	audible exhalation

It should be noted that unlike what is common in Jeffersonian (2004) transcriptions, I use commas as regular punctuation marks to facilitate the reading of each turn. The lines have been translated from Danish and the structure been preserved as much as possible.

Invitation to participate (in Danish)

Invitation til deltagelse i erhvervsph.d.-projekt

Leadership for innovation – enabling proactive and shared leadership

Projektet gennemføres i perioden sept. 2021- sept. 2024 af erhvervsforsker Elisabet Skov Nielsen, UKON i samarbejde med Department of Organization, CBS. Projektet er økonomisk støttet af Innovationsfonden.

Baggrund og formål:

Innovation og tilpasningsdygtighed er afgørende for mange organisationer i dag, som skal overleve og vækste i foranderlige miljøer. Centralt heri er mobiliseringen af organisatoriske aktører til at tage initiativ, medansvar og skride til handling over for opstående problemstillinger i og på tværs af teams/afdelinger. Nærværende projekt har til formål at undersøge hvordan proaktivitet og medlederskab muliggøres og begrænses i hverdagssamspil i organisationer. Vi bruger begrebet 'aktørskab' som betegnende for det at tage ansvar og handle proaktivt i løsningen af opstående organisatoriske problemstillinger.

Projektet vil undersøge, hvordan proaktivitet og medlederskab understøttes i momenter af daglige samspil og særligt hvad formelle ledere siger og gør, der inviterer til eller afviser, at organisationsmedlemmer kommer med idéer, spiller proaktivt ind og tager ansvar for og del i ledelse.

Dataindsamling:

Projektets empiriske del vil finde sted i 1-2 danske organisationer, hvor flere casegrupper vil blive fulgt i hver organisation. Det kan være en ledergruppe, en afdeling eller en teamleder med team, dvs. casegrupper på forskellige hierarkiske niveauer. Projektets forløb og dataindsamling aftales nærmere med jer som caseorganisation, men forløber forventeligt i følgende hovedfaser:

1. Præsentation af projektet for casegrupper og indhentning af mundtligt samtykke fra deltagere. Indledende semistrukturerede interviews med lydoptagelse afvikles i hver deltagende casegruppe.
2. Observationer af daglige samspil i casegrupperne, fx på møder og i samtaler, som videooptages så vidt muligt (af forsker eller af casegrupperne selv), hvis alle deltagere giver samtykke hertil.
3. Formidling af projektets første resultater til casegrupperne og en ny runde observationer.
4. Formidling af projektets resultater og analyser med anonymisering af jeres organisation og deltagere.

Hvad får vi ud af at deltage?

Ved at deltage i projektet får I på tæt hold undersøgt jeres praksis og viden om, hvad I som ledere gør der kan forstærke eller modvirke proaktivitet og medlederskab i hverdagen. Undervejs i projektperioden vil I blive præsenteret for og kunne indgå i dialog med forsker omkring de foreløbige resultater.

Kontaktoplysninger

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CBS COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

UKON HUMAN RESULTS

Participant information, second round of data collection (in Danish)

Information forud for deltagelse i erhvervsph.d.-projekt, dataindsamling efteråret 2023

Leadership for innovation – enabling proactivity and shared leadership

Original titel

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Projektet undersøger

- hvordan proaktivitet og medlederskab forhandles i daglige samspil mellem ledere og specialister
- ledere og specialisters personlige erfaringer med, hvad der understøtter og modvirker proaktivitet og medlederskab

Dataindsamling:

Projektets empiriske del finder sted i to danske organisationer med to runder af dataindsamling, hvoraf den første er afviklet og den anden er forestående:

1. Observationer med videooptagelse på ledelses- og teammøder i organisationerne i forår-sommer 2022. Videooptagelserne blev analyseret for at undersøge, hvordan initiativ og handling forhandles.

   Efter første dataindsamling afholdtes et pitstop/refleksionsmøde, hvor udvalgte optagelser og begyndende analyser blev delt og diskuteret med deltagerne i de forskellige casegrupper.

2. Supplerende observationer med videooptagelse på møder samt 15-20 lydoptagede interviews af ledere og specialister med centrale tværgående roller i efteråret 2023. Interviewene undersøger deltagernes oplevelser af, hvad der understøtter og modvirker proaktivitet og medlederskab.

   Efter anden runde dataindsamling afholdes et afsluttende pitstop/refleksionsmøde med forsker omkring begyndende analyser af mønstre på tværs af interviewene.

