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SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Department of Business Administration
Management

Shared Leadership as a Future Leadership Style

- will the idea of the traditional top-down manager
be an obstacle?

Master Thesis
Management
Autumn 2008

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Abstract

Leadership has always attracted human beings. In this thesis we identify the traditional top-down single leadership as a powerful norm, influencing every leader. With this assumption in mind we have chosen to conduct a literature review where we examine the concept of shared leadership on two levels in order to evaluate the possibilities for the concept to become a new leadership norm. First, we make an overview of 18 articles and four books in the field. We explore the historical origins of the concept, different definitions, requirements and difficulties of shared leadership. We find that increased complexity and the emergence of knowledge organizations are factors that contribute to the development of shared leadership, while the large amount of prerequisites that have to be fulfilled is an obstacle. We have categorized the prerequisites into three groups; person-related, structural and selection-related, where the personal aspects seem to be the most important to manage a successful shared leadership. Second, we analyze the findings about shared leadership in terms of institutional theory. We state that leadership is an area dependent of norms and the institutional environment. Furthermore we emphasize the difference between what people say and what they do and explore the notion of the traditional top-down single leaders as ‘the real leader’. We find that there is a prevailing idea that leaders of tomorrow will not agree with all the demands that yesterday’s lonely leaders experienced. We state that the existing norm of the single leadership is strong and investigate how that norm can be changed and expanded in favor of the development and existence of shared leadership. We present four different cases of how shared leadership can be espoused and used in organizations and point out the fact that it does not have to be legitimate to be used. In the future, we predict that shared leadership will exist side by side with the traditional leadership style.

Thanks

We would like to thank our tutor Gill Widell for her support, guidance and opinions. We also want to thank our opponents and Svante Leijon for taking time to read our thesis and giving us constructive feedback. Thanks to our families and close friends for being supportive during our work with this thesis.

Finally, we want to thank each other for discussion, encouragement, cooperation, taking time and friendship. We have shared the leadership during the creation of this thesis in an equal way, and this has encouraged us to believe in shared leadership.

Göteborg 23 January 2009

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

During our time at the university, our interest for leadership has been growing. We have realized that no recipe book in the world can help a leader who doesn't know what he or she believes in. In order to become a good leader, it is necessary to reflect and learn continuously. We have also realized that leadership is a theme that has always been attracting human beings. As early as in the 1500s, Machiavelli wrote his book of leadership advice to the emperor Lorenzo de Medici, but issues about power and rationality have always been central in human societies.

Of special interest to us, as potential leaders of tomorrow, is of course the development of leadership into the future. A relatively new, and emerging, concept is the concept of shared leadership. Many researchers argue that shared leadership will gain more importance in the future, and it is a popular theme to research.

When we think about shared leadership, associations to sharing experiences and responsibility awaken positive feelings, and this is a reason why we think that shared leadership as a concept is attractive. Despite its popularity the concept is yet rather unexplored. We would like to contribute to the research on shared leadership by collecting and summarizing what has yet been written in the field, including its difficulties and disadvantages. We also want to address the question about why such an attractive leadership concept is not universally implemented.

1.2 Background

“He is typically a male. He is said to be a prima donna. He thinks he knows everything. He wants only obedience, not disagreement, from his subordinates. He is a tough, masculine guy who likes to throw his weight around. He is a loner who works only as an individual and disparages the idea of teamwork. He has technical skills but no people skills. He does not listen to others or give them any useful information. He has not respect for the abilities of his subordinates. He makes all the decisions himself. He does not grow; he is static and unchanging. Even seemingly desirable leadership attributes, such as independence, are treated as undesirable on the grounds, for instance, that independence precludes working with others.”

Locke (2003:272), on the notion of the traditional top-down leader

The traditional view of leadership is based on a vertical top-down relationship between the (single) leader and the led or subordinates (Pearce & Conger, 2003). The view of top-down command and control leadership has its roots from the Industrial Revolution. In the early 1800s command and control were important components of leadership and Jean Baptist Say proclaimed that “*entrepreneurs must be capable of supervision and administration*” (Pearce & Manz 2005:130). The management and leadership literature was first shaped by the emerging railroad industry. The railroad development was conducted on a large scale with a large number of employees and there was a need of a system that could coordinate and control the organization.

In the beginning of the 20th century management and leadership developed into “scientific management”, an idea based on that workers can be scientifically observed concerned with developing optimal routines in order to achieve an efficient production. An important aspect in the

scientific management is the separation between the manager's and the workers' responsibility. The manager's responsibility is to control and the workers to follow the directions. The thought of subordinates having any role in leadership was unthinkable in the 1800s. (Pearce and Manz, 2005)

To use Mintzberg's (1983:163,187) terms, the superior coordinating principle was standardization of work processes, combined with direct supervision when needed. Running a company as a machine bureaucracy may be well effective, but only as long as the environment is stable and simple and does not demand any adaptation of the organization. Pearce and Manz (2005:131) along with Mintzberg (1983:187) state that the ideas of the top-down thinking to a large extent still remain today. Even in types of leadership as visionary, charismatic and transformational, the main focus is that thinking and decision making is performed by the leader.

During the latest 30 years a shift has been observed in the area of leadership. Heenan & Bennis (1999) have studied several cases of what they call co-leadership. The phenomenon of shared leadership is however not new, according to Sally (2002) the Republican Rome had a system of shared leadership that lasted for more than four centuries.

Greenberg and Walt (2001) mean that shared leadership is the future model of leadership because there will be greater demands on the leadership that not one individual can be able to cope with alone. Decision making is getting more complex, and as Mintzberg (1983:138) states: "*The more complex the environment, the more decentralized the structure.*". More people will have to be engaged in the decisions, and neither are there any easy answers (as if it ever were!). Mintzberg (1983:140) further reasons that given a complex environment that also is stable; the organization is likely to choose standardization of skills as coordination mechanism, i.e. they employ people that are well educated and trained for handling situations that may occur. But, and this is a more likely scenario, if the environment is not just complex, but also dynamic (i.e. changing), the best coordinating principle would be mutual adjustment, which is what co-leaders strive towards (at least according to Sally (2002)).

1.3 Problem analysis

The traditional top-down leadership is a leadership style that has dominated the leadership field. However, there are many theories concerning different forms of collective leadership, for example theories about shared leadership, co-leadership, distributed leadership, team leadership and small numbers at the top (Backström, Granberg & Wilhelmson 2008). Döös, Hanson, Backström, Wilhelmson and Hemborg (2005) have made a survey concerning shared leadership in the Swedish working society and have mapped its occurrence and the managers' attitude towards it, and argue that the phenomenon is quite common. However a substantial difficulty of their research was the diversity of ideas of what shared leadership is among their respondents, which makes their results able to question.

At first sight, the difficulties of the shared leadership research area obviously seem to be lack of common definitions. Lack of common definitions is however not unusual in the field of leadership, and it might also be a sign of that the area is multifaceted and ambiguous. Jackson and Parry (2008:85) state that shared leadership contribute to the leadership literature, but that there is a lack of empirical analysis. Though, when penetrating the area more thoroughly we think that a problem for the idea of shared leadership also is the lack of willingness to share the power.

