

# The Leader as a Facilitator of Learning at Work

A study of learning-oriented leadership in two industrial firms

Andreas Wallo



**Linköping University**  
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*[Come Clarity - In Flames]*

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*[Home - Foo Fighters]*

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Linköping in October 2008

*Andreas Wallo*



# 1 Introduction

The focus in this thesis is on the leader as a facilitator of co-workers' learning in the workplace. This can be seen as a currently growing area of research where the roles of leaders are put under the spotlight due to assumptions that their responsibility for human resource development is increasing. In the following sections the theoretical and historical development within this field of research is briefly introduced. Furthermore, the aim, key concepts and research setting of the study are also presented.

## 1.1 Background

When looking at recent developments within the field of leadership and organizational research it is difficult to shut one's eyes to descriptions of how the labour market and its actors have been affected by the globalization of economies, technological innovations and changes in consumer behaviour (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2007). Occurrences such as these have allegedly forced private and public sector organizations to make extensive changes in order to rejuvenate and to assure competitive advantage (Allen et al., 1998; Storey, 2004). In the wake of these transformations follows a number of new production philosophies, such as Lean Production and Total Quality Management that aim at optimizing organizational operations to create greater flexibility, improve quality and balance the flow in the production processes (Bergman & Klefsjö, 1994; Womack, Jones & Roos, 1990).

Traditionally, organizational success has been linked to different economic measures, but in recent years questions concerning education and learning at the workplace have attracted increased attention in relation to efficiency, development and innovations (Antonacopoulou & Bento, 2004; Lorenz & Lundvall, 2006). Favourable learning conditions have been deemed important not only for individuals, but also for organizations that wish to uphold their competitiveness and innovative capacity (Argyris, 1993; NUTEK, 2000; SOU 1999:69). This has led to an increased need for learning and development at the individual, group and organizational levels, which traditional institutions for adult education have not managed to meet (Ellström & Hultman, 2004). Research indicates that formal training needs to be integrated with informal learning in daily work and that the potential of the workplace as an arena for learning and development needs to be furthered explored. Evidence shows that a closer integration between production and

learning may create recurring opportunities for reflexive action and developmental learning (Ellström, 2001).

The answer to questions of how to manage these transformations and how to facilitate arenas for learning and development has often been ‘through more and better leadership’ (cf. Senge, 1990). Consequently, since the latter parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leadership researchers and practitioners have directed a lot of attention to the supposed new and changing nature of leadership. This course of events has been described as a paradigm shift (House & Aditya, 1997) to indicate the release of the last remainders of traditional Tayloristic leadership values, making way for more humanistic ideals. The new paradigm represents a notion where conventional supervisory leadership tasks – like monitoring daily operations – have been distributed to teams of employees in the organizations (Sandberg & Targama, 2007). Instead of relying on formal authority and instructions, leadership within the new paradigm is based on a developmental outlook on co-workers and a readiness to foster their ideas and creativity (Bass & Reggio, 2005).

Much effort has been put into studies of how a leader should act to facilitate change and development in organizations. Yet, the current theoretical conceptualizations tell us little about how actual leadership practice has changed and if leadership in today’s organizations really differs from the old paradigm (Storey, 2004). Furthermore, not everybody agrees with this predilection for the significance of leadership concerning organizational effectiveness. Taking a critical perspective, Alvesson (2006) argues that there is a general tendency to exaggerate the relevance of leadership when it comes to solving organizational problems. Irrespective of the problem, leadership always seems to be the solution. Similarly, when it comes to a leadership that facilitates learning, studies within a managerial work tradition, stemming from seminal work by Carlson (1951) and Mintzberg (1973) display a more ambiguous image of leadership than the one advocated within the new paradigm. Based on a study of supervisors’ influence on workplace learning, Hughes (2004) concludes that the new facilitative role of the leader seems to occur in an indirect fashion and through very traditional leadership activities. Furthermore, Viitala (2004) argues that the daily activities of leaders do not match those represented in ideal models.

A number of researchers have pointed to the need for further empirically-based research concerning the leaders’ role to facilitate learning processes (Agashae & Bratton, 2001; Dirks, 1999; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Hughes, 2004; Sadler, 2001; Viitala, 2004). Previous studies of leadership provide only limited guidance for leaders in light of their new challenge to encourage learning (Viitala, 2004). Most of the previous research on the relationship

between learning and leadership focuses on leaders' learning in connection with leadership development programmes. Even if this is an important area that is also in need of further research (Eraut, 2004; Savolainen, 2000), this knowledge is not sufficient to understand how leaders facilitate the learning of others. Furthermore, from a workplace learning perspective leadership is clearly considered to be an important condition for learning (Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Skule, 2004), and studies have indicated that active management support and encouragement is significant in order to promote learning at work (Ellström & Kock, 2003, Fenwick, 2003; Södergren, 1996; Södergren & Fredriksson, 1998). However, limited attention has been paid to what the leader actually does when leading for learning and how this affects our understanding of leadership and the daily work of leaders in organizations.

## 1.2 Aim of the thesis

In relation to this background it seems important to further explore the relationship between leadership and learning in the workplace. Do we really have enough evidence to support the notion of a new leadership and to what extent is it possible for a leader to carry out this kind of leadership? On the basis of this discussion the purpose of the thesis is to increase the knowledge of leadership in relation to co-workers' learning and development at the workplace. This purpose can be more closely defined in terms of the following research questions:

1. *What characterizes leaders' work and how they perceive their leadership?*
2. *How do leaders perceive their leadership in relation to co-workers' learning at work?*
3. *What activities do leaders employ to facilitate co-workers' learning at work?*
4. *Which factors enable and constrain leaders' possibilities to facilitate co-workers' learning at work?*

In the thesis, the focus is on the facilitation of the co-workers' learning seen from a leader perspective and not on the actual learning processes of the co-workers. Questions concerning the leaders' own learning are not addressed to any greater extent.

### 1.3 The concept of leadership

After an extensive review of leadership research, Stogdill (1974) made the now classical remark that there appear to be as many definitions of the term leadership as there are people who have tried to define it. However, there are some basic features which are often included in modern conceptualizations. The textbooks of Yukl (2006) and Northouse (2007) offer two typical and frequently quoted definitions.

Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. (Yukl, 2006, p. 8)

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (Northouse, 2007, p. 3)

According to these definitions leadership is considered to be a process of interaction between individuals, rather than a set of individual traits, which was the common notion in early research (Yukl, 2006). Furthermore, this interaction involves influence toward a direction determined by a commonly shared goal. The process is also reciprocal in the sense that the leaders may influence and be influenced by the followers.

To better understand what this actually implies, we can look at what premises are needed for leadership to exist. Judging from the definitions, a necessary condition is that it involves some kind of acting agents, which in leadership research are usually categorized as either leaders or followers (Northouse, 2007).<sup>1</sup> A social agent is in this sense equal to a collective who share a similar structural position (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 2003). Furthermore, when the leader as an agent is discussed in leadership research it is common to return to distinctions between the two related concepts of leadership and management (Yukl, 2006). Many scholars have claimed that these are oppositional and distinct constructs (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990) which represent different functions in an organization. Management is viewed as primarily connected to activities such as organizing, planning, controlling and staffing, while leadership stands for the general process of influence. Some even go as far as to separate leaders and managers as being opposite personalities (Zaleznik, 1977). However, the

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<sup>1</sup> Currently the term ‘co-worker’ is often preferred instead of ‘follower’, to further accentuate that they are independent and intentional subjects who do not just obey the leader’s every whim (cf. Tengblad, 2003).

leadership researchers of today often argue that since there is such a considerable amount of overlap between the two concepts – which makes them hard to separate – it would be more fruitful to focus on the leadership process, rather than on whether or not the individuals are called leaders or managers (cf. Backström, Granberg & Willhelmsson, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Another condition for the existence of leadership is the interaction of the involved agents. In this sense it is possible to view leadership as an activity-dependent phenomenon that is sustained through human actions (Fleetwood, 2005). Hence, if the agents involved cease to perform whatever it is that they are doing, the phenomenon would stop existing. However, this does not imply that leadership is dependent on the activity of identification, i.e. leadership does not have to be practised deliberately to matter. The actions of a leader can have accidental consequences of which the leader is unaware, and even if leadership is deliberately executed, it is not certain that it will be perceived as such by those being led. They may simply think that they ‘did it themselves’ without even noticing the part played by the leader.

What kinds of actions are then required for leadership to exist? A simple answer to this question is that there could be any number of actions, as long as they involve some kind of influence, mediated through social interaction. If neither of the agents influences the other, the process would probably not be characterized as leadership. The reason why one person in an organization can take on the role as a leader, while another becomes a follower can be explained as a differentiation of power. Most common is perhaps that they belong to different positions in a social hierarchy (cf. French & Raven, 1960). A social hierarchy can be seen as a type of social structure, which precedes the agents’ interactions, but at the same time depends on them for its existence (Archer, 1995). In an organisation the role of ‘leader’ is usually located in a higher hierarchical position than the role of ‘follower’, depending on various factors such as age, level of experience, gender, formal education, or family ties. If the mechanism of the organization is such that the amount of power increases in higher positions, it is possible for the leader to influence the interaction with the follower. Hence, the social structure labelled ‘organizational hierarchy’ creates prerequisites for the social interaction. However, the interaction can simultaneously elaborate the structure. Social interaction could, for instance, lead to a realization that it would be more efficient to have team-based production than a traditional linear model, which if acted upon would transform the social structure called ‘work organization’.

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<sup>2</sup> Whether the agents in the leadership process are labelled as managers or leaders is not an issue in the thesis. The words are used synonymously in the text.

This elaborated structure then becomes the condition for subsequent social interaction in a continuing, cyclical process (Archer, 2003).

Both of the textbook definitions (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006) accentuate that the process of leadership must have a direction, i.e. that there is some sort of goal, which needs to be attained. This goal is usually formulated in advanced, but due to social interactions such as conflicts, negotiations and concessions, that often lead to unintended consequences, the goal will probably change during the course of the process (Archer, 1995). In a business organization, the goals are often associated with efficiency, profitability, quality and safety and they can be both short and long term. In previous leadership research, a lot of attention was directed to how leaders attain these types of economic goals by making the followers work harder or faster. However, today it is more important that the goals are sufficiently communicated from the leader to the followers and preferably even jointly conceived and mutually agreed upon (Yukl, 2006).

In light of this discussion, a definition of leadership in this thesis is formulated as follows:

Leadership can be conceptualized as a social and reciprocal process, through which one or more agents influence other agents towards attaining a goal. This influence is situated within the limits of social structures that constrict or enable the interaction, which concurrently reproduces or transforms these social structures.

With a working definition of leadership established, it is now time to direct attention to its relation to learning in the workplace, which is the second theoretical construct of importance in this thesis.