Hvad får vi ud af at deltage?

Ved at deltage i projektet får I på tæt hold undersøgt jeres praksis og viden om, hvad der medvirker og modvirker til proaktivitet og medlederskab i hverdagen. Undervejs i projektperioden vil I blive præsenteret for og kunne indgå i dialog med forsker omkring de foreløbige resultater.

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CBS COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

UKON HUMAN RESULTS

Interview guide from interviews with employees in the Help (in Danish, anonymized)

INTERVIEWGUIDE – THE HELP

Interviewet handler om dine erfaringer med at arbejde i *The Help*, herunder særligt dine oplevelser af din rolle og hvad initiativ og ansvarstagen betyder i dit arbejde. Det bliver lydoptaget og senere transskriberet, og dit navn vil blive anonymiseret. Interviewet tager max 1 time.

Forskningstema	**Interviewspørgsmål**
Fortællinger om praksis i *The Help* – rolle, forventninger og muligheder i arbejdsvilkår.	Jeg vil rigtigt gerne tages med ind i din hverdag, hvis du vil fortælle om din praksis helt konkret og hverdagsagtigt: • Hvad bruger du typisk din dag på – fx i går? • Hvad har du lavet i denne uge i *The Help*? • Hvad består dine arbejdsopgaver i *The Help* typisk af – og hvem arbejder du sammen med? • Hvad oplever du er let og hvad er svært i dit arbejde og din rolle som den ser ud nu? Fx hvordan virker arbejdet i *The Help* sammen med underviserrollen. • Hvad skal du primært lykkes med i *The Help*? • Hvad forventes af dig fra forskellige sider? (kolleger, ledelse, elever, dig selv) • Hvordan påvirker dit arbejde dine kolleger uden for *The Help*? (Hvad muliggør, hvad begrænser det dem i?) Hvordan samarbejder / taler I om det? • Hvordan vurderer du hvad du skal bruge din tid og energi på i *The Help*– hvordan taler I evt. om hvad der skal gøres og prioriteres? (kolleger, leder, elever) • Hvor meget frihed har du til at bestemme hvad du gør i dit arbejde? Og hvordan bruger du den frihed?
Personlige oplevelser med initiativ og hvordan det bliver fremmet / hæmmet i *The Help* og organisationen mere generelt.	• Hvem tager (typisk) initiativer til noget i *The Help*? • Hvordan gør man det – går man bare i gang? • Kan man gøre noget på egen hånd – eller hvem snakker man med for at få en idé til at flyve? • Fortæl mig om et initiativ du eller en anden har taget til at gøre noget nyt/anderledes. Hvad gik idéen ud på? Hvordan opstod den? Hvordan kom du / I i gang med at gøre noget? Hvad skete der med det over tid? • Hvordan oplever du, der tages imod initiativer (i *The Help*, kolleger uden for *The Help*, leder, elever)? • Har du oplevet at støde ind i noget, strukturer eller lign. som gør det svært at tage initiativ til noget? • Hvad oplever du omvendt fremmer initiativer? • Hvis du skal sige noget positivt eller negativt ift. selv at skulle tage initiativer i *The Help*, hvad er det så?

	• Hvilke muligheder og dilemmaer er der eventuelt forbundet med det at tage initiativ for dig?
Personlige oplevelser med anerkendelse og ansvar ift. initiativer	• Hvem har blik for det, du gør og hvordan det virker? • Sidste gang du fik anerkendelse, hvad var det så for? Og fra hvem? • Hvordan taler I i *The Help* om virkningerne af forskellige indsatser og initiativer der tages? • Hvem står til ansvar for om noget lykkes eller ej? • Hvordan håndterer og taler I om det, der ikke virker eller fejler? Kan du give et konkret eksempel (ikke kun på hvordan I taler om det, men hvad oplever du) • Hvad betyder det for dig at tage ansvar på den måde, du beskriver her? • Hvad driver dig til at tage ansvar for opgaver og initiativer i *The Help*, du kunne have ladt være med? • Hvad gør det svært at tage ansvar? • Hvilke dilemmaer er der eventuelt forbundet med ansvar i dit arbejde for dig?
Fortællinger om projektet *The Help* mere bredt – hvordan er det som struktur rettet mod initiativ og ansvarstagen? Kobling til andre strukturer som muliggør/begrænser *The Help*s funktion.	• Hvad er baggrunden for og formålet med *The Help*? • Hvorfor ville du gerne arbejde her? Hvad fik du at vide om din rolle og forventninger til dig, da du startede? • Hvordan relaterer *The Help* sig til jeres strategi i din oplevelse? Samarbejdsflader ml. ledelsen og jer, Fx hvem kommunikerer hvad ud i organisationen? • Hvordan har *The Help* og arbejdet i *The Help* udviklet sig over tid? • Hvad er særligt ved at være en del af *The Help*? • Hvordan forstår du jeres opgave og funktion ift. resten af organisationen? • Hvordan ligner *The Help* andre strukturer og indsatser i organisationen? Hvordan adskiller det sig? • Hvordan fungerer det med at have en koordinator på *The Help*? Hvad bruger du koordinatoren til (vs. din leder)? • Andet omkring *The Help* og dets rolle i organisationen?
Afrunding	• Er der andet, du kunne tænke dig at komme ind på? • Tak for din tid!