Unwillingness to share the power can be connected to the myth of the traditional single leader, which can be viewed as a formal structure arisen as a reflection of a rationalized myth (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). If the concept of shared leadership deviates too much from the institution of what a leader should be, it is not strange if it takes time for it to be generally accepted. In the institutional environment, inertia is a natural effect since actors strive to be similar to each other, which DiMaggio and Powell (1983) label isomorphism.

Is it possible to change the norm, i.e. can shared leadership compete with the traditional view of single top-down leadership? We can see at least three possible scenarios, where the first one is that shared leadership is a short-lived fad that will bloom up and disappear within a short timespan. The second possibility is that shared leadership substitutes the traditional top-down leadership. The third alternative is that shared leadership will exist side by side with the traditional leadership.

However, we believe that not only norms influence the emergence of shared leadership, but also the possibilities to practice shared leadership in the everyday leading life. Leaders that share leadership will probably need other capabilities than those who conduct traditional single leadership, such as collaboration skills, prestigelessness and the actual will to share the power. We want to explore the practical requirements to successful shared leadership and if some types of organization are better suited for shared leadership than others.

1.4 Purpose

Our purpose with this master thesis is to investigate the concept of shared leadership and examine the practical requirements and prerequisites that have to be fulfilled in order to achieve a functioning shared leadership as well as evaluating the possibilities for the concept to become a new norm. In order to do this we try to achieve an understanding of the institutional environment concerning leadership and to explore how norms change.

1.5 Disposition

Our work with this thesis can be seen as divided into two main phases. In order to make the presentation of our ideas as intuitive and natural as possible, we have chosen to let the disposition of the thesis mirror our working stages. Even before the first phase started, we had to create some kind of idea about the field and about possible questions. This is represented by our Introduction chapter, which is intended to introduce the reader into the area and into the questions and problems we will face throughout the text. In the Introduction chapter we also state our purpose. The next thing we had to do, still at an early stage, was to decide how and where to search for literature and what to look for and how to analyze it. In the second chapter, Method, we ventilate the considerations and decisions made during this stage.

Then the first main phase took place, namely the search for information about shared leadership and an image of the concept and the field started to take form in our minds. In the third chapter, The concept of Shared Leadership we give the reader the result of our searching and studying of the literature on shared leadership. We try to cover the emergence of shared leadership as a concept, different definitions, the two special cases of shared leadership which we have identified during the work, prerequisites for a successful shared leadership, whether some organization types are better suited than others for shared leadership, as well as paradoxes and difficulties of the concept

presented in the literature. We sum up with a conclusion of the findings. After reading the third chapter the reader should have quite a good view of how shared leadership is presented in the literature.

Chapter four, Leadership norms, represents the second main phase of our work with this thesis, namely the analyzing stage. We have chosen to present the theories used to analyze the material from chapter three together with the analysis. This is mainly due to pedagogical reasons since we believe that the reader will benefit much more from the explanations of the theories if the theories are used immediately. Another, perhaps more common, way of doing this is to start the thesis with presenting the theories, then present the material and end with the analysis. Even though this may be more systematic, we worry about that the reader will be so bored from reading theories without any connection to the actual thesis that he or she perhaps stops reading. Consequently, we give you the theories and the analysis in the same chapter.

Finally, in chapter five, we conclude our findings and analysis with the Conclusion.

2 Method

2.1 Choice of method

To fulfill our purpose we needed to achieve an understanding of the current research on the concept of shared leadership. We were afraid that an empirical study would not give us the broad perspective we wanted to reach. We found rather much written in the area, but yet no overview seemed to be done. We found different possible perspectives and approaches to the concept, e.g. gender, work-life balance, decision making and future leadership. Out of these perspectives, the focus on future leadership interested us in particular. We wanted to explore the possibilities for shared leadership to become an accepted leadership style in the future. In order to do this we needed to achieve an understanding of the history and origins of shared leadership. This is why we have chosen to make a literature review that summarize the findings of the research in the field. However, we do not merely want to make a literature review, we also want to go one step further and analyze the concept of shared leadership in order to understand the mechanisms behind the emergence of it and also to predict its future.

2.2 Search method

To find literature about shared leadership, we have utilized databases in the business administration field available through the library of Göteborg university, such as Business Source Premier, JSTOR, Academic Search Elite, Emerald and Scopus. We have also carefully studied the reference lists from articles and books that we considered relevant to our thesis, in order to find more literature. In some cases we browsed specific journals which seemed to cover topics interesting to us, and we also did follow-ups on interesting authors. Beside this, searching on Google, GUNDA and LIBRIS have provided us with additional literature.

We discussed which search words would be relevant to our search and started off with ‘shared leadership’, which resulted in hits from a large range of contexts. We also realized that it was not the only term for the phenomenon we wanted to investigate. Soon we employed ‘co-leadership’ and ‘co-CEOship’ as search words, which we at first considered as having the same meaning and being interchangeable. Later on, we understood that there do exist differences between the meanings of the words, but that it was possible to find material concerning the same phenomenon even though they labeled it differently. Additional search words have been ‘distributed leadership’ and ‘collective leadership’, which seem to refer to a broader area yet connected to shared leadership.

Since our searching generated such a broad range of hits, we needed to consider whether the hits were relevant. Therefore, we decided that an article or book had to fulfill one criterion to be included in our study, namely that it should concern leadership in organizations. With this search method we ended up with 18 articles and four books to use as primary literature in our thesis.

To make the concept of shared leadership comprehensible we regarded shared leadership as a general concept with two special cases, namely ‘shared position and shared power’ and ‘cooperation between different positions’. This division is based on our own interpretations of the literature on shared leadership and some of the slight differences in the presentation of the concept that we perceive among the authors. The division is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

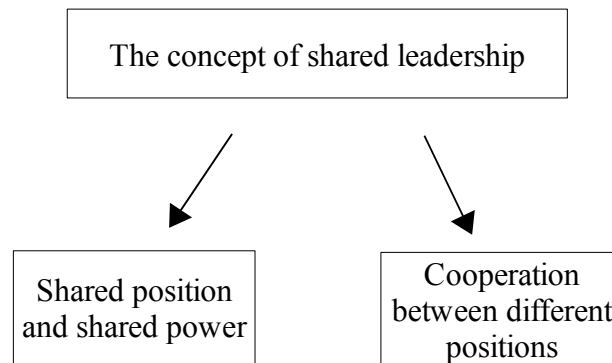


Figure 2.1 Division of the concept

2.3 Reading and analyzing the literature

The aim with this thesis is to present the concept of shared leadership on two levels. First, we want to summarize and categorize the different ideas of shared leadership as they are presented by scholars in the field. Furthermore, on a more abstract level, we want to analyze the ideas of shared leadership using organizational theory concerning institutions, norms, learning and leadership.