## 1.4 The concept of learning in the workplace

As was initially stated, questions concerning learning in the workplace have recently climbed higher on the organizational agenda (Ellström, 1996; Fuller, Munroe & Rainbird, 2004), but research on learning at work is by no means a new phenomenon. An interest in the human factor and how to develop human resources has for a long time been included in studies of organizational change. However, as a research discipline the field of learning in the workplace is still rather new and in formation (Elkjaer & Wahlgren, 2006). This field ties together many different research strands such as Organizational Learning, Workplace Learning, Human Resource Development and Continuing Professional Education (Bierema & Eraut, 2004; Elkjaer & Wahlgren, 2006). Although these strands differ somewhat in

terms of theoretical assumptions and level of analysis, the smallest common denominator seems to be an interest in the individual's learning and how it – in a working life context – is related to collective learning at group or organizational levels. But what is learning? This is of course not an easy question to answer since, much like leadership as a theoretical construct, there are several different perspectives on learning and ways of conceptualizing it.<sup>3</sup>

The intimate relationship between learning, working and living is one that does not easily lend itself to analysis, partly because it is embedded in the dynamics of our human engagement with the challenges of living and working. Learning is both a process and product, a cause, a consequence and context in which emerging life and work patterns co-evolve and in turn organize learning. (Antonacopoulou, 2006, p. 234)

It is, however, possible to discern two main positions that are often referred to in research on learning in the workplace. Cognitive perspectives on learning on the one hand, versus situated or socio-cultural perspectives on the other, have been a recurrent way of illustrating the opposition between the notion that learning occurs within the individual and the notion that learning is embedded in historical, cultural and social contexts (Illeris, 2007). These perspectives have traditionally been viewed as incommensurable, but today it has become more common to accentuate the importance of working with combined approaches where these perspectives do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive. It is instead argued that we need to transcend this dichotomous separation in favour of multiple-perspective approaches (Kock, 2002). Hence, from this line of reasoning it is possible to conceptualize learning as partly consisting of an interplay of processes between the individual and the context and partly of an internal process of knowledge acquisition (Illeris, 2007). A definition of learning that encompasses both of these processes has been put forth by Illeris (2003):

The point of departure for my concept of learning is that learning must be understood as all processes leading to permanent capacity change – whether they be physical, cognitive, emotional or social in nature – that do not exclusively have to do with biological maturation or ageing. (Illeris, 2003, p. 170)

A similar definition of learning has been formulated by Ellström (1992):

---

<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I do not elaborate on the historical foundations of different learning perspectives. For a thorough description and analysis see for example Illeris (2007).

## *Chapter 1 – Introduction*

Learning is here regarded as relatively lasting changes in an individual as a result of the individual's interaction with his/her environment. (Ellström, 1992, p. 67, my translation)

In this latter definition, the individual constitutes the learning subject, but according to Ellström (2004) it is also possible to speak of other learning subjects, such as groups or organizations.

Something that is not explicitly addressed in the definitions is what is being learnt. This is a rather difficult question to answer, since it is dependent on the premises of the learning. However, Ellström (2004) argues that it, in general, is possible to distinguish at least three learning dimensions; a subjective dimension, a performance dimension and a structural dimension. The subjective dimension encompasses different aspects of the competence of the learning subject, such as knowledge, skills, habits, notions and values, while the performance dimension concerns how this competence is put into use and changed in relation to a specific assignment or situation. The structural dimension refers to reproduction or transformation of the learning subject's material, social or cultural environment, like for instance a change in work procedures, routines or institutionalized notions. In addition, the structural dimension also holds the results of learning in the form of new knowledge, concepts, models or theories (*ibid.*).

As previously mentioned, learning can vary depending on the degree of formality and structure, and when it comes to learning in the workplace a distinction is often made between formal, planned and goal-oriented learning that is primarily related to specific educational settings, and more informal and spontaneous learning that can be viewed as an aspect of all human endeavours (Ellström, 1996). Informal or incidental learning often appears as a side-effect when a task is performed (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). In connection to these different types of learning it is also possible to distinguish various so-called learning activities that include any process which either intentionally or unintentionally supports learning. Learning activities can be described as formal, non-formal or informal (Eraut, 2000; Kock, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Formal learning activities are usually planned and associated with classroom-based education, while informal learning activities are more experience based, less planned and include learning from other co-workers in the organization. The non-formal learning activities can be understood as located between formal and informal learning activities in the sense that while they are not conducted in accordance with a detailed plan, they cannot be characterized as unorganized. Examples of non-formal learning activities include quality circles and seminars in the workplace (Eraut, 2000; Kock, 2002).



According to Kock (2007) the learning activities are embedded in a specific context that differs depending on what organization is being studied. Kock distinguishes between the external context, which consists of factors such as branch conditions, legislation and competitors, and the inner context that comprises social, technical and economic systems. The activities and the actors are surrounded by these two contexts, which affects and shapes different situations and the understanding of them.

## 1.5 Research setting

The empirical foundation of the thesis comprises case-studies (Yin, 2003) of two Swedish industrial manufacturing companies.<sup>4</sup> The first company, AlphaCo, offers solutions for the production and development of products containing electricity, electronics, and mechanics. Its head office and main factory is located in a small Swedish municipality where the company has approximately 145 employees. In addition, the Group also employs approximately 660 workers located in a Central European country. The second company, BetaInc, offers solutions in the area of material handling. Since the turn of the century, this company has been owned by a global industrial Group. The main production facility is also located in a small Swedish municipality and has approximately 1000 employees. In total the Group has approximately 9000 employees worldwide.

These two organizations operate on a market that exerts a high degree of change pressure on its actors and stakeholders, which is evident in the effort that is constantly put into gaining market shares. Since the turn of the century, both companies have been influenced by new philosophies on how to organize production. For instance, Lean Production principles have been incorporated in their production systems. This is believed to have caused changes for the leaders in the organization, but the knowledge of what has changed and how it has changed is still a bit unclear.

## 1.6 Outline of the thesis

In this introductory chapter the relation between leadership and learning in the workplace has been put into a current context and the aim and research questions of the thesis have also been presented. In addition, chapter 1 provides a discussion of the central theoretical concepts included in the thesis and a brief introduction of the research setting.

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<sup>4</sup> In the thesis the cases are referred to as AlphaCo and BetaInc, which are fictive names. A more detailed description of the case organizations is provided in chapter 5.

## *Chapter 1 – Introduction*

Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the theoretical frame of reference in the thesis. Chapter 2 is divided into three main theoretical traditions within this particular field of research, which are used as a frame to understand the directions of previous theoretical and empirical contributions to our knowledge of leadership in relation to learning and development at the workplace. In chapter 3, connections are made between the learning process, different types of learning and a learning-oriented leadership.

In chapter 4 follows an account of the methodological points of departure and analytical framework. The relation between the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the study is discussed. Furthermore, the chapter also covers issues of design, implementation and methods for data collection. The analysis and presentation of the empirical data is also presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of quality aspects of the study.

In chapter 5, which is the first of the empirical chapters, the two cases are presented in terms of the historical background and the current affairs of the companies. The general idea of this chapter is for the reader to become acquainted with the context in which the leaders operate. Furthermore, the chapter also includes a specific focus on organizational policies and guidelines that concern leadership, learning and development. In addition, the leaders in the two cases are presented.

In chapter 6, we take a closer look at the leaders' daily work in order to get an understanding of what kinds of activities they engage in on a regular basis and with whom they usually interact. The chapter also contains answers to questions concerning how the leaders view leadership in terms of what it means to them and how they feel about being leaders. Taken together, this chapter, in combination with chapter 5, creates a basis for understanding how working with human resources is related to the total work situation.

In chapter 7, the relation between learning, development and leadership is more closely targeted. This is done by means of an initial presentation of the leaders' perceptions of the phenomena and what kind of meaning they attribute to them. As a second step, the chapter contains descriptions of how the leaders work with these issues in terms of taking on different leader roles.

In chapter 8, we take yet another step towards understanding leadership in relation to learning and development by looking at what kind of activities the leaders engage in when conducting their leadership.

The empirical chapters are concluded with a summarizing analysis of the results. In chapter 9, these analyses are integrated and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and aim of the thesis. In addition, this final chapter also addresses theoretical and practical implications, and suggestions for further research.

## 2 Traditions in leadership research

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leadership has been studied in a variety of ways depending on aspects such as the researchers' methodological preferences and a changing view of what constitutes leadership. Over the years different traditions have competed in the quest for understanding effective leadership. The earliest research focused on traits and innate qualities of the borne leader, but was then superseded by an interest in behaviours and leadership styles. Later on came approaches dealing with power-influence, contingencies and leader-follower interactions (Yukl, 2006).<sup>5</sup>

Several issues within these theories are important to researchers and practitioners that take an interest in the alleged and alluring 'new leadership' which is aimed at development and learning. In this chapter, three current research traditions are reviewed. They are labelled studies of effective leadership, studies of managerial work and critical management studies. The focus is on basic assumptions in contemporary theories of leadership and how they address issues of learning and development.

### 2.1 Studies of Effective Leadership

The first tradition centres around the idea of leadership as a means of installing order in the uncertain environment that we are supposedly facing (Storey, 2004). The main agenda of this tradition is to find the nature of effective leadership and its lineage can be traced back to early studies of different leadership styles (Lewin, Lippit & White, 1939; Likert, 1961). The essence of this research agenda is conceptualized in a theoretical strand labelled 'New Leadership Theories', which focuses on the importance of the strong and charismatic leader (Bryman, 1992).

Many of the theories within this tradition were developed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the globalization of the labour market and the following critique from practitioners that previous leadership models had failed to provide answers to what constitutes effective leadership in a changing context (Hunt, 1999). These events ignited a renewal of the research field described as a paradigm shift (Conger, 1999).<sup>6</sup> One of the earliest contributors to this shift was Burns (1978) who formulated a theory

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<sup>5</sup> For a more extensive coverage of leadership research prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century see for instance House & Aditya (1997), Northouse (2007) or Yukl (2006).

<sup>6</sup> At this time the previous dichotomy between production and employees was upgraded with change as a third dimension (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991; Yukl, 1999).

in which the motivational influence of so-called transformational leadership was contrasted by a transactional counterpart relying on rewards as a means of motivating the co-workers. At the same time, a similar direction appeared on the arena. This direction, Charismatic Leadership Theory (House, 1977) was based on the notion that charisma is a central trait in leadership in terms of motivating co-workers to accomplish the goals of the organization.

### *2.1.1 Leadership for performance 'beyond expectations'*

In principal, the two directions described above shared similar basic assumptions about leadership, so when Bass (1985) further developed Burns' theory they were fused together into what is currently the most influential model within the tradition (Yukl, 2006). The essence of Bass' model is the notion that transformational leaders inspire and motivate the co-workers to achieve performance outcomes that go beyond expectations (Bass, 1998). A key feature is the distinction between transformational and transactional leader behaviour. However, opposed to Burns' original idea, Bass views the behaviours as separate, but not mutually exclusive dimensions, thus making it possible for leaders to be both transactional and transformational (*ibid.*).

According to Bass, four components constitute transformational leadership; Idealized Influence (or Charismatic Leadership), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration (Bass, 1998). Idealized influence refers to the leader being a role model for the co-workers. The co-workers identify with the leader's behaviour and try to act in the same way as the leader. Inspirational motivation implies behaving in ways that inspire and motivate the surrounding co-workers, thus providing challenge and meaning to their work. This component also arouses team spirit, optimism and enthusiasm. Intellectual stimulation refers to supporting creativity and efforts to be innovative by approaching old situations in novel ways and by questioning assumptions that are taken for granted. It is also positive when the co-workers try new approaches even if they fail. Individualized consideration refers to the leader paying attention to each individual's need for personal development, thereby coaching the co-worker to higher levels of potential. The leader is responsible for creating a supportive environment that tends to the individual's need and desire (*ibid.*).

Turning to transactional leadership, which occurs when a leader disciplines or rewards the co-worker based on performance, it is possible to discern two components; Contingent Reward and Management-by-Exception. In addition, Bass's model also includes a non-leadership component, Laissez-Faire Leadership (Bass, 1998). Contingent Reward implies rewarding the co-worker for satisfactorily performed tasks.