Interview guide from interviews with managers (in Danish, anonymized)

INTERVIEWGUIDE – LEDERINTERVIEWS

Oplevelser med forhandling af ansvar og initiativ på mødet:

- Hvad oplevede du på mødet i dag?
- Hvad var dine overvejelser da du/x gjorde x?
- Hvad opfattede du som problemet I talte om? Var I enige om det?
- Hvordan var dit ejerskab til x?
- Oplevede du forskellige interesser/holdninger i spil og hvordan?
- Var der noget, du var opmærksom på ikke at sige eller gøre?
- Hvordan kan det være?
  ... (flere spørgsmål afhængigt af hvad der konkret har udspillet sig)
- Hvad oplever du, I blev enige om – hvem gør hvad herfra?

Oplevelser med forhandling af ansvar og initiativ på tværs af ledelsesmøder:

- Hvordan ligner / adskiller det vi så i dag ift. hvad du oplever på jeres møder i øvrigt?
- Hvad bruger I jeres møder på?
- Hvordan arbejder I med opdukkende problemstillinger? Kan du give et konkret eksempel?
- Hvem tager typisk initiativ og ansvar for noget I taler om? Hvad gør I andre?
- Fortæl mig om et initiativ du eller en anden har taget til at gøre noget nyt/anderledes. Hvad gik idéen ud på? Hvordan opstod den? Hvordan kom du / I i gang med at gøre noget? Hvad skete der med det over tid?
- Hvordan bliver initiativer, og at nogen tager teten for noget, modtaget på jeres møder? Hvad bliver man typisk anerkendt for i gruppen?
- Hvad sker der med det, der er nogen der løber med?
- Hvilken rolle tager du typisk på jeres møder? Hvilke muligheder og begrænsninger giver det for dig?
- Hvordan afklarer I hvem, der skal løbe med hvad? Hvad er i dit perspektiv i spil, når I skal finde ud af det?
- Hvordan ender det på den måde – hvad sker der, og hvad sker der så?

Praksisfortællinger om ansvar og initiativ i organisationen:

- Fortæl mig om din hverdag – en almindelig dag hos dig? Hvad gør du? Hvad sker der?
- Hvor kan man se initiativ og ansvarstagen hos i hverdagen? Kan du give konkrete eksempler?
- Fortæl mig om et initiativ du eller en anden har taget til at gøre noget nyt/anderledes. Hvad gik idéen ud på? Hvordan opstod den? Hvordan kom du / I i gang med at gøre noget? Hvad skete der med det over tid?
- Hvor og hvordan kan det være svært? Giv gerne ex.

- Hvordan bliver initiativer og at nogen tager teten for noget modtaget?
- Hvordan kræver det din energi og arbejde fra dig at muliggøre initiativ og ansvarstagen fra andre? Hvornår muliggør du det i løbet af dagen i samspil med andre? Giv gerne ex.
- Hvad oplever du fremmer initiativ for tværgående problemstillinger hos dig selv? Og hæmmer det? Kan du give et konkret ex.
- Hvordan spiller kultur ind ift. initiativ og ansvarstagen rundt i organisationen?
- Hvilke strukturer (fx arbejdsgrupper, møder osv.) kan være med til at muliggøre det? Hvilke kan være med til at gøre det svært?
- Hvad med en struktur som *The Help*? Hvad er baggrunden for og formålet med *The Help*? Hvad er din rolle i det?
- Hvordan ser du dens funktion ift. resten af organisationen?
- Hvordan ligner *The Help* andre strukturer og indsatser i organisationen? Hvordan adskiller det sig?
- Andet omkring *The Help* og dets rolle i organisationen?