Reading the primary literature, we have focused on definitions of shared leadership, in which contexts shared leadership appears, how common it is and if it is more common in certain types of organizations than others. We have also tried to understand how shared leadership is perceived in organizations and if it is seen as a leadership style that gives legitimacy to its performers. When reading the literature we summarized the main content and categorized similar ideas together. This led to the division of the concept into ‘Shared leadership’ as superior and ‘Shared position and shared power’ and ‘Cooperation between different positions’ as two special cases of ‘Shared leadership’, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

To fulfill our purpose we also needed to address the question about why shared leadership is not more common than it is and to evaluate the possibilities for it to become a new norm in contrast to the traditional top-down single leader norm. Shared leadership seems to be an ambiguous concept. On the one hand it exists in every organization, but on the other hand it is not much researched and perhaps not fully accepted as leadership style. To analyze this kind of phenomenon, we find institutional theory relevant, since it covers when one thing is said and another thing is done. We also wanted to explore how the norm of the traditional top-down single leader affects the development and existence of shared leadership, which is tightly connected to institutions. For this purpose, institutional theory is a helpful analyzing tool, since it deals with the mechanisms behind the emergence and change of norms and institutions, and about how institutions work in everyday life.

2.4 Usefulness of the study

With this study we want to contribute to the current leadership research by making an overview of the existing literature on shared leadership. We hope that students that are to write about leadership can find our study useful and also other people interested in the area and particular managers and leaders. We want to give the reader an understanding of what shared leadership is and more important what is behind the image of ‘the real leader’ and what factors creates this image.

3 The concept of Shared Leadership

3.1 Development of the concept

Pearce and Conger (2003:9-13) argue that a multitude of research contributions during the 1970s to the mid-1990s have provided a conceptual grounding for the concept of shared leadership. Among these research contributions they place for example the concepts of participative decision making self-leadership and self-managing work teams. For instance, self leadership refers to the notion that the members in the organization can lead themselves, and important areas of self leadership are self observation, self-goal setting, self reward, rehearsal and self-management of dialogue (Pearce & Manz, 2005:133).

In the middle of the 1990s the research world was, according to Pearce and Conger (2003:13), finally ready to approach the idea of shared leadership, i.e. leadership that is shared not just in an informal and tacit way, but in a formal and explicit way.

Fletcher and Käufer (2003) have studied the emergence of the research on shared leadership and state that three relational shifts can be identified as illustrations of how the concept of shared leadership differs from the traditional view of leadership. The first shift is that the notion of one single leader is starting to decay, and the idea of the organization as an iceberg – with the base even more important than the visible top – has started to prevail. Focus turned from individual achievement to collective achievement and shared responsibility. The second shift includes that leadership is starting to be seen as a social action, where hierarchical ‘top-down’ practices are becoming less important, while the followers are getting new attention and seen as important co-creators of leadership. The third shift is leadership as learning, which implies a collective learning process that concerns the whole group. (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003:22-23)

3.2 Prevalence

There has so far been lack of international as well as Swedish research which measures the prevalence of shared leadership, which has made it difficult to get an overview of its existence (Döös, Hanson, Backstöm, Wilhemson & Hemborg, 2005). However, Döös et.al. have researched 404 Swedish organizations of varying sizes and sectors and have found that 41 percent out of 404 organizations are practicing shared leadership. Shared leadership seems to more common in small private organizations with less than 50 employees. Furthermore, Döös et.al. argue that it is hard to estimate if the number is trustworthy because of the lack of a common definition of what shared leadership is among the managers participating in the study.

3.3 Definitions

Pearce and Conger (2003:1) define the difference between shared leadership and traditional leadership in the following way:

The key distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an appointed or elected leader [...]. Rather leadership is broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralized in hands of a single individual who acts in the role of a superior.

Within this definition, shared leadership is seen as a rather broad concept. Consistently, in their book, the editors Pearce and Conger (2003) include Team Leadership as well as Co-leadership in the concept, and in this thesis we therefore choose to present Shared Leadership as superordinated to ‘Shared Position and Shared Power’ as well as ‘Cooperation between different positions’, which we will present further ahead in the text. Despite this broad and group-related way of viewing shared leadership, Fletcher and Käufer (2003:22) note that research on shared leadership seldom is linked to research on group processes and teamwork, and state that the theory and practice of shared leadership would benefit from such a link.

O’Toole, Galbraith and Lawler (2002) derive the fact that the notion of shared leadership has got very little attention, from that the concept does not fit into the classical, traditional way of viewing leadership, namely as something that one person does. The authors exemplify famous leaders who have had help from other good people, i.e. they wouldn’t have managed to achieve such success without their co-leaders. The authors are concerned by that this single-leader-focus might make us blind to other leadership setting possibilities. (O’Toole et.al. 2002:66)

The most usual argumentation for why shared leadership is emerging, and why it is needed, is that the leader cannot be the expert in teams composed of people with different expert skills. Instead, the team will be more effective if the leadership is distributed and all members are allowed to influence the direction (Burke, Fiore & Salas, 2003:105). Similarly, Pearce & Manz (2004) claims that shared leadership occurring when all members of a team are engaged in the leadership provides a stronger leadership than when relying on one top leader, and that this is particularly needed in knowledge work where the leader is often at significant knowledge disadvantage compared to a team of many members.

According to Cox, Pearce and Perry (2003:52) a team has at least two sources of influence; the appointed or emergent team leader (which traditionally has gained a lot of attention in earlier research) and the team itself (which has gained more attention in recent years). Shared leadership focuses on when the team is exerting influence, but it is not the same as the concept of empowered teams. Shared leadership goes further and has to fulfill three criteria, according to Cox, Pearce and Perry (2003:53): *“First, team members must understand that constructive lateral influence is a standing performance expectation. Second, members must accept responsibility for providing and responding appropriately to constructive leadership from their peers. Third, the team members must develop skills as effective leaders and followers.”* Consequently, shared leadership puts greater demands on the team members’ reflection upon their exertion of influence on the team.

Jackson and Parry (2008) state that co-leadership and distributed leadership challenge the traditional view of leadership and instead of concerning only followers and leaders, leadership is becoming a process between people and makes it possible for all people to be involved despite formal position in leadership.

Alvarez & Svejnova (2005) mean that there are different constellations of roles and relationships at the top. They are focusing on what they call small number at the top. Small number at the top is usually shared between two and four and is a mixture of role separation, role combination and role-sharing among a reduced number of executives. Alvarez & Svejnova (2005) describe that small number at the top can be observed in the film industry where film directors often couple their career with a producer but they also argue that small number at the top can be observed in other

businesses. Leaders in political organizations have shared leadership and the reason for this is the same as for other organizations, that it is not possible for one single person to do everything. Their main argument is that sharing executive roles is useful to increase performance at the top.

Shared leadership is an old phenomenon (see for example Sally (2002) who writes about shared leadership during the Republican Rome), and we assume that it exists in many small businesses, such as family companies and companies where the only employees are the owners. Shared leadership is probably a natural way of arranging the management when two people own and run a business together. As the business grows, other forms of leadership may emerge. However, concerning the articles we have studied for this thesis, none of them address shared leadership in small family businesses, which might have to do with the size of the businesses studied in the articles. Most of our articles concern leadership on top positions in big companies.