Management-by-Exception, which can be either active or passive, refers to the leader monitoring deviances from principles and taking corrective action against any mistakes or erroneous behaviour of the co-worker. Laissez-Faire leadership refers to the absence of leadership and is by definition the most inactive and ineffective of all leadership behaviours (Bass, 1998).

When combining all of these components, Bass arrived at a model labelled 'The Full Range of Leadership'. The idea of the model is that all leaders display every component to some extent, but that the leader with an optimal profile more frequently displays transformational behaviours (ibid.). Bass & Reggio (2005) argue that there is considerable evidence that transformational leaders are likely to be – both subjectively and objectively – considered more effective in comparison to transactional leaders.

If we look at recent empirical studies that build on Bass' theoretical framework, there are few that explicitly focus on learning and development. However, if we widen the scope of learning to include concepts such as empowerment, innovation and creativity, the numbers of studies instead become so immense that they are hard to overlook. In general, these studies are based on questionnaires and survey data and aim at examining the presence of transformational leadership and whether it is correlated with learning and increased organizational performance. For instance, Coad & Berry's (1998) study of the relationship between goal orientation and leadership shows that transformational behaviours were correlated with an orientation towards learning and increased competence, while transactional behaviours instead were correlated with an orientation towards performance and positive evaluations from superiors. Similarly, Jung, Chow & Wu (2003) examined the effect of transformational leadership on empowerment, creativity and organizational innovation. Their results indicate a positive relation between transformational leadership and organizational innovation. Transformational leaders were found to increase subordinates' intrinsic motivation, which stimulates creativity. Furthermore, the transformational leader encourages followers to think outside of the box and encourages follower creativity by providing a climate that supports follower's innovative efforts (ibid.). Other studies showing similar results include Jung & Sosik (2002) and Pham & Swierczek (2006).

### *2.1.2 Leadership in 'Learning Organizations'*

A contributing factor to the popularity of transformational leadership is its connections to the management concept of the Learning Organization, which was in style during the 1990s (Senge, 1990). The essence in Senge's notion of the Learning Organization is the ability to create favourable conditions for

the co-workers' learning and to use this learning in order to influence and adapt to the surrounding world. Senge argues that an organization *per se* can have the ability to learn, autonomous from the learning of individuals in that organization. Even though individuals leave their positions, their knowledge could still exist in the consciousness of the organization (cf. Morgan, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

Senge's (1990) message had a considerable impact on the field. The basic idea was that successful organizations need a constant learning process to manage the competition from the surrounding environment. To create this process, Senge argues that an important key lies in the leadership. He identifies three roles that the leaders should play to facilitate learning in organizations; designer, steward and teacher. The designer tries to fit together the organizational structures with the work processes to enhance or hinder learning. The steward mediates a so-called purpose story, which consists of the leader's personal translation and embodiment of the organizational vision. In spreading the story of how learning connects to the progress of the organization the leader becomes a steward of that vision. The teacher is responsible for creating opportunities for reflection about the organizational reality, which can be seen as events, patterns of behaviour, systemic structures and purpose stories. To promote learning the leader should focus on the latter two to get the followers to see the big picture (ibid.).

Building on Senge's notion, Bass (2000) concludes that transformational leadership behaviours are preferable to create a Learning Organization. The leader must use an inspirational leadership, which will be spread throughout the organization, and through intellectual stimulation the leader can bring forth the expert knowledge of the members in the organization. The individualized consideration behaviours contribute in terms of an interest in the different developmental needs of each individual. Bass also recognizes that the transactional behaviours to some extent are relevant to the creation of a Learning Organization. Contingent rewards such as promotions and salary increases could be used to encourage learning. Sometimes even failing an attempt at learning could be rewarded. Active management-by-exception is, however, not a preferable behaviour for creating a Learning Organization, but it is sometimes necessary to monitor the subordinates' performance and to correct erroneous behaviour. Passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire leadership are not proactive enough for a Learning Organization (ibid.).

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<sup>7</sup> From research on learning in organizations (cf. Argyris & Schön, 1978; 1996) critique has been directed to Senge's notion of a Learning Organization, which is seen as a management fad that does not illustrate the complexity of the learning process (Illeris, 2003). Weick (1976) argues that the rationalistic view of Learning Organizations disregards the nature of organizations as loosely coupled systems.

Empirically, Senge's (1990) leadership roles have been used by Agashae & Bratton (2001) to explore leader-follower dynamics in Learning Organizations. More specifically, they measured whether leaders' behaviour influences the learning of followers in a Canadian energy company. The results show that all three of the roles were present in the study, but to various extents. The designer role was weakest, followed by the steward and then the teacher. Another study that draws on Bass's (1985) and Senge's (1990) framework is that of Larsson (2008) who focused on middle managers as driving forces for sustainable development within healthcare organizations. Larsson concludes that the change competence of the leaders, in terms of being willing to try new approaches and to question habitual work processes, is crucial to organizing development.

### *2.1.3 Leading others to lead themselves*

While the 'New Leadership' strand has largely dominated the field since the late 1980s, it has not excluded alternative views of leadership. Currently the idea of leadership as a distributed phenomenon is gaining momentum (Day, Gronn & Salas, 2004; Gronn, 2002).<sup>8</sup> According to Bryman (1992) this direction, which he labelled 'Dispersed Leadership', grew as a reaction to a perceived overemphasis on the importance of one single person in explaining leadership effectiveness. Its proponents sought a shift in focus away from the traditional chain of command towards a theory wherein more than one person could be a leader and exercise leadership. The interest in collective leadership also stems from the introduction of organizational concepts such as team-based production that challenged the traditional leader-centred notions of leadership (Pearce, 2004; Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001).

On the basis of Kerr & Jermier's (1978) leadership substitute framework, Manz & Sims (1980) identified self-management, or self-leadership, as a possible substitute for formal leadership. They argued that if subordinates are well-informed about organizational needs, have the appropriate competence for the tasks at hand and are motivated to engage in productive activity, self-leadership could lessen the need for closer supervision, direction and control.

In order for subordinates to become self-leaders, much depends on the support they receive from their own leader. Manz & Sims (1991) and Sims & Lorenzi (1992) argue that this is a new leadership paradigm, which they coined 'SuperLeadership' and defined as the process of leading others to lead themselves (cf. Hultman, 2001b). The ultimate result is empowered self-leaders who can function in self-managing teams (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992).

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<sup>8</sup> Although the conception of leadership as shared by more than one person may be popular at the moment, it is not to be considered as a novel approach (Gronn, 2002).

According to Manz & Sims (1991) the road to becoming a SuperLeader involves several steps. To lead others, you first have to learn how to lead yourself. Then you should also lead by example in terms of displaying self-leader skills that the followers should adopt. Furthermore, the leader must also involve the followers in the goal-setting process, in order for them to learn how to set goals on their own. Being a SuperLeader also implies creating positive thought patterns by supporting thinking that focuses on opportunities rather than obstacles. But it is also necessary to find appropriate rewards or reprimands in relation to the co-workers' goal-fulfilment. The reprimands should be constructive so that they do not hinder the learning process and the leader should view a mistake as a learning opportunity. An important aspect is also to promote self-leadership through teamwork. Through the influence of peer relationships and collective responsibility, the self-leadership is believed to stay on a course that is consistent with the goals of the organization. The final step involves creating a culture that allows self-leadership to grow (ibid.).

The concept of SuperLeadership emphasizes self-directed leadership in teams as a means of distributing responsibility to the lower levels of the organization (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992). The focal issue when it comes to notions of how leadership is distributed in teams is often how the individual learning can be aggregated to the group and organizational levels. However, this notion has received critique of a methodological nature. Markham & Markham (1995) argue that it is problematic to assume that a theory formulated at the individual level, would automatically apply at the group level. They find it unclear whether self-leadership should be analyzed as a result of individual processes, dyadic processes or group processes.

Examples of studies with a focus on distributed leadership include Elloy's (2005) examination of the impact of SuperLeader behaviours in self-managed work teams on variables such as commitment to the organization, job satisfaction and organization self-esteem. The results of Elloy's survey showed that teams led by supervisors that exhibited SuperLeader characteristics scored high on the measured variables. In another recent study of the relationship between leader behaviours and team performance outcomes, Burke et al. (2006) found that person-focused behaviours were related to perceived team effectiveness, team productivity and team learning. Similar results were found by Stoker et al. (2001) and by Özaralli (2003).

However, there are also studies that present a more nuanced image of distributed leadership. Brown & Gioia (2002), who studied leadership in top management teams in a dotcom environment, conclude that distributed leadership was primarily related to the top echelons of organizations, and connected with conditions of rapid or irregular change. The distribution of



leadership was confined within the top team and did not reach the lower levels of the organization.

#### *2.1.4 Contingencies of effective leadership and learning*

According to Bass (1997), contingencies make a difference, but do not override the effectiveness of transformational behaviours. By contingencies, Bass & Reggio (2005) refer to the environment, the organization, the goals and tasks involved and the distribution of power between the leader and the co-workers. As Bryman, Gillingwater & McGuinness (1996) note, there is a tendency for many writers to marginalize contextual issues when examining the impact of leaders on organizations. However, some studies are available on this topic. Amitay, Popper & Lipshitz' (2005) investigation of leadership styles and organizational learning in community clinics showed a high correlation between transformational leadership, organizational learning and organizational values. Transactional leadership behaviour on the other hand was negatively correlated with the organizational learning variables. The results show that transformational leadership significantly affects organizational learning values, which in turn affect the arrangements whereby individuals interact for the purpose of learning and development.

According to Pham & Swierczek (2006) the organizational structure should be designed to maximize the possibilities for interaction among the employees in order to create opportunities for the transfer of learning. They also note that it is important not to take the learning culture for granted; rather it should be nurtured on a continuous basis. Besides the structure of the organization, Berson, Shamir, Avolio & Popper (2001) argue that the size of the organization may moderate the effects of transformational leadership. The impact of a transformational leader's vision was more positive in smaller organizations. This finding supports previous research by Howell & Hall-Merenda (1999) and Shamir (1995), who suggest that transformational leadership requires a large amount of face-to-face time with the followers to develop close relationships and to give them individualized consideration. In relation to this, Wofford, Whittington & Goodwin (2001) argue that all followers may not have the same need for leadership. Their study indicates that followers with a need for autonomy and the will to grow on the job were more positively influenced by transformational leadership than were those who did not report such needs.

So far we have seen evidence that transformational leadership has a positive effect on learning in organizations, while its transactional counterpart does not receive the same praise. However, Vera & Crossan (2004) argue that we need to challenge this conventional wisdom by also

highlighting the value of transactional leadership. Depending on such contingencies as the external and internal environment, prior organizational performance and stages of organizational life, it may be possible that transactional leadership is in fact more beneficial for learning than a transformational ditto. The authors argue that this should be considered in further research on connections between leadership and learning.

## 2.2 Studies of Managerial Work

The second tradition differs from the one previously described in the sense that it is not so concerned with what supposedly constitutes effective leadership. The focus is rather on what activities managers actually undertake in their daily work and the nature of everyday leadership (Noordegraaf & Stewart, 2000). Building on pioneering studies such as Carlson's *Executive Behaviour* (1951) and Mintzberg's *The Nature of Managerial Work* (1973), researchers have tried to classify managerial tasks and to analyze the different roles of managers. At an early stage the primary question of relevance in this tradition was therefore; what do managers do (Hales, 1986)? To a large extent this question has been answered by descriptive research, employing ethnographic methodology with observations and interviews as primary methods of data collection (Yukl, 2006). The interest in what managers do stems from a critique of previous normative classifications of managerial work that laid down principles for what should be done (cf. Fayol 1914/1949), which were not always empirically and theoretically founded.

Over the years there have been several attempts to review the accumulated knowledge in this tradition (cf. Hultman, 1989). For instance, Hales (1986) surveyed 30 studies conducted between 1951 and 1982, including Carlson's and Mintzberg's contributions, as well as the influential work of Stewart (1976, 1982) and Kotter (1982). The recurring themes include a focus on the substantive elements of managerial work, the allocation of time spent on different tasks and patterns of interaction (cf. Florén, 2005).

### 2.2.1 *The activity patterns of managerial work*

Yukl (2006) concludes that the work of a manager is performed at a hectic pace. The work hours are long and it is not uncommon for the manager to bring work home in the evenings and during weekends. The stream of tasks that lands on the manager's desk is unrelenting and there are seldom breaks in the workload. Another recurrent result is that the work is varied and fragmented. Carlson (1951) found that the normal working day was characterized by frequent interruptions and that the managers seldom had

time alone at their desks. Mintzberg (1973) concluded that about 50 per cent of the activities were completed in less than nine minutes and that only 10 per cent lasted more than one hour. The tasks quickly shifted from important business decisions to more trivial matters. Due to the fragmented activities it was hard for the manager to find periods of time without interruptions, which in turn made it difficult to set aside time for reflective planning and other activities that require uninterrupted attention. Hence, the nature of managerial work could be characterized as reactive rather than proactive (Hales, 1986).

In the light of these findings the manager has often been interpreted as a victim of circumstances (Milsta, 1994) or even as a puppet in a puppet show where someone else pulls the strings (Carlson, 1951). However, Kotter (1982, 1999) presents a counter image as he claims that managers many times act opportunistically when faced with problems that require a reaction. According to Kotter, the manager is in fact deliberate in his actions and chooses to react when opportunities arise in order to influence the course of events in the organization. Similarly, Tyrstrup (2006) argues that what can be perceived as reactive and short-term behaviour could prove to be a strategic measure in a longer perspective. Furthermore, Tyrstrup argues that we should not downplay the importance of reaction in favour of pro-action *per se*, since this promotes the notion of a good manager as rational and deliberate, while the ones who do not have similar conditions become the bad managers. According to Tyrstrup, the improvised elements of managerial work could be seen as important for development. The reaction of the leaders may be governed by rules on what the leaders should do, but how they do it is usually up to them to decide. This leaves the leaders with the possibility to find creative ways to solve problems, thus creating opportunities for learning and development in everyday work situations (Södergren, 1996). Similarly, Hultman (2001a) speaks of 'intelligent improvisations' and argues that knowledge may be created locally by impromptu and imperfect actions.

When it comes to the question of with whom the manager interacts the evidence indicates that it is more common for the managers to spend time with people other than their own co-workers. Typically, the interaction involves subordinates of their co-workers, lateral colleagues, superiors of lateral colleagues and more senior managers in the organization. To a considerable extent the managers also interact with actors outside the organization such as clients, suppliers and subcontractors (Yukl, 2006). On the subject of interaction Mintzberg (1971) distinguished five main ways of communication: written messages, telephone calls, scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings and so-called observational tours. In addition, Yukl (2006) adds electronic messages such as e-mail and video conferencing. A

common feature is that managers to a large extent prefer oral communication, since it involves more information than, for instance, a written letter (ibid.).

But what about the claims that changes in working life also affect the management in organizations? In a recent attempt at retracing Carlson's (1951) steps, Tengblad (2002) found that, even though much still remained the same, some changes had indeed occurred. The fragmentation of time was still apparent, but there had been an increased fragmentation in space, in terms of geographical mobility. The managers in Tengblad's study operated in a global arena and were not confined within the boundaries of their own organization. Tengblad (2006) has also replicated Mintzberg's (1973) study. The main results indicate that there are in fact changes in managerial work that are attributable to the changing management discourse and to factors such as transformed organizational structures, but that these changes are integrated in the already established work-practices, rather than replacing them. Tengblad's findings show that the managers act more like institutional leaders and less like administrators, since they spend more time on exchanging information with subordinates and attending social functions than on administrative desk-work and decisional processes. Furthermore, the managers of today have a much larger workload, but the fragmentation of time does not seem to be as salient as in Mintzberg's study. All in all, Tengblad suggests that this indicates that the introduction of theories, such as transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) may have had an effect on managerial practices at the CEO level, but that the effect is more modest than the scenario depicted in the current management discourse.

### *2.2.2 Managerial roles*

As we have seen there is much to gain from descriptive accounts of what kinds of activity occupy managers' everyday agenda. However, there are other ways of categorizing the content of managerial work, which are aimed at understanding how these different functions and activities interrelate. On the basis of observations of five top-executives Mintzberg (1973) created a classification of 10 different managerial roles grouped into three families; interpersonal roles, information processing roles and decision-making roles.

The interpersonal roles are divided into figurehead, liaison and leader. While the figurehead acts as a symbol for the organization, the liaison makes new contacts and creates networks with actors outside the organization. The leader allocates tasks, motivates the co-workers to do their jobs, recruits new employees and trains the staff (Mintzberg, 1973).

The information processing roles consist of monitor, disseminator and spokesperson. The monitor seeks information in order to understand what is

going on in the organization and to gain data for decision-making. The disseminator spreads the information that has been gathered to keep the co-workers in the organization updated. The spokesperson directs the information towards actors outside the organization (Mintzberg, 1973).

Finally, the decision-making roles include entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. Mintzberg argues that these roles are probably the most essential in managerial work. The entrepreneur initiates and designs change processes in the organization to find new solutions to old problems. The disturbance handler deals with immediate and unforeseen problems or 'fires' that are a central part of the everyday work. The resource allocator distributes resources to different tasks. The negotiator solves problems that may arise in relation to the allocation of resources in terms of negotiating with other actors, such as other managers, co-workers or the union (ibid.). Because of its limited empirical foundation it is difficult to generalize from Mintzberg's study. However, Hales' (1986) review of common elements of managerial work appears to match to Mintzberg's roles.

### *2.2.3 Modern managerial work - towards HRM and HRD?*

Judging from the results of Tengblad's (2006) study, some changes can be traced at the highest echelons of the company, but what about the lower levels in the hierarchy? A number of studies have highlighted the fact that the devolvement of personnel development responsibilities to middle and line managers is becoming a rapidly growing area of research (Gibb, 2003; Heraty & Morley, 1995) and according to Hales (1999, 2005) it is possible to discern two main directions concerning the leaders' new work. The first of these directions advocates a downward flow of tasks within the organizational hierarchy. Many of these tasks concern Human Resource Management (HRM) issues, such as recruitment, quality management and increased financial responsibilities for the employees. The second direction instead focuses on developmental activities such as training, coaching, mentoring and facilitating learning. It could thereby be characterized as involving matters of Human Resource Development (HRD) and is believed to follow organizational changes such as decentralization and team-based production. These two directions are not mutually exclusive, but could be conceived of as elements of the new managerial work (ibid.).

In a recent survey of private and public sector organizations in the UK, Hales (2005) explores whether these new directions are reasonable conceptualizations of the new managerial work and if it is possible to find evidence of them in a work practice. His findings show that the developments in the role of first-line managers have not been radically altered from

supervision towards either team-management or business management. Instead it appears as if the role exhibits stability and can still be characterized as rooted in supervision. Hales explains this stability by the fact that the managers are part of an intricate hierarchical structure, which still holds them responsible for the fluency of daily operational processes. This makes the managers reluctant to delegate responsibility to the subordinates. He argues that if the responsibility is shared it is usually upwards with senior managers or with specialists, such as HR-experts. Hales concludes that the supervisory core in the work of lower-level managers in fact has been strengthened.

Other studies have arrived at similar conclusions as Hales and also indicate that even in Lean Production systems, where supervisors had become 'mini-managers', their roles were still oriented towards labour control, rather than towards incorporating HR responsibilities (cf. Delbridge & Lowe, 1997; Lowe, 1993). Cunningham & Iles (2002) report that their survey on staff attitudes to learning showed that a majority believed that management was committed to promoting learning, but nearly 20 per cent said that training was neglected because of the volume of work, the need to maintain service standards and a lack of staff. Similar results have been presented by Ellinger, Watkins & Barnas (1999) who studied how managers appointed to be instructors in a large change programme perceived their new role. The findings indicate a modest support for serving as an instructor. The managers reported difficulties in finding time for these new assignments, which were seen as an additional burden. Moreover, they felt insecure with the position of being a teacher and requested competence development. Similarly, based on the images of leadership emerging from a study of organizational culture, leadership and learning in care work organizations, Ellström & Ekholm (2004) found few indications that the leaders of the organizations considered the development of co-workers to be a part of their tasks. Apart from offering courses for further education, they did not see themselves as important for the co-workers' learning.

However, there is also evidence that some changes have occurred to the new role. In a case study of leadership in organizations that have implemented process-oriented and team-based work organizations, Ellström & Kock (2003) showed that several managers expressed an ideological shift towards a leadership consistent with the ideal image in contemporary literature, which is believed to be more in accordance with demands associated with the process-oriented and team-based organizations. Concepts such as coaching and team leadership were especially highlighted. However, when prodding a bit further several traces of the old leadership were found. It appeared to be tenacious and firmly rooted in the practice. Nonetheless, three aspects of the new leadership were discernible in the results; creating good

relations to the team, inspirational and motivational leadership and leadership for learning. The last aspect was only mentioned occasionally and Ellström & Kock conclude that the new, coaching aspects of leadership were mainly relation-oriented and not especially learning-oriented.

In a study by Ellinger & Bostrom (2002) the findings indicate that the managers perceived themselves to be facilitators of learning. Learning was seen as closely connected to the daily work and the co-workers were perceived as willing to learn. However, the results also show that this role was seen as competing and distinctly different from the manager role. Ellinger & Bostrom argue that this evidence contradicts the traditional categorization of coaching as a subset of the manager role. Similar results are presented by Renwick (2003) and Whittaker & Marchington (2003).

#### *2.2.4 Managerial work and learning in the workplace*

When it comes to studies of leader activities and roles, an influential contribution is made by Ellinger & Bostrom (1999) who study managerial coaching behaviours in learning organizations. Their findings include thirteen behaviour sets that define the role as facilitator of learning. These behaviour sets are grouped into two clusters; empowering behaviours and facilitating behaviours. The empowering behaviours are oriented towards encouraging the co-worker to assume more personal responsibility and accountability for their work. These behaviours aim at giving more power and authority to the co-workers and can be seen as being grounded in an empowerment paradigm rather than in a prescriptive coaching paradigm. The facilitating behaviours are oriented towards the support of learning and development, the promotion of new levels of understanding and the offering of new perspectives (ibid).

In a recent article, Beattie (2006) reports on findings from a study of the interface between workplace learning and the behaviours of developmental managers, i.e. line managers with HRD responsibilities. The findings revealed a hierarchy of developmental behaviours that occurred within a range of contexts, such as formal and informal supervisory sessions and through daily work activities. In ascending order the behaviours include; caring, informing, being professional, advising, assessing, thinking, empowering, developing developers, and finally challenging. Beattie argues that the base of the hierarchy consists of behaviours such as caring, informing and being professional, since they are closely related to the managers' professional backgrounds. These behaviours were also found to be practiced by most of the managers in the study, while more demanding and higher level behaviours such as empowering and challenging were not as common.