3.4 Special cases of shared leadership

We have now given a view of shared leadership in general. There are however two special cases of shared leadership, related to organizational structure, that have to be explained as well, namely Shared position and shared power and Cooperation between different positions. The former refers to when leaders share a formal leading position while the latter refers to when persons of different positions share the power.

3.4.1 Shared position and shared power

Troiano (1999) makes a distinction between co-CEOship and co-leadership, where co-CEOship is when two persons share the CEO position and are equally responsible for the duties connected to that position. Co-leadership is a broader phenomenon where usually one person is the official leader, but shares the responsibilities with one or more other persons. The most usual setting in which co-CEOship occurs is when two companies merge and have to decide who shall be the CEO. In such situations the two CEOs of the merging organizations sometimes share the position, but this is not unproblematic according to Troiano (1999). O'Toole Galbraith and Lawler (2002) agree and state that the reason why co-leadership arises from corporate mergers seldom is successful, is that has been so much competition between the two CEOs that it will become hard for them to cooperate. They are also relative strangers to each other, which also makes cooperation more difficult. Greenberg-Walt and Robertson (2001) describe shared leadership in the highest levels when the responsibility that the CEO have is split between two or more individuals. They present factors that are drivers to shared leadership, of which the main factor is that companies unite and that the CEO positions need to be integrated.

Holmberg and Söderlind (2004), who have experienced sharing a leading position together, define shared leadership as when there are two persons that share the top position, responsibility, working tasks and have equal power. The main presumption for a successful shared leadership according to Holmberg and Söderlind is to have a common basic view and prestigeless trust to each other. Furthermore, they state that it is easier to share the working tasks and the responsibility than the power and that the most important with a successful shared leadership is that the leaders share the power to make decisions within the organization.

Döös and Wilhelmson (2003) also define shared leadership as when two persons in the same position take the same responsibility and have the same power in decision making.

3.4.2 Cooperation between different positions

Heenan and Bennis (1999), who according to Vine et.al. (2008) were the ones who coined the concept of co-leadership, mean that there is a core of co-leaders in every organization who do the work but not get much glory of it. Both Heenan and Bennis and Vine et.al. (1999:340) define co-leadership as “*two leaders in vertically contiguous positions who share the responsibilities of leadership*”. The co-leaders are talented and dedicated people who often are more capable than their superiors and acts as the shadow of the Great Man or Woman. According to Heenan & Bennis co-leadership celebrates not just the few charismatic leaders that are articulating the vision of the organization but those who do the real work. Vine et. al. (2008:339) introduce co-leadership by mentioning famous leaders, and then point out the fact that people seldom know who their Number 2's, Right Hand Men and Women, or more correctly their Co-Leaders are. This implicates that Vine et.al. (2008) have the same view of co-leaders as Heenan and Bennis (1999) have, namely that the co-leaders usually play an important role in the leadership, but are yet seldom explored and investigated by media and scholars.

Pearce and Conger (2003) remind about that the concept of co-leadership was introduced in research as early as in the 1950s, but was initially concerned mainly with group therapy settings, and consider co-leadership as a subordinated concept of shared leadership namely “the two person case”.

In line with many other theorists, Heenan and Bennis as well as Vine et.al. argue that there is a need of re-thinking the traditional concept of leadership since the world has become more complex. The decisions are complex and made more quickly and the CEOs are not able to do everything by themselves. Different great leaders, such as Bill Gates, have co-leaders beside them that play an important part and contribute to greatness in the organization without getting much attention or being well known as leaders in public. Vine et.al. (2008:341) think that the reason why co-leadership improves the leadership is that the leadership tasks of today and the complex environment put great demands on the leaders and that it is easier to manage these demands if the task is shared by two people, i.e. a CEO and a co-CEO, president and co-president and so on.

Heenan and Bennis (1999) state that co-leadership should permeate at every level in every organization. The co-leaders can close the gap between the persons at the top and the rest of the organization. However leaders at the top are still celebrated.

Heenan and Bennis describe that co-leaders choose one of three different career paths to become successful, namely being a *fast-tracker*, a *back-tracker* or an *on-tracker*. A fast-tracker is described as a deputy on the way up, back-trackers as former chiefs who have downshifted and on-trackers as being the adjunct that not necessarily want the top position or were not promoted to it. According to Heenan and Bennis (1999:19) being a co-leader and learn all the skills required is the “surest path” to achieve the top position. Heenan and Bennis question why co-leaders are willing to subordinate their egos and serve the leader in this time when we as humans celebrate the star. They classify co-leaders as followers and give three main reasons that motivates them: *Crusaders*, they serve a noble cause, *confederates*, they serve an exceptional organization and *consort*, they serve an extraordinary person. Two attributes that are important for a great co-leader are courage and creativity. It is important to have the courage to be honest and dare to speak up to people in leading positions and have creativity to look beyond the manual and see what is best for the organization.

3.5 Prerequisites for shared leadership

We will now turn to which prerequisites that according to the literature need to be fulfilled in order to achieve a successful shared leadership. First we look at the requirements for shared leadership. After that we address the question whether certain organization types are better suited than others to host shared leadership, and focus on knowledge work as a form of work that many scholars argue facilitates shared leadership and vice versa. Then we give you the paradoxes and difficulties with the concept of shared leadership as they are presented in the literature.

3.5.1 Requirements for shared leadership

Most theories concerning different forms of shared leadership seem to present some kind of framework for which prerequisites that have to be fulfilled in order to achieve a successful shared leadership. We have identified three major kinds of requirements, and categorize them into person-related, structural and selection-related factors.

Person-related factors

The person-related factors concern the relationship between the two leaders and their personal characteristics, implying that not everyone can share a leadership together. Holmberg and Söderlind (2004), who have experienced shared leadership themselves, state that lack of respect, different goals, unwillingness to share the glory and having different ambitions can ruin a shared leadership. O'Toole et.al. agree with Holmberg and Söderlind, stating that the skills and emotional orientations of the co-leaders should be complimentary. However, O'Toole et.al. mean that co-leaders can be different and compliment each other, in contrast to Holmberg and Söderlind, who for example argue that the co-leaders need to have similar views of people. Heenan and Bennis (1999) argue that a co-leader needs to be creative and to have courage to serve the organization best and to go beyond the manual. People who can both command and follow as the situation requires. Sally (2002) recommends co-leaders to never speak ill of the other and to practice self-denial to a certain extent.

Structural factors

Sally (2002) focuses on structural factors that are likely to contribute to the success of co-leadership. Among the factors can be noticed that co-leaders should both arrive and depart together from the leading position. If one of the leaders leaves, the other one must be exchanged as well. He also states that the possibilities for the co-leaders to ascend to solo leadership should be eliminated, suggesting that it might be desirable for a co-leader to start reigning alone. O'Toole et.al. (2002) state that division of tasks is necessary, but that division of credits is more difficult and even more important. Furthermore, Sally (2002) states that the co-leaders should share office even if they work at different places in the world, and in that case keep an empty desk beside their own for their co-leader to use when visiting. According to Sally this feeling of closeness to the co-leader will facilitate the cooperation.