The results of Ellinger & Bostrom's (1999) and Beattie's (2006) studies have also been subjected to a cross-cultural analysis of coaching behaviours (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2006). The findings of the comparison indicated a high degree of similarity and congruence of meaning between the studies. Eight of Beattie's nine behaviours were considered very similar to Ellinger's thirteen categories. These findings are also verified by Amy (2006) in a study of leaders as facilitators of organizational learning. In addition to Ellinger's behaviours, Amy's results included three ineffective behaviours; authoritarianism, defensiveness, and non-responsiveness (Amy, 2006).

In a series of reports on the development of knowledge and skills in employment, Eraut, Alderton, Cole & Senker (1998, 1999, 2000) presents results concerning the impact of managers on learning in the workplace. The findings are divided into three main parts. The first describes organizational policies that impact the learning at the workplace. These include external or in-house courses, apprenticeship or trainee schemes, induction and rotation and, finally, appraisal systems which range from a relatively informal interview conducted annually to systematic performance management systems. The second part contains activities associated with the concept of the manager as staff developer, in terms of appraisal and mentoring. The third part consists of the informal influence of the manager by being a positive or negative role model, functioning as an expert and affecting the learning climate of the workplace (Eraut et al., 1999).

Eraut et al. (1998) argue that the range of methods for supporting learning appears to have widened, but that the basic concept is still based on a rationalistic view of learning, where learning goals need to be specified and learning opportunities planned. The researchers report that they found several positive examples of such formal methods in the material, but that there were also situations where activities such as appraisal missed out on people who needed it, or had a rather limited impact on those who got it. Furthermore, the roles of being mentors and coaches were quite rare. Eraut et al. (1999) argue that it is important to consider that the local manager may influence learning more by affecting the climate at the workplace and through setting a personal example, than through formally recognized activities such as sending co-workers on courses or working with appraisal.

In line with Eraut et al. (2000), Moqvist's (2005) study on leadership in public sector organizations revealed that the managers viewed working with development as a rational process. But, after observing the managers, Moqvist came to the conclusion that development work occurred spontaneously in the daily practice – in interaction with others – and often led to variations on a previously known theme. Moqvist differentiates between the managers' explicit and implicit work, where the first is visible and



formalized and the second implicit and spontaneous. She argues that the implicit work provides better opportunities for the leader to have an impact than the explicit work which is often centred around a formalized arena. This conclusion makes leadership as a learning and influence process connected to the implicit work, but Moqvist also makes the interpretation that these two kinds of work can be seen as intertwined and dependent on each other. Based on a study of school development, Scherp & Scherp (2007) arrive at similar conclusions and argue that the pedagogical leadership of school leaders can be seen as permeating the entire leadership, and not as a separate set of tasks.

### *2.2.5 Managerial work in context*

While several studies have tried to establish what managers do, there have not been sufficient attempts to answer the question of why managers do what they do (Hales, 1999). Traditional management research may be viewed as theories of effective leadership in search of evidence, but managerial work research seems to be more a case of empirical accounts in need of theoretical explanations. Evidently there is a need to consider both the agency of managers as well as the structural conditions that affect their work practice. Building on Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, Hales (1999) locates the dimension of managerial responsibility in-between structure and agency. According to Hales, responsibility as the defining character of management is located in and shaped by a system of resources and cognitive and moral rules which are reproduced and drawn upon by the work practices of the manager.

Concerning factors that enable or restrict learning in the workplace there are numerous reports that leadership is an important condition for learning (Sambrook, 2005; Siebenhüner & Arnold, 2007), but few studies have focused on factors that in turn affect this kind of leadership. One exception is Heraty & Morley (1995) who identified a number of factors that inhibit the devolvement of training and development responsibilities to line managers. These factors include the importance of the activity from a strategic perspective, the issue of ownership, differing perspectives between line managers and HR specialists and the organizational support for line managers to conduct training and development activities in a competent fashion. Similarly, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) argue that without the support of a systematic HR expertise it is likely that even the best suited managers will find it difficult to follow the learning ambitions espoused in company policies if these policies oppose goals connected to daily production.

The results of Cunningham & Iles' (2002) study showed that managers felt that their organisation lacked methods for sharing knowledge. Although the managers were aware of their responsibility for implementing a learning

climate, a lack of incentives and conflicting priorities constrained them from doing so. Similarly, Amy (2006) found a number of impediments to learning, such as cultural barriers that included excessive competition manifested in an unwillingness to share information. There were also personnel matters, in terms of co-workers with negative attitudes towards learning, and training issues, concerning the managers' need for competence development in order to meet the new role. Poell et al. (2006) also reported preparatory education and competence development as a central factor influencing the work of workplace trainers. Similarly, Carroll & Gillen (2002) view teaching competence as an important condition for being an effective manager/teacher.

In addition, Poell et al. (2006) have also identified other contextual characteristics affecting the role of being a workplace trainer. These characteristics were organizational type, number of years of experience, and position in the enterprise. The sample of organizations in the study was of different sizes but no relationship was found between size and trainer roles. Hughes (2004) adds to the list of factors by arguing that trust might impede the possibilities for the leaders to support learning. In the process of facilitation, the supervisor is the one that must prove trustworthy for the co-worker to reveal weakness in terms of competence needs. Ellström & Kock (2003) also argue that an important inhibiting factor for a learning-oriented leadership was the decline of direct leadership. The operative work was suppressed by administrative duties and indirect leadership. This might be a consequence of the increased span of control following the decentralization and flattening of organizations.

## 2.3 Critical Management Studies

The third tradition in this review adopts a more critical stance towards leadership and learning in organizations. According to Johnson & Duberley (2000) the tradition of critical studies of management originates from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century comprised scholars such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Habermas. In essence, critical theory is oriented toward critiquing and changing society. It takes a negative stance against positivist research on social phenomena, since it questions the possibility to generate objective knowledge of a social reality that the researchers themselves are co-constructing (Benton & Craib, 2001). Instead it is required of the critical researcher to cast aside that which has been taken for granted in favour of dialectic reasoning on the study object at hand (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). Critical theory is driven by an emancipating knowledge interest, and the primary objective of research is to awaken the awareness of that in our society which we see as naturally given

(ibid.). By emancipation, Alvesson & Willmott (1992) refer to the process of becoming freed from repressive ideological and social conditions that place unnecessary restrictions on the development of our consciousness.

When it comes to the scientific studies of organizations, management and leadership, critical theory has recently been revitalized in the form of Critical Management Studies (CMS). As a label, CMS is relatively new and often connected to Alvesson & Willmott's (1992) anthology *Critical Management Studies*. Researchers within CMS are influenced by the Frankfurt School, post-structural perspectives and, to some extent, critical realism and neo-institutional theory (Grey & Willmott, 2005). However, it is important to note that CMS can hardly be considered as a coherent direction characterized by consensus, which would more or less conflict with the main concept of critical studies. In comparison to the previously described effective leadership tradition, CMS does not lean on any grand theories. Instead its core consists of loosely related theoretical contributions that in some ways target and criticise the contemporary body of management literature (Grey & Willmott, 2005).

### *2.3.1 Critique of the rationalistic view of leadership*

One of the pillars of CMS is its critique of the rationalistic view of leadership that dominates management research in general and theories within the New Leadership paradigm in particular (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). The rationalistic perspective on leadership rests on the notion that it is possible by scientific studies to find the best leadership, which in turn functions as a means of achieving an effective organization. Ellström (1992) refers to this as a tool model, where leadership is compared to an instrument that can be utilized to accomplish the needed objectives. Sandberg & Targama (2007) argue that the reason why the previously described paradigm shift has not yet come into play is that research on leadership got stuck in a 'rationalistic trap'. They believe that now, when leadership is supposed to facilitate learning and knowledge creation, the problem is not the leaders' interest in these issues, but rather that they are stuck in a rationalistic mode of thinking where competence is objectified and put into an instrumental means-ends discussion. Competence is seen as any other set of skills that can be honed with formal education, but the actual learning is treated as a black box.

Grey (1999) finds some common characteristics of the contemporary discourse of management, which he connects to conceptualizations of organizations as post-bureaucratic. He argues that – in Weberian terminology – the basis of managerial authority is charismatic rather than rational-legal. In higher hierarchical levels of the organization the managers must be visionary,

while managers on lower levels are thought of in less grandiose terms, i.e. coaches, team-builders, facilitators and change agents. Their leadership is relation-oriented and communicative, which has been referred to as a feminization of management. With this management discourse come a number of related concepts, such as empowerment, entrepreneurship, and multi-skilling. The role of the manager becomes one of creating the conditions under which the co-workers are empowered to perform a wider range of tasks, unleashing their full potential as entrepreneurial innovators. In conclusion, Grey argues that this discourse embodies some of the most important lines of thought in western society during the late 20th century.

In order to avoid falling into this rationalistic trap, Sandberg & Targama (2007) calls attention to approaches that, in contrast to the rationalistic ontology, accentuate the importance of the individual's subjective and social understanding of a phenomenon. This understanding is seen as contextually situated and growing through communication and interaction with others. The co-worker is conceived of as an active being, who acts upon the basis of his understanding of reality in order to create meaning, rather than being governed by need satisfaction. In other words, our perception of reality is constantly evolving in a continuous learning process. In order to influence the development of understanding and learning, Sandberg & Targama argue that the leaders must step down from the pedestal and take the co-workers' understanding of their and the organization's work as a point of departure. Leadership then becomes a process of guiding the reshaping of the co-workers' understanding of their tasks and its content (ibid.).

### *2.3.2 The romance of universal leadership models*

Another line of critique that is perhaps more directed toward transformational leadership, but which also applies to other theories within the effective leadership paradigm, regards it as a top-down model with elitist and antidemocratic elements (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2002; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Studies have shown that an overly enthusiastic belief in a charismatic leader can lead to unwanted results in terms of leader-dependency and narcissistic leaders (Maccoby, 2000). Furthermore, Sandberg (2003), voices a concern for manipulative elements in this new leadership, which have been conceptualized as a management of meaning (Smirchic & Morgan, 1982) thereby shifting the focus from the actual performance of an employee to a holistic outlook where the hands, heart, values and mind of the employees are taken advantage of as well. Deetz (1995) describes the modern business of management as managing the insides of workers, their hopes, fears and aspirations, instead of their behaviour. Alvesson & Willmott (2002) speak of

this organizational control as identity regulation, which produces the appropriate individual for the organization. Kärreman & Alvesson (2004) use the label socio-ideological control for the same occurrence.

Alvesson (1999) argues that if we view leadership as an ideology and a set of practices, those who are not leaders will become unimportant as independent subjects. Their values, thoughts and motivations will be seen as a function of leadership. According to Alvesson, this does not imply that the co-workers cannot still be important, but only as a dependent variable in relation to leadership. The important thing is that leadership creates the appropriate 'co-workshop'. Furthermore, Ellström (1992) argues that if we were to look at HR issues such as recruitment and competence development from a critical perspective, we can assume that these processes are governed by the employers' interest in control, internal conflicts and the prevailing power-politics in the organizations, rather than by rational cost-benefit analyses or humanistic arguments. In this sense education and other forms of competence development become a part of the managerial control system and instruments for the invisible exercise of power.