Selection-related factors

O'Toole et.al. (2002:71) argue, supported by Sally (2002), that co-leaders need to be selected together as a team in order to become successful, and that problems can arise if the co-leadership is emerging from unfavorable conditions, like an acquisition where the CEOs of the two companies are to collaborate. Troiano (1999) is also very skeptical to this kind of co-leadership, which he labels co-CEOship.

In summary; there is a substantial number of factors for co-leaders to pay attention to in order to achieve a successful shared leadership. The researchers have been focusing on different kinds of factors and they seem to agree about that co-leaders must put a lot of effort to make their collaboration work. Respecting each other and never overriding one's co-leader seem to be an overall theme for the advice given in the literature. None of the researchers really addresses the question whether anyone could co-lead with anyone, but considering all of the requirements that are to be fulfilled we get the impression that co-leadership wouldn't work if the co-leaders do not either fit together or are really determined to manage a co-leadership together.

3.5.2 Organization types in general and knowledge work in particular

Shared leadership can be found in many different organizational configurations, such as in family businesses or when two companions own and manage a company together and as a result of mergers and acquisitions. Returning to Mintzberg's (1983) terms and the reasoning presented in our Background, the most prevalent coordinating principle regarding shared leadership is probably mutual adjustment, where people cooperate in a close and bilateral way. This is far from the coordinating principle present in the machine bureaucracy. This implies that organization types where mutual adjustment is usual would be more likely to host shared leadership.

A phenomenon connected to mutual adjustment is *flow*, which Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) define as a “*state of consciousness in which people feel completely involved in an activity to the point that they lose track of time and lose awareness of self, place, and all other details irrelevant to the immediate task at hand*” (Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003:220). When people experience flow, it is usually triggered by interpersonal interaction and there seem to be eight key elements (Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:221-223) that characterize the task people do when experiencing flow, namely: clear goals at every step of the way, immediate feedback to one's actions, balance between challenge and skills, consciousness excludes distractions and irrelevant information, no worry of failure, self-consciousness disappears, sense of time becomes distorted and the activity becomes autotelic (i.e. the task becomes an end in itself).

Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi (2003:229-230) claim that shared leadership promotes flow in a number of ways, e.g. by reducing competition (within the team), decreasing worry of failure and even making the task become autotelic. They then suggest that a workplace environment is likely to promote flow and creativity if six conditions are fulfilled. An organization that values excellence in performance, gives clear goals to the members, provides members with constant and timely feedback, balances challenges and skills, decreases distractions and gives freedom and control to its members, is according to Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi (2003:230-231) likely to also host flow and creativity, and the authors claim that shared leadership is tightly connected to these six factors.

Greenberg-Walt and Robertson (2001) claim that the demand of shared leadership will increase in the future as the knowledge work organization will be more frequent. Pearce and Manz (2005) define knowledge work as “*Work that requires intellectual capital of skilled professionals*”. Furthermore Greenberg-Walt & Robertson state that leaders of knowledge workers must be ready to involve subordinates in the decision making. Knowledge workers are people that know more than their managers and will be hard to keep in the organization because they want challenges and opportunities and will move to the employer that offers them this. Consequently, the traditional top-down leadership will be hard to apply in these organization structures, and future leaders will need

to have the skill of hiring and retaining key talent. Shared leadership may be a one way to help demonstrate this skill.

Consequently, we have several links between shared leadership and knowledge work. First, Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi claim that shared leadership promotes flow, which is an important part of knowledge work. Shared leadership facilitates knowledge work, so to speak. Second, as work tasks and organizations become increasingly complex, Greenberg-Walt and Robertson (accompanied by among others Pearce, Manz, Sims...) state that the need and demand for shared leadership will increase. The traditional vertical leadership is not the most appropriate way to lead knowledge work. To summarize, knowledge work facilitates shared leadership.

3.5.3 Paradoxes of the concept of shared leadership

Although the research and practice of shared leadership in many ways seem to be welcome and appropriate in the leadership discourse of today, Fletcher and Käufer (2003:24-26) identify three paradoxes of the concept. The first paradox is that when organizations want to aim for a flatter, less hierarchical and more adaptive organizational structure, the kind of CEOs they tend to look for to conduct these organizational changes are the typical hierarchical strong single leaders that are well renowned of successful top-down organizational changes.

Fletcher and Käufer's (2003) second paradox is that the stories and narratives in organizations about leadership tend to be about heroic solo leaders that have done great achievements. The stories about the supporting and collaborative shared-leadership achievements tend to be labeled as non-heroic and more or less disappear. The third paradox is that the skills required to achieve a high leading position is often far from the skills required to share leadership, which Fletcher and Käufer exemplify with a CEO who spoke passionately about sharing responsibility and the importance of being a good listener and learn from others. After a pause he added: "*But frankly, I have to tell you, that is not how I got here.*" (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003:26).

3.5.4 Critique towards the concept of shared leadership

O'Toole et.al. don't mean that shared leadership always is better than solo leadership, in fact "*some of the most visible examples of shared leadership have ended in failure*" (O'Toole et.al. 2002:68). The authors answer the question of when two or (or more) leadership heads better than one with: "*when the challenges a corporation faces are so complex that they require a set of skills too broad to be possessed by any one individual.*" (O'Toole et.al. 2002:68)

Although positively directed towards the concept of shared leadership, Conger and Pearce (2003:299) are eager to mention that they do not view shared leadership as the universal solution to any leadership issue or group setting. The authors argue that there do exist some situations when shared leadership is not just non-optimal, but even harmful, e.g. when there is a lack of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to shared leadership, when there is lack of goal alignment between members of the team, when there is lack of goal alignment between the team and the organization, when there is lack of time to develop shared leadership and finally, when there is lack of receptivity to shared leadership. For example, when mentioning lack of knowledge, skills and abilities Conger and Pearce (2003:299) mainly refer to groups which don't have an enough strategic or overall point of view, and rather are too tactic and focused on details, and also groups where "*a critical number of members lack the appropriate leadership competences*" (Conger & Pearce, 2003:299). The question arising in our minds when reading about these limitations is; When *is* shared leadership

workable? If we invert the situations previously mentioned we find that shared leadership is appropriate when there is enough time, receptivity, knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to shared leadership and that the team members as well as the team itself and the organization are united towards a common goal. It is questionable whether all of these conditions are ever fulfilled at the same time in organizations.

Locke (2003) approaches the concept of shared leadership and enters the shared leadership debate with a great deal of skepticism. He thinks that shared leadership is unlikely to work if not combined with vertical leadership (Locke, 2003:273-274), and points out all the conditions that has to be fulfilled for shared leadership to work as a major weakness of the concept. Furthermore, Locke (2003:275-276) questions the existence of true co-CEOs in any longer time-perspective and claims that O'Toole et.al.'s study about people sharing power in the top of organizations firstly is not about true co-CEOs (sharing power and responsibility equally) and secondly in the case there actually were any true co-CEOs that they were probably temporary exceptions.

Locke (2003:278-279) states that some tasks (e.g. vision, core values, choice of members to top management team, structuring & restructuring the organization) should *not* be shared, while some *could* be shared (e.g. selection & training at the lower levels, motivation, team building). His ideal leadership model (Locke 2003:281) is an integrated model; a combination of the shared leadership model and the top-down model, but also containing a bottom-up component, i.e. that the top management is listening carefully to the rest of the organization.

3.6 Summary of findings

We have so far found that the different scholar's are supporters of shared leadership and that they all share the same core value which is that the world is very changeable and complex which demand new leadership styles. It is not enough with what the single leadership offer, there is a need of cooperation, a multiple leadership and team leadership.

We have found that the development of the concept of shared leadership between the 1970 and the mid 1990 has provided a ground of what the concept is today. Shared leadership is a broad concept including different ways of distributing power between leaders and followers. The concept includes everything from two people sharing power, a few people at the top and even entire teams sharing the power. Even though the definitions differ slightly from each other, they all share the idea that there is a need for re-thinking the traditional top-down single leadership, because of increased complexity and new requirements on leaders of tomorrow.

The scholars state that there are many advantages with collective leadership. Döös et.al. (2005) argue that there is not much research made of the prevalence of shared leadership. In their study, Döös et.al. find that shared leadership exists in 41 percent of the organizations, but that it is hard to estimate the validity of their results since the participants all had different views of what shared leadership is.

Early in our study we regarded 'shared leadership' as a general concept with two special cases: 'shared position and shared power' and 'cooperation between different positions'. We did this because we interpreted some of the literature as assuming shared leadership as when two people share both the position, responsibility and power, and some literature as when the people cooperating not necessarily are in the same power position.

We have found that there are three main prerequisites which are based on personal-related factors that include personal feature as willingness and being able to both lead and to follow, structural factors that concern the common departure and arrival of co-leaders and structural arrangements as sharing office, and the last one being selection-related factors, indicating that co-leaders should be selected with the purpose to lead together. Co-leadership stemming from mergers and acquisitions tend to be problematic.

Concerning which type of organization that would be most suitable for shared leadership, the definition of shared leadership implies that it should work in any organization. However, the scholars agree about that knowledge work organizations would be particularly suitable. This is because of the prevalence of flow and need for mutual adjustment in such organizations. The fact that employees in knowledge work organizations tend to be more knowledgeable than their superiors, implies that they need to be more participative in the decision making.

There is not only practical prerequisites and organization type that determines whether the shared leadership will be successful or not. The norm of the single leader is still strong and may shadow shared leadership. Despite all the advantages we have found that shared leadership has, the concept has not gained much attention. The institutional idea of the top down single leader can be a reason why shared leadership do not exist in the same extent as the single leadership. To find out how the existent norms affect leadership and the development of shared leadership we will in the following chapter with help of institutional theory analyze the phenomenon.

4 Analyzing the findings

4.1 Leadership and isomorphism

We have now reached an understanding of the concept of shared leadership. Although shared leadership has its difficulties and obstacles to become a successful leadership form, it still seems as an interesting concept that leaders should consider. Surprisingly, shared leadership doesn't seem to have reached acceptance and attention in accordance with its advantages, and there is also lack of empirical (Jackson & Parry, 2008) as well as theoretical (O'Toole et.al., 2002) studies about it. The phenomenon obviously exists in many organizations (Döös et.al., 2005), but it seems to receive other labels, or perhaps no label at all.

We believe that shared leadership deviates from the idea about how 'real' leaders should be. O'Toole et.al. (2002:65) are thinking in the same direction, stating that there is a near-universal myth about that leadership always is singular and that shared leadership is counterintuitive in relation to the established myth. Leadership is a highly important and legitimacy dependent activity, and if leaders believed that their way of conducting leadership was not a 'real' one, then they would probably try to change it into a more accepted way.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have investigated why organizations become so similar to each other. They argue that different drivers affect organizational change today than in Weber's days and that these drivers create great homogeneity among organizations. The time comes, according to DiMaggio and Powell, when a certain innovation is spread to a degree when it no longer is adopted because of potential performance improvements, but rather because of its provision of legitimacy. DiMaggio and Powell (1983:149) label this homogenization process *isomorphism* and choose to focus on institutional isomorphism (the other type is competitive isomorphism), since it provides good help to understand the politics and ceremony important in modern organizations.

Furthermore DiMaggio and Powell (1983:150) identify three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occur: coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism, and describe how organizations sometimes are more or less forced to carry out a certain change, sometimes do it as a response to uncertainty, and in the form of copying another organization that acts as a role model (even though the role model organization is not aware of the modeling, or perhaps doesn't wish to be a role model). Isomorphism can also be connected to professionalism, where professionals become more and more similar to each other through processes as filtering and socialization. Being similar to other organizations may not give advantages to the organization in the form of increased efficiency or competitiveness, but it may be rewarded in other ways such as making it easier for the organization to transact with other organizations, to attract staff and to be seen as legitimate and trustworthy.

If it is true, as we along with O'Toole et.al. state, that there is a prevailing idea that leadership is singular, then DiMaggio and Powell's reasoning helps us understand why shared leadership is not universally implemented. A concept that has not gained legitimacy is unlikely to be copied to any higher degree. But if it is as researchers (like O'Toole et.al., Döös et.al. and more) state: that shared leadership surely exists, but that it is not being researched to any greater extent and that it seems as it is not fully accepted, then the problem is somewhat different. If a concept is not fully legitimate,

but still is used, then we need some more thoughts to understand why it is so, and in the next section we will address this problem by examining differences in what people say and what they do.

4.2 What they say is not always what they do

As early as in the 16th century, Machiavelli (1532) stated that the difference between how people really live and how they *should* live is big, and that the person more interested in what he/she *should* do than in what he/she really *does*, rather learns to fall, than to succeed. A more recent explanation of the same topic is given by Argyris (1991), who addresses the question why the most successful people seem to be the ones who have the greatest difficulties to learn. These people are used to success but less good at managing failure, rather they tend to slip into defensive reasoning when in a potential learning situation. Argyris explains this by pointing out the difference between espoused theory and theory-in-use, where espoused theory is what the person thinks is important and would tell if asked about how things should be. Theory-in-use, on the other hand, is the logic according to which the person actually acts, and doesn't have to have anything to do with the espoused theory. By helping people to become aware of these differences and to dare to discuss them, defensive behavior can be decreased.

Tyrstrup (2005) provides us with an illustration of the thoughts from Machiavelli and Argyris presented above. In his book, Tyrstrup (2005:27-29) describes that he while giving lectures on leadership in management courses usually asks the participants to give personal examples about leadership. What is striking about the stories told by the participants is that they are very seldom personal, but rather usually about some famous and distant leader, like Nelson Mandela or Ingvar Kamprad. Tyrstrup states that people, when thinking about leadership, tend to think about extraordinary persons who during extraordinary conditions have performed extraordinary actions. Such persons should be considered as exceptions, but since they are mentioned when asked about typical leadership examples, they are probably also viewed as role models or norms. Using Argyris terms, Tyrstrups participants probably gave air to their espoused theories. Fletcher's and Käufer's example of a CEO (see section 3.5.3. in this thesis), who spoke in an engaged way about the advantages of shared leadership, but after a while admitted that he actually hadn't acted in that way to achieve his current position, also touches this theme. Could this be a clue to why shared leadership has not yet become the number one leadership practice of the world? People are usually very positive about it, but when it comes to action the norm seems to be something else. And in some cases the scene seems to be the opposite: shared leadership exists in almost every organization (Döös et.al., 2005), but is not gaining much attention when it comes to research (O'Toole et.al., 2002).