Following this latter line of critique there are scholars who claim that new leadership theory directs too much attention to the importance of the individual, thus creating almost mythological images of heroic leaders (March & Weil, 2005; Meindl, 1995) and neglecting the significance of the followers and the context (Conger, 1999). Alvesson & Sveningsson (2007) are critical towards assumptions of universal leadership styles, such as Bass' (1985) Full-range model, and makes a comparison with how good leadership within the police corps probably differs from good leadership in a R&D company. Even if studies within the effective leadership tradition do include the context, it is usually treated in a mechanical sense as a contingency which should be held constant while the leadership is measured. Furthermore, Alvesson & Sveningsson (2007) argue that the popularity of the leader-centric theories can be explained by the tendency of these leadership notions to simplify the complexity of the leadership process, by attributing the leader with powers to single-handedly transform problems into opportunities and passive co-workers into empowered learners. Leadership is confined to traits, skills and behaviours, which then are matched with different contingencies. The almost naive focus on the heroic leader has limited our understanding of the phenomenon by excluding the discussion of which complex and subtle social processes are involved in its construction (ibid.).

From a neo-institutional perspective, the tendency to idealize the leader and cling to the mythological images of leadership can be interpreted as the organization's compliance with surrounding institutional discourses. Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) argue that these ideas travel round the world

and are often adopted at the same time by several organizations or individuals. This mythology of leadership can, thus, be conceived of as institutionalized ideas within a theoretical field (cf. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This also explains why leaders often describe their leadership in terms of the ideal image stemming from rationalistic models. The leaders have embraced a way of talking about leadership that is based on others' ideas rather than on their own experiences. In comparison to Argyris & Schön's (1996) view of theories of action, this can be interpreted as a difference between espoused theories and theories-in-use. The espoused theories are those on which we call to speak of our actions, while the theories-in-use are implicit and govern the actual leader behaviour.

Based on a study of managers in a biotech company, Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003b) claim that much of the leadership that is discursively expressed tends to disappear when push comes to shove. When asked about what the leaders actually do in their everyday work, the image of a rational, well-organized and premeditated leadership style crumbled. Alvesson & Sveningsson conclude that there often seems to be a tendency for the eloquent notions of leadership to disappear when the everyday actions of leaders are taken into account. They argue that we may need to question the traditional concept of leadership and the actions that are attributed to it in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Another tendency to note is that when leadership does not correspond with the normative image it is often conceived of as negative. In a study, Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003a) focused on perceptions of good leadership versus bad micro-management. The results of a discourse analysis indicate that the views about what leadership is and should be are deeply contradictory. The leaders portrayed themselves as leading with visions, values and strategies, but often referred to working with assignments associated with the criticized form of micro-management. Alvesson & Sveningsson concluded that the leaders' sense-making appeared to be caught between contradictory leadership discourses. Similar results were found in a case study of a single manager (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), whose identity was primarily related to functions of managerial work in terms of three different roles; janitor, ambassador and culture generator. The janitorial role refers to administrative tasks, while the ambassador role represents figurehead and spokesperson functions. As a generator of culture, the manager refers to the creation of a creative climate in the management team, which she believes to be the important glue that holds the organization together. The manager feels frustrated with the fact that administrative tasks steal time from culture creation and therefore speaks of this role in negative terms.

### *2.3.3 Tightening the iron cage*

From CMS, critique is also directed to the seemingly good-willed intentions of organizational learning programmes and human resource activities that are aimed at improving the environment, as well as the motivation of the co-workers. Proponents of CMS argue that the idea of human resources is basically just a new and softer form of control (Willmott, 1993). In line with this, Barker (1993) argues that concepts such as self-leadership in team-based production could be seen as concertive control. According to Barker, the leader who constantly monitors the production has been replaced by teams of workers under the flag of self-leadership. While this is often viewed as something positive in terms of liberation from Tayloristic production ideals, Barker remarks that the control seems to increase rather than decrease and argues that the value-based, concertive control may not be as obvious as that of the traditional Tayloristic organization, but that it can be seen as more powerful and harder to resist than the former system. Barker compares this to Weber's notion of an iron cage of rationality that encloses the co-workers.

In support of Barker's (1993) notion, Ezzamel & Willmott's (1998) study of four UK based companies that introduced teamwork as a way of improving productivity and competitiveness, indicates that the team exerted a very strong control over its members. Ezzamel & Willmott also found that an important contributing factor for the controlling group climate was the introduction of a bonus system based on group performance. One of the conclusions that were drawn from the study is that a team-based organization did not replace the bureaucratic system in the organization, but rather distributed some of its functions to the team, thus keeping the traditional hierarchical control system intact (*ibid.*). So even if teamwork is often portrayed as a way to rid the organizations of inhumane modes of government, to be replaced by more humanistic and liberating models, it is apparent that concepts such as empowerment and development need to be scrutinized in the light of what control is really being executed.

The exercise of soft control is seemingly not always explicit. In a study of managers' learning, Wenglén (2005) found that the managers portray themselves as consultative leaders, in terms of being coaches and facilitators of the co-workers' learning processes. However, in comparison with other emerging identity constructions, Wenglén argues that the positive connotations of consultative leadership are not the only way to interpret this identity. Instead, he finds that, below the surface, aspects such as exercising power are becoming visible. One of the leaders in the material admits that her leadership is not always explicit. Sometimes she influences the co-workers without them noticing it. Wenglén concludes that consultative leadership in many ways can be interpreted as an alternative to authoritarian leadership.

Ray, Clegg & Gordon (2004) also voice concerns about the implications of distributed leadership. They wonder what will happen to the role of the leader and the power politics in the organization when team leadership becomes the new norm. A paradox that arises from the idea of self-leadership is that when the individuals and the groups takes responsibility for both the planning and performance of the daily work activities, as well as the more long-term strategic development, what is left for the superior leader to lead? Grey (1999) asserts that, whether or not the distribution of leadership to the followers is in fact empirically observable, there are some points that are worth making. One is that if you look at this from an elite perspective on leadership and management, some problematic implications arise when power and authority is dispersed, in the sense that these structures tend to be very robust. Throughout history, the division of government and labour has found ways to be reproduced, and one might wonder what will happen when the leadership is taken from those who are used to being in charge. Another point is that in some ways this is not a new phenomenon. Even if you may argue that we are all leaders now, it is equally possible to argue that we always were. Tasks that are labelled as managerial have always, to some extent, been carried out by individuals that neither view themselves as leaders, nor are considered as such by others in the organization (ibid.).

#### *2.3.4 Learning as an oppressive ideology?*

When it comes to issues concerning the development of human resources at the workplace, a specific strand called Critical HRD is currently in formation (Fenwick, 2004; Rigg, Stewart & Trehan, 2007). Building on CMS and critical pedagogy, Fenwick (2004) argues that there is need for a critical approach working within the broader HRD-research field to balance the critique that has come from adult learning theorists (e.g. Billett, 2002; Coffield, 1999) regarding the inadequacy of incorporate research-based knowledge and to question the notion of employee development as a means of increasing shareholder value. Bierema (2002) finds that the management-driven nature of workplace learning research often tends to be culturally neutral, which could potentially be harmful to the adult learners' sense of identity, self-worth and control. Bierema accentuates that we need a new workplace pedagogy which departs from the accumulated experience of traditional training and development, but that is mindful of the need for new approaches that comes with a diverse workforce. This involves linking the individual and the context to re-conceptualize workplace development as a lifelong process and formulating policy that is socio-culturally sensitive (ibid.). Valentin (2006), who asserts that the aim of a Critical HRD is to



uncover and expose – rather than to reinforce – dominant power structures, finds the underlying positivistic ontology and epistemology in the traditional HRD approach to be troublesome. Research is here considered to be a value-neutral and objective way to uncover the truth about how HRD can contribute to increased organizational performance.

Much of the focus within Critical HRD concerns the notion of lifelong learning that has lately dominated the discourse of education and development in relation to the workplace. However, this notion is not without problems and has been referred to as the myth of the learning society and a wonder drug (Billett, 2002; Hughes & Tight, 1995). Holmes (2004) argues that this 'learning turn' is enticing in its nature and that many would prefer to see themselves as facilitators of learning instead of managers. This is because learning is viewed as self-evidently good and liberating, and as a way to enable individuals to improve their life opportunities, thereby neglecting the possibility of negative learning. Ellström (1992) argues that we need to take into account that learning can lead to passivity, subordination or de-qualification, which can be compared to the concept of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). Holmes (2004) claims that the conformist nature of formal training and education often diminishes and reduces learning to an oppressive ideology that favours the interests of a particular group or section of society to the disadvantage of another. Furthermore, Holmes finds it necessary to move beyond the individualistic, psychologistic representations of the phenomenon towards recognition of its social and situated character (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). Cunningham (2004) argue that when HRD experts are confronted with workplace learning, they tend to focus too much on techniques to manipulate the behaviours of followers and to yield to all-encompassing and often destructive responsibility schemes that belittle learning. Furthermore, she argues that we need to contextualize the worker, the organization and the capital into a responsibility framework that accentuates quality of life above enhanced productivity and fast capitalism.

In conclusion, Fenwick (2004) proposes that in order for HRD to be critical we need a greater focus on the problems and interests of the workers, accompanied by a greater attention to organizational practices that marginalize some and privilege others. Fenwick argues that we should address the complexity, context and contested nature of learning, along with facilitation processes that use democratic approaches to working with the emancipatory change of the employees.

## 2.4 Concluding remarks

This review of leadership research has displayed three traditions that all contribute to our understanding of leadership that aims at facilitating learning. It is important to note that the review is not intended to be completely exhaustive, but rather to present a conceptual map of the terrain where certain important contributions are marked. As we have seen, in some aspects the three traditions are distinctly different, while in others they are quite similar. The differences between the traditions can be understood in terms of what aspects of leadership become relevant to focus on, but also as different ways of analysing the same aspects. The similarities consist of some specific notions of leadership and learning that appear to serve as common ground. For instance, the traditions acknowledge that important functions of a learning-oriented leadership include; being a role-model, creating a learning environment, being supportive and challenging in order to create reflection.

The idea in the upcoming analysis is that the traditions can contribute different interpretations of the material, but also to find common theoretical ground. For instance, an important question is how the leaders' work and leadership can be understood in terms of being proactive or reactive? Another question is how the leaders' perceptions of the role of being a facilitator of learning can be interpreted differently on the basis of previous empirical evidence. The traditions will also guide the analysis of the activities that the leaders engage in to facilitate learning and the factors that either enable or constrain leadership for learning and development.

In conclusion, it is also important to note that, when taken together, the relation between leadership and learning has only been addressed sparingly in contemporary leadership research and the empirical foundations for the so-called 'new leadership' are limited. When connections have been made it is also evident that learning is treated as something of a black box and seen as unproblematic. Learning is described as everything ranging from creativity and innovations to empowerment and job commitment. The theories do not distinguish between different types of learning or address learning as an ongoing process. But as we have seen from both the definitions of learning in the introductory chapter and the problems with learning that were discussed within the CMS tradition, learning cannot be reduced to a dependent variable of leadership. Moreover, if the relationship between the individual and the context in which learning is supposed to occur is disregarded, learning becomes an actor-driven project that goes on regardless of factors such as organizational structure. For these reasons, the next chapter is devoted to further integrating the concepts of learning and leadership.

## 3 Leadership for learning in the workplace

As was evident in the preceding chapter, connections between leadership and learning in the workplace are rather scarce in contemporary leadership research. In this chapter, an attempt is made to link the two concepts in a workplace context. Initially, some parts of the previous discussion on learning (see chapter 1) are further elaborated. This is followed by a presentation of theories that concern the phases of the learning process and a discussion on how to understand a learning-oriented leadership

### 3.1 Learning and its conditions

This first section contains a discussion of different types of learning and the conditions that enable or constrain them. Furthermore, the types of learning and the conditions are also related to two competing logics of learning and development in organizations.

#### *3.1.1 Adaptive and developmental learning*

Previously, it has been suggested that learning is a process of change in a learning subject that occurs in a subjective, a performance or a structural dimension. However, so far we have not yet touched upon the quality of that learning. On this topic it has been recognized that there are different types of learning and Ellström (1996) makes the distinction between adaptive learning and developmental learning. Other similar conceptualizations of different forms of learning are restrictive and expansive learning (Engeström, 1987), instrumental and transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991) or single-loop learning and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

The notion of learning as adaptation focuses on the mastery of known situations and recurrent tasks, while learning as development is characterized by a critical questioning that challenges previous assumptions, thus promoting new and creative solutions to problems or assignments. Adaptive learning concerns the refinement of existing routines in organizations, in contrast to developmental learning, which instead transforms the prevailing situation (Ellström, 2006). According to Ellström (2004) these two types of learning are connected to the three learning dimensions and it is important not to view them as mutually exclusive. Ellström argues that they rather can be perceived as co-existing and complementary forms of learning.

### *3.1.2 Conditions for learning*

But what determines whether learning is adaptive or developmental? In order to answer this question it is necessary to discuss the conditions in the workplace that enable and constrain learning, i.e. the learning environment of the organization (Ellström, Ekholm & Ellström, 2008; Fuller & Unwin, 2004). Ellström (2001; 2006) identifies eight learning conditions that constitute the learning environment. The first condition is the learning potential of the work task, which can be seen as a function of complexity, autonomy and demands for competence. An assignment with great learning potential is usually complex and demands a full use of the actor's competence. Furthermore, it also offers objective as well as subjective autonomy in regards to how the assignment should be handled. Objective autonomy refers to possibilities to define the actual assignment, while subjective autonomy refers to the actor's competence in relation to the assignment (*ibid.*).

The second learning condition concerns the balance between autonomy and standardization of the work performance and outcomes. In relation to the industrial sector this represents a contested terrain, where proponents of formalization and standardization of work processes (Adler & Cole, 1993) have argued the superiority of Japanese production principles in general and those applied at the NUMMI transplant in particular, but who have been opposed by alternatives to Lean Production in terms of the model used at Volvo's factory in Uddevalla (Berggren, 1993; 1994). In connection to learning, the question has been whether or not standardization inhibits developmental learning by reducing the autonomy and variation in how the work tasks are performed. However, Adler & Cole (1993) present another interpretation by arguing that standardization is a key factor when designing for learning, since it reduces the time spent on tasks with low learning potential in favour of working with more creative assignments. Secondly, it is also possible to claim that with the introduction of formal standards and rules comes greater transparency which allows the co-workers to get a more holistic understanding of the company (*ibid.*). Ellström (2006) argues that it is thus hard to reach a conclusive answer to which of the philosophies is most supportive of learning, since it seems to depend on what tasks are standardized and the level of co-worker participation in the standardization process. In other words, in relation to learning, formalization comes across as a double-edged sword.

This brings us to the third learning condition; the participation of employees in decisions that affect the design of the organization. In studies of possibilities for learning in the course of daily work, evidence has suggested the importance of co-worker participation in the problem solving process

(Davidsson & Svedin, 1999; Kock, 2002). To put it simply, it appears as if a higher degree of participation provides more possibilities to develop qualified and innovative learning. According to Ellström (2006), participation in innovative system development, where the co-workers are highly involved in solving problems, is most likely to facilitate developmental learning.

The fourth learning condition concerns subjective factors such as the individual's attitude towards learning, i.e. learning readiness, which in previous studies has been identified as important for the commitment to learning activities in the workplace (Baumgarten, 2006; Ellström & Ekholm, 2004). Factors that may explain why individuals approach possibilities for learning differently – some are enthusiastic, while others are cautious or downright negative – are related to social background, previous experience of educational institutions, level of education and economical, political and cultural conditions (Rubensson, 1996).

On the topic of cultural factors that affect learning, which is the fifth learning condition, Ellström (2006) argues that learning can be inhibited by workplace norms that do not appreciate the value of competence development, career ladders, theoretical discussions or individual responsibility. Ellström advances the suggestion that a culture that enables developmental learning on the contrary is characterized by a climate that encourages questioning and critical reflection, where it is okay to take initiatives or to have a different opinion, and where it is not the end of the world if someone makes a mistake.

The sixth condition for learning concerns the direction and goals of the organization. According to Ellström (2006), it is necessary to question the established notion that clearly formulated goals and detailed plans are always preferable. Based on empirical findings that show how goal formulation in actuality can be characterized as a dynamic process of contradictions and power struggles, Ellström questions whether this by nature inhibits learning and advances the interpretation that legible goals may be in favour of adaptive learning, while developmental learning is closer connected to the uncertainties that occur when unexpected problems arise in the organization.

In any typical organization, it is not uncommon for developmental activities to be subdued by a major focus on the daily operations. As a consequence, studies have shown that learning often needs to be initiated by some sort of change or disruption (Dewey, 1933/1998). According to Ellström (2006), a condition for learning is thus the perceived transformation pressure from the outer context, caused by occurrences such as rapid technological development, increased demands from customers or the introduction of new production philosophies.

However, this change pressure may not necessarily be enough to break established routines or norms, which is needed to reach developmental learning. Studies have shown that demands for changes also require active management support (Davidsson & Svedin, 1999; Ellström, Ekholm & Ellström, 2008; Södergren, 1996), in terms of allocating adequate resources and putting developmental issues on the agenda. The support of the management is also important to reduce the stress and anxiety that often comes with radical changes (Ellström, 2006).

### *3.1.3 Two competing logics of learning*

According to Ellström (2006), we need to recognize that there are patterns of practices that shape the conditions of learning in organizations, which implies that the focus on learning at the workplace often comes second to the production and core processes of the organizations. Ellström advances the interpretation that the desire to focus on both the significance of learning at work and on the need for time rationalization and enhanced efficiency represent two different logics of activity and learning, which simultaneously operate in organizations; the logic of performance and the logic of development.<sup>9</sup> These different logics are complementary and stem from the distinction between adaptive and developmental learning. They do not only represent different ways of viewing learning at work, but can also be seen as alternative ways of organizing learning in the workplace (ibid.).

Within the logic of performance, routine action obtained through adaptive learning is dominant. Rules and instructions are followed when handling known problems or situations. According to the logic of performance, learning is primarily instrumental and valued when it promotes effective action. This leads to an environment characterized by security, standardizations and consensus. The logic of development on the other hand is characterized by the opposite pattern of activity, thus focusing on reflective and alternative thinking, risk taking and the desire to experiment. Uncertainty and divergence are seen as possible generators of developmental learning and not as threats or inconveniences (Ellström, 2006).

As both of the logics can be considered essential for the organization's ability to survive and develop – you cannot have development without implementation or vice versa – the interesting question is how to find an appropriate balance between them instead of letting one, usually the logic of performance, dominate the other. This is of course not a simple matter. Ellström (2006) arrives at the conclusion that even though time and other

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<sup>9</sup> Ellström's (2006) interpretation builds on March's (1991) distinction between exploitation and exploration in organizational learning.

objective resources are important for learning, they are not enough. Also required are the co-workers' and leaders' subjective awareness of the significance of these processes. This awareness may enable the leaders to find space for development and learning – within the logic of performance – thereby putting these issues on the agenda.

### 3.2 A closer look at the learning process

To further understand how leadership may be related to the actual process of learning we need to take a closer look at its phases. Over the years, there have been a number of different attempts to illustrate the different stages of learning, but one recurring and often cited model has been conceptualized by Dewey (1933/1998) in the book *How we think*. Admittedly, Dewey's original focus was on the learning and development of an individual, but his thoughts have proven to be of use in understanding organizational learning as well (cf. Svensson, Jakobsson & Åberg, 2001). This model has influenced a number of elaborated conceptualizations of the stages of learning. For instance, Kolb (1984) asserts that his model of experiential learning partly draws on Dewey's ideas.<sup>10</sup> This is also the case for Ellström's (1992; 1996) notion of developmental learning and even though Engeström's activity theoretical framework is mainly influenced by Russian psychologists, it is possible to find connections to Dewey as well (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999).

Based on Dewey (1933/1998), the concept of learning is seen as a process consisting of several steps wherein reflective thought and action are interwoven. Beginning with some kind of disturbance or problem, Dewey portrays learning as a movement from habitual actions, through definition of a problem, analysis and understanding towards new actions that both solve the problem and lead to new knowledge. According to Dewey, the limits of every unit of thinking consist of a perplexed and confused situation – pre-reflection – in the beginning and a resolved and clarified situation – post-reflection – at the end. Within these limits of reflective thought, five phases of thinking occur (ibid). In order to take a closer look at these phases we will draw upon Miettinen's (2000) illustration of Dewey's model:

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<sup>10</sup> However, Miettinen's (2000) critical investigation of Kolb's model for experiential learning reveals that the asserted connections to Dewey are not exactly crystal clear. Miettinen is critical of the fact that Kolb draws on Dewey's book *Experience and Education* (1938) and not from any of his work on thought and logic, e.g *How we think* (1933/1998).

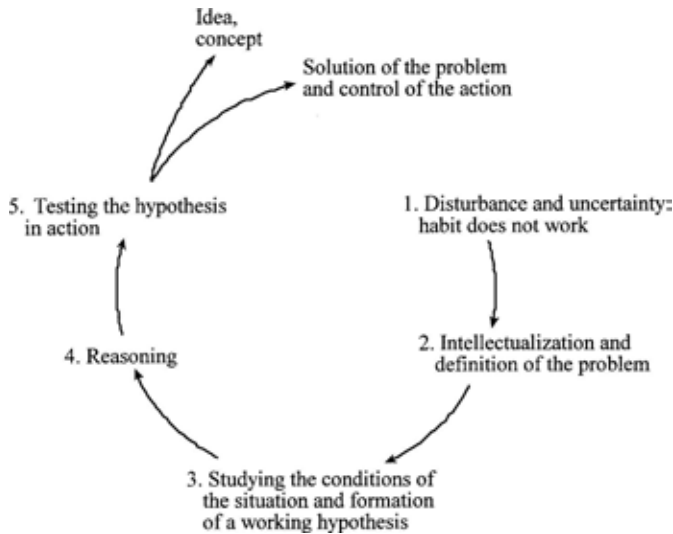


Figure 1: Miettinen's illustration of Dewey's model for reflective thought and action (Miettinen, 2000, p. 65).

According to Dewey (1933/1998), routinized actions usually imply a low degree of reflection and thus learning. It is not until the habitual course of activities are interrupted by problems, disturbances, difficulties, resistance or hesitation, that learning occurs. In Miettinen's (2000) figure above, this state of uncertainty represents the first phase in the learning process. The reflective experience thereby originates in oppositions to the routinized way of doing things. However, according to Dewey (1933/1998), these oppositions and contradictions are not primarily a result of inner, psychological processes. Instead he argues that they follow an inadequate relation between the individual and its surroundings.

In phase 2 – intellectualization – a closer examination of the problem at hand follows. The resources, restrictions and possibilities of the problem are studied in order to find a tentative problem definition that can guide the further analysis and problem solving (Dewey, 1933/1988).

The word 'problem' often seems too elaborate and dignified to denote what happens in minor cases of reflection. But in every case where reflective activity ensues, there is a process of intellectualizing what at first is merely an emotional quality of the whole situation. This conversion is effected by noting more definitely the conditions that constitute the trouble and cause the stoppage of action. (Dewey, 1933/1998, p. 109)



The third phase consists of a more in-depth analysis of the situation in relation to which the problem is supposed to be solved. This includes both material and social conditions for the said action. Based on this analysis, a working hypothesis or guiding idea is formulated for the actions that should be taken. This is in its nature preliminary and in need of further development. (Dewey, 1933/1988)

In phase four follows reasoning, which implies an intellectual operation where the different parts and ideas that have been analyzed are related to each other. Dewey describes this as a thought experiment where the working hypotheses are merged, scrutinized and changed. The phase can be seen as a synthesis of conflicting parts into a meaningful whole (ibid.).

Dewey (ibid.) argues that the only way to establish the validity of the hypothesis is to test it in practice, which is the fifth and final phase of the model. The intellectual experiments that have previously been conducted will only lead to tentative conclusions. In order for the working hypothesis to be valid it must lead to change in the situation or in the relation between the actor and his surroundings. If the practical experiments agree with the theoretical results and if there is reason to believe that only the specific conditions in question would lead to such results, this is enough confirmation to draw a conclusion.

Dewey (ibid.) states that even if the process does not lead to the verification of the hypothesis and the solving of the problem, it is important to learn from the mistakes in order to reach success in the subsequent passing of the phases. When the process is successful in terms of adequate changes to the situation, this will also lead to new knowledge, new ideas and increased learning that in the future becomes meaningful when solving other problems. Furthermore, Dewey argues that these phases should not be regarded in an absolute sense, since both the sequence as well as the extent of the phases may vary. There is nothing sacred about there being exactly five phases and it is likely that they in reality will co-exist rather than follow upon each other.

According to Svensson, Jakobsson & Åberg (2001), the dynamic between experience/action and reflection/conceptualization is central to Dewey's notion of how we think. Action and reflection are intertwined and condition one another. Concepts and theories do not evolve individually and autonomously, but should rather be understood as an integrated part of action, which is situated in and dependent on the social context. In other words, for Dewey, joint action is a central point of departure to resolve the dialectic relationship between experience and reflection. Learning, in terms of an investigative method, can be understood as a social process that takes place in a social context (ibid.).

This notion has been further developed in other conceptualizations of the learning process in connection to working life. For instance, Engeström's (1999) elaboration of activity theory partly draws on Dewey's thoughts on how to transcend the dualisms between activity and thought, theory and practice and facts and values. In fact, even though there is no reference to Dewey, Engeström's conceptualization of seven epistemic actions in an expansive learning cycle is quite similar to the previously described five phases.<sup>11</sup> The seven actions in Engeström's model are; (1) questioning, (2) historical and/or empirical analysis, (3) modelling the new solution, (4) examining the new model, (5) implementing the new model, (6) reflecting on the process, (7) consolidating the new practice. One of the main differences between Dewey and Engeström is that the latter is more oriented towards understanding the significance of cultural mediation as well as the importance of history and the role of artefacts.

In an earlier text, Engeström (1994) discussed the role of the teacher or instructor in relation to the stages, actions or phases of the learning process. In the following section we will look at what parallels can be drawn between Engeström's discussion and leadership for learning in a workplace setting.

### 3.3 Interpreting leadership for learning

So far in this chapter it has been argued that there are different types of learning and that learning can be seen as a process which consists of a number of phases or actions. Furthermore, it has also been concluded that learning – especially higher-order – needs to be supported:

Although there are many occasions of productive learning in everyday situations, most of everyday learning consists of conditioning, imitation, and trial and error. Investigative, deep-level learning is relatively rare without instruction or intentional self-instruction. For that very reason, instruction is necessary. Its task is to enhance the quality of learning, to make it purposeful and methodical. (Engeström, 1994, p. 48)

This takes us to the question of what part the leader in an organization plays in relation to co-workers' learning. In the following section, two complementary assumptions are outlined. The first is that the leader, through various activities, can influence the different phases of the learning process at the individual, group or organizational levels. The second is that the leader

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<sup>11</sup> Instead Engeström primarily take Davydov (1988) and Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) as point of departure for his discussion.

concurrently can affect the more overarching logics in terms of either supporting developmental or adaptive learning.

When it comes to the first of these assumptions, we may turn to Engeström (1994) for a discussion on the relation between an instructor and a student in a workplace learning context. Engeström's arguments are based on formal rather than informal learning activities, but nonetheless there are some parallels to the role of a leader in relation to the learning process of a co-worker. In essence, Engeström asserts that the task of the instructor is to influence the students (further on referred to as co-workers) to become more self-reliant, self-aware and responsible, in order for their learning to increase. The instructor arranges disturbances, in terms of intellectual confrontations, challenges and demands that create a need for learning for the co-workers. Furthermore, the instructor also guides and supports the co-worker during the steps of the learning cycle.

During the course of the cycle, the role of the instructor shifts. According to Engeström, there are nine instructional functions: preparing, motivating, orienting, conveying and elaborating new knowledge, systematizing, practicing, applying, criticizing, evaluating, and controlling. Engeström argues that the instructor must be aware of how these functions are related to the learning process of a learning subject.

The instructor must ask: "At this stage, am I attempting to construct an orientation basis with my students – or to systematize and consolidate what I have already taught them – or perhaps motivate them to embark on an entirely new topic?" (Engeström, 1994, p. 96)

In short the functions are initiated when the instructor challenges the co-worker by playing the 'devil's advocate' to create a motivating cognitive conflict. Then the instructor invites the co-worker to experiment and find models to resolve the conflict, while at the same time providing the adequate tools for the job. When the co-worker starts applying his newly formulated models, the instructor offers additional knowledge. During the practical application, the instructor takes the perspective of the 'competent practitioner', who demands solutions to actual problems and situations. It is, however, important to note that there is no universally correct order or distribution of time between the different functions. One and the same function may be repeated over and over again, while another is completely left aside (Engeström, 1994).

If we momentarily look back at the previous chapter and the review of leadership research in relation to learning, it is apparent that there are no similar conceptualizations of the connection between the leaders' actions and

phases of learning. On the contrary – as has been pointed out earlier – within leadership research the knowledge of learning seems to be limited. With few exceptions (cf. Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Ellström & Kock, 2003) current leadership researchers treat learning as something given and fixed, which can be achieved as one goal among others, e.g. increased quality or efficiency. The process of learning is not problematized to any larger extent. Within the managerial work tradition, there are no specific accounts of leader behaviours or actions that relate to the phases of learning. Nor do Bass (1985) or Senge (1990) discuss how transformational leadership and the leader as teacher can act differently depending on the type of learning or phases in the process. It is actually only Manz & Sims (1991) that account for some kind of progression in the leadership. When it comes to Critical Management Studies (cf. Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), there are even fewer connections between phases of learning and leadership. Admittedly, reflection is central to the critical approach, but in a different sense than is portrayed by Dewey (1933/1998) or Engeström (1994). The critical, emancipatory, reflection rather questions the learning process, and is actually closer related to the concept of deuterio-learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996), i.e. learning about learning, in order to see behind that which is taken for granted.<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to the second assumption exclaimed above, it is possible to reconnect with the previously described distinction between developmental and adaptive learning, as well as the difference between the logic of development and the logic of performance (Ellström, 1996, 2006). Even if Engeström (1994) does not make an explicit point of connections to leadership, this theme has been developed by others. For instance, March & Weil (2005) claim that one of the major challenges for a leader is to find a balance between exploitation (performance) and exploration (development) in organizations. Furthermore, it is also possible to draw parallels between Bass' (1985) theory of transformational and transactional leadership and the types of learning. However, while Bass promotes a movement towards becoming more transformational as preferable, thereby downplaying the importance of transactions, Ellström (2006) and March & Weil (2005) rather accentuate the need to see the relationship between transformation and transaction, development and adaptation, exploration and exploitation as a dialectical process, where one bites the other's tail in a continuous loop.

By drawing on the discussion above it is possible to formulate two ideal typical leadership directions; performance-oriented leadership and

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<sup>12</sup> All in all, it is interesting that these modern leadership theories do not draw on the situational aspects of leadership developed by researchers such as Hersey & Blanchard (1969) and Vroom & Yetton (1973).

development-oriented leadership (a partly similar distinction is made by Scherp, 2008). A leader with a performance-orientation mainly exhibits a transactional leadership with a focus on control and evaluation. The aim is to facilitate adaptive learning oriented towards mastering procedures and routines. In line with the logic of performance (Ellström, 2006) the practises have an emphasis on;

- routinized, effective action;
- problem solving through the application of given rules/instructions;
- consensus;
- standardization, stability and avoidance of uncertainty.

Development-oriented leadership on the other hand consists of more transformational behaviours aimed at challenging and supporting developmental learning, which is oriented towards developing new and creative solutions. Anchored in the logic of development (Ellström, 2006) the patterns of practise have an emphasis on;

- critical reflection and questioning of current practises and structures;
- alternative thinking;
- experimentation and risk taking;
- tolerance for ambiguity, variation, and mistakes.

These two orientations are not seen as excluding each other, but rather as complementary. Leadership that facilitates learning can be thus seen as oriented towards both development and adaptation; since these processes are each others' prerequisites (Scherp, 2008). However, depending on the surrounding conditions, one may dominate over the other.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that in connection to these two leadership orientations and their adjoining logics, there are additional dimensions to consider. Firstly, the interaction between a leader and a co-worker has been described as a process of influence. However, this interaction is not always direct (cf. Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Rather, the interaction process can be compared to interlocking spirals. The leaders and co-workers are not always in direct contact during a regular work day. Instead, they meet on certain occasions, such as at various meetings. During these occasions, the leadership and subsequent influence is direct. The rest of the time, i.e. when the leader and co-worker go about their day, the influence is indirect, governed by previous decisions, agreements, instructions, rules, policies, norms, management systems or culture (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004).

Secondly, the interaction is itself influenced by factors located outside both the leader and the co-worker (cf. Archer, 2003). Much like the conditions of learning, there are conditions of leadership in organizations in terms of enabling and constraining structures. For instance, the layout of the factory, work schedules, chains of command, span of control, work descriptions, functionality of machines, meeting forms and gender patterns are examples of structural and cultural factors that explicitly or implicitly affect the leader.

In conclusion, an important task is to explore the two leadership orientations. Therefore, the connection between leadership and learning within organizational logics will function as a frame for analyzing the empirical material, which is presented in the following chapters. The two cases will then be discussed on the basis of the research questions of the thesis (see chapter 1) that concern the practice of leadership, the leaders' notions of leadership and learning, and constraining and enabling factors.

## 4 Methods

This chapter contains a presentation of the methodological considerations and points of departure for the thesis. Furthermore, the chapter also includes a description of the research methodologies that have been used, as well as an account of how the case studies were carried out, analysed and presented. In addition, the final section contains a discussion of the quality of the study.

### 4.1 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

Even though leadership has been studied scientifically since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has still been argued that we do not understand it to any greater extent (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b). Contributing reasons for this paradox include the dissension concerning the way we conceptualize leadership and the unclear relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology in previous research (Fleetwood, 2005; Tsoukas, 2000).

By drawing on a critical realist meta-theoretical model of explanation (Bhaskar, 1978; Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004), some ontological and epistemological assumptions can be commented on in relation to the social scientific study of leadership. To begin with, as has been discussed in the introductory chapter (see 1.3), the point of departure in this thesis is that leadership can be viewed as a process, both in terms of interaction and of the constant and cyclical elaboration of social structures. From a critical realist perspective social structures and agents<sup>13</sup> are considered to be different, but mutually dependent entities. In other words, it is not possible to reduce structure to being acting agents or agents into being social relations. Social structures form the context in which leadership occurs, while this interaction process simultaneously