In order to further analyze the concept of shared leadership and to compare it to the established ideas, we need to examine how the norm (or theory-in-use) of leadership looks like, i.e. how a 'real' leader should be.

4.3 The 'real' leader

We began this thesis with a citation from Locke (2003:272), who described the traditional top-down leader in a rather exaggerated, but humorous way. We have put quotation marks around 'real' in the topic above to make it clear that we speak about the idea of what is real, i.e. an idea that may often be taken for granted, but still merely is an idea. Berger and Luckmann (1966:14-15) have a similar,

but more thorough, reasoning about quotation marks and reality, distinguishing between the man on the street, the philosopher and the sociologist, stating that the sociologist will never get rid of the quotation marks even if he or she omits them in text. This means that sociology is about ideas and ‘realities’, where the truth of the ideas is less important than the impact they have on society. We don’t state that there is only one view of how a ‘real’ leader should be, but we want to emphasize one of the ideas that we understand as having had a great impact on today’s society.

The ‘real’ leader is associated with the traditional top down heroic leadership. There is one strong and independent leader who is to be followed and this is also what the most of the literature within the leadership field is addressing. Kallifatides (2001), Tyrstrup (2005) and Holgersson (2005) are describing a similar type of leader that is not far away from Locke’s description. The norm of a leader is in general a tough man on his own.

Kallifatides (2001) has studied a program in leadership development which is showing the importance for a leader of being tough and made of the right stuff. Today’s managers, argues Kallifatides, have access to four images which are “being made of the right stuff, the calculating expert, the father, and being chosen by someone”. Tyrstrup (2005) describes that the idea of leadership is viewed as an individual phenomenon, as something that a single person does. Holgersson’s (2005) empirical study of recruitment of top executives shows that the CEOs in Sweden is a rather homogeneous group. A typical Swedish CEO is in general a 50 years old man, with a middle class background who has studied engineering or business at one of the elite schools and universities in Sweden.

Apparently, there seems to be a more or less common image of the ‘real leader’, or at least the typical manager, as being a middle-aged man, with attributes as mentioned above, performing management tasks on his own, i.e. not sharing the leadership in terms of the focus of this thesis. How to interpret this? Will this image be an obstacle for shared leadership as a concept to be more widely accepted and used? With Argyris’ ideas about differences between theory-in-use and espoused theory in mind, we can conclude that it does not necessarily need to be so. People honestly state one thing, and then act in a completely different way. Nevertheless, norms and ideas are important, and do affect our behavior and ways of viewing the world.

We will continue examining the institutional environment around leadership, but from a somewhat different angle. The fact that shared leadership can relieve leaders on a personal level is an issue that has not been much evaluated so far in this thesis. We have mentioned that shared leadership can be a good method when the leadership tasks reach such high degree of complexity that it is too difficult for one individual to handle, but shared leadership can of course also make the leadership duties easier to carry on other areas as well, which we will address in the next section.

4.4 Leaders’ needs

There is a prevailing idea that leaders’ of tomorrow will not accept the conditions of today’s leadership. They will not be willing to sacrifice quality time, family and other values to the same extent as traditional leaders do (Trollestad 2003). Can shared leadership be a possible solution to fulfill leaders’ personal needs?

In order to get an understanding of leaders’ needs, Trollestad (2003) has made interviews with 15 Swedish CEOs, which most of them have a traditional top down leadership style, about what

characteristics they believe a good leader has and how they describe themselves as leaders. Most of them agreed that a good leader is a mature, stable and balanced person and this is also how they interpret themselves to be. The reality though describes a different side which shows that they struggle with lack of time, stress and owner expectations. They find it problematic to get time for what they believe is important in life such as family and time for reflection.

The leaders that Trollestad has interviewed mean that the expectations of the young people are growing and the coming generation will demand different considerations to the individual situation. The fact that Trollestad has found that single leaders have a need of more time for reflection and what they perceive is important in life could be an opportunity for shared leadership to become an accepted concept. Shared leadership could provide a feeling of not being alone and possibilities to handle stress and lack of time in a better way.

Consequently, shared leadership can be a contributing factor to fulfill leaders needs. However shared leadership is not yet accepted to the same extent as the traditional top-down single leadership. If shared leadership is to be used one major obstacle has to be overcome, namely the institutional norm of leaders on their own. Assuming that the image of a 'real leader' is someone who doesn't share the leadership, and that this idea prevents shared leadership from becoming an accepted way of performing leadership – what would be required to change that norm? This takes us to the question about how norms emerge and change over time.

4.5 The creation and transfer of institutions

In their classical work, Berger and Luckmann (1966) start off from everyday life to examine how 'reality' is created and knowledge is taken for granted as if it was true through social construction. This is relevant to study in order to get a better understanding of how the ideas about how a leader should be have been developed and how they may be changed. The main point of interest is not whether the content of the ideas about how leaders should be is true or not. Answering that question is beyond the scope of this thesis, so we instead choose to study the rise, development and change of ideas, which – true or not – obviously have a great impact on our society.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe how language makes subjective and individual experiences objective and possible to distribute or transfer to other people. In this way language also makes the experiences less personal and more anonymous. We can consider this as a clue to why espoused theory and theory-in-use usually differs from each other. It is viable to presume that when experiences are transferred to language and becoming less personal, a possible space between what people say (which is connected to language) and what they do (which is more connected to the person) may occur. The power of language is strong, "*It can,*" as Berger and Luckmann (1966:53) states: "*therefore, be said that language makes 'more real' my subjectivity not only to my conversation but also to myself.*" The ability of language to assign experiences to certain categories, or *typify* experiences, anonymizes also in the sense that it makes it possible to assume that anyone belonging to the category in question could experience the same. By labeling (or typifying) an experience, for example stress before an exam, as a typical student experience, the experience is no longer only mine – I can assume that most students experience stress before an exam now and then, and this is a way for me to make sense of it. To typify behaviors and phenomena saves time and effort, makes the world predictable, and is the start of institutionalization. Institutionalization is thus much about habits, and getting used to things to an extent where we take them for granted.

Having emphasized the power of language in the creation of institutions, we then turn to what an institution really is. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) an institution implies that certain actors will perform certain actions. The institution channels human behavior in one specific direction as if it was the only one, despite the fact that numerous ways of behaving exist. In societies, different forms of social control exist, like punishments for people breaking the law. Berger and Luckmann (1966:73) argue that the institution in itself is stronger than any societal social control, and that the social control mechanisms “*are required only in so far as the processes of institutionalization are less than completely successful*”.

Even more interesting to study is what happens when a new generation (i.e. a people that haven't experienced the creation of the institutions) is introduced to the existing institutions. One could believe that these 'new' people would carefully evaluate the prevailing institutions in order to find out whether they are plausible enough to adopt, but according to Berger and Luckmann, the case is rather that the institutions gain an even stronger position, and will be perceived as an objective fact – a truth – by the new generation. This could explain the common sense experience that it usually is the youngest who are the most conservative. History and a whole world of institutions are there before the birth of an individual, and he or she will just be confronted with them, as undeniable facts, impossible to wish away.

4.6 Shared leadership in the future

Turning back to shared leadership, we have already stated that the future probably will imply a larger degree of knowledge work, which will call for a leadership style closer to shared leadership than the traditional single leadership. The personal needs of leaders may also be better fulfilled by shared leadership, and we have seen that shared leadership already exists in many organizations. But, given that shared leadership may be more functionally and practically viable than the traditional style in the future, will the norm be changeable enough to allow the new leadership to emerge? What will happen when a new generation of leaders comes and gains more and more responsibility in our organizations. A new generation that has not seen how the old norms were created. Every institution has its history, and the norm of the traditional single leader surely has one too, but one that the new generation does not know. What the new generation has is a set of ideas, which once upon a time probably was highly appropriate, and today is viewed as something taken for granted.

It sounds as if this story might end in an unfavorable way for the concept of shared leadership. Luckily, Berger and Luckmann (1966:124) remind us that the transmission of institutions between generations never is completely successful, and that institutions consequently can change. However, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that the strength of the institutional environment and the importance of legitimacy contribute to the performance of ceremonial actions, that may not be defensible in terms of efficiency, but allows organizations to escape from encountering the gap between the operational and institutional realities. This phenomenon is called decoupling and implies that an organization may well deviate from the institutional environment in its actions, as long as the 'official' version of the organization is appropriate. Consequently, assuming that shared leadership is not legitimate enough, shared leadership could be practiced as long as it is not outspoken. This seems to be the case according to Pearce and Manz (2005), who state that shared leadership is present in every organization. On the other hand, in case that shared leadership would

gain legitimacy, organizations may assume it as a leadership practice in a ceremonial way, but continue as usual (i.e. with traditional single leadership) on the operating level, in accordance with the phenomenon of decoupling.

As we can see, it is possible to argue for four different cases. First we have the case when shared leadership has not gained legitimacy and therefore companies do not want to practice it. Second, we have the case that shared leadership still has not gained any legitimacy, but companies practice the concept anyway, even though they by the mechanism of decoupling do not espouse that they actually practice shared leadership. A third case is when shared leadership has gained legitimacy, but is due to slow organizational structures or other possible reasons not practiced in organizations. Yet organizations may espouse that they have shared leadership in order to benefit from the legitimacy associated with the concept. The fourth and last case would then be when shared leadership has gained legitimacy and is practiced by organizations. These four cases are illustrated in the figure 4.1 below.

	Not legitimate	Legitimate
Not practiced	Not espoused and not used	Espoused but not used
Practiced	Not espoused, but used	Espoused, and used

Figure 4.1 Four cases of how shared leadership can be espoused and used

The above reasoning implies that a shift in the norm of how a real leader should be not necessarily need to occur in order for shared leadership to be practiced. Yet, as we have seen in this thesis, if shared leadership are to become a new norm, institutional change would probably need to happen. In this context it feels relevant to write a few words about institutional change. How do institutions and norms change? We have many examples of that change really do occur, like the fact that women of today both vote and work, that slavery has ended and that homosexuality no longer is seen as a disease. But the question is how the change takes place. Does it happen with a new generation, i.e. with an insufficient transfer of the old norms? Or are the old norms replaced by new, and more legitimate ideas and norms? Or are the norms simply being modified? The answer is probably that all of these three processes, and perhaps even more processes that we have not mentioned here, happen at the same time, which makes it difficult to trace changes in the institutional environment.

Concerning shared leadership, we believe that the concept has good chances to achieve increased importance. We base this on the fact that it is an attractive concept that, despite the large amount of requirements needed to be fulfilled to succeed, has a potential to help leaders to perform their tasks. Beside these practical reasons, we can also see potential factors that may contribute to institutional change. For example, we face a generational shift in many organizations, with skilled and responsible-taking people born in the 1940s retiring, implying that norms will have to be transferred

to a new generation of leaders. This may not imply that the norms will change, but a transfer is still a potential opportunity for change, since norms seldom are completely transferred from one generation to another. We also face economic depression as a result of the recent financial crisis. Hard times often mean good times for change. Consequently, there are opportunities both for an insufficient transfer of norms, replacement of norms, and for modification of existing norms, which means that changes in the institutional environment in favor of shared leadership might be expected.

5 Conclusion

We have evaluated theories about shared leadership and have achieved an understanding of the concept and the different variations of it. We have realized that the research field of shared leadership is multifaceted and have for the purpose of this overview divided the concept into to subgroups. Sharing leadership in terms of ‘shared power and shared position’ is probably less prevalent than ‘cooperation between different positions’, since we believe that more arrangements have to be done in the case when two people share a leading position. Most of the researchers are enthusiastic about the concept, and this may of course be due to our choice of theorists to read, but does more probably indicate that this concept has characteristics that make it easy to like. A common argument for shared leadership is that the increasing complexity in the world will put greater demands on leaders. These demands may be easier to meet for two or more co-leaders than it is for a single leader. Another common argument for shared leadership is that knowledge organizations become more common, which will call for shared leadership. The presence of flow and the fact that the employees often know more than the manager are characteristics of the knowledge organization that make shared leadership especially well suited. Although shared leadership has many advantages, it also has its difficulties. The biggest problem with shared leadership is that so many requirements need to be fulfilled in order to succeed and it is also probably time consuming compared with single leadership. Beside these practical obstacles we have also realized that there is a resistance to the concept, which we derive to the prevailing institutional ideas about leadership, which shared leadership deviates from.

Nevertheless, the prevailing institutional ideas about leadership are not set in stone. They may change, but what is more, they don’t even have to change for shared leadership to be practiced. Practicing what Meyer and Rowan (1977) label decoupling gives organizations the opportunity to act in one way but present another image to their environment. We think that this is how shared leadership is treated in many organizations today, especially when it comes to co-leadership. The espoused version is that the leader is a single leader, but in reality every leader probably has a companion, may it be a colleague, wife, manager or other. However, this may be changed in the future as a consequence of changes in the institutional environment. Such changes have happened before, and are most likely to happen again.

In the problem analyses we stated three possible scenarios of how shared leadership will be perceived in the future. The first scenario we introduced was that shared leadership is a short-lived fad that will bloom up and disappear within a short timespan. The second possibility was that shared leadership substitutes the traditional top-down leadership. The third alternative was that shared leadership will exist side by side with the traditional leadership.

After studying shared leadership and analyzing the phenomenon, we believe that the third alternative is the most likely to happen. Actually, we believe that it already happens. Shared leadership exists everywhere in organizations on all hierarchical levels, sometimes visible and sometimes not.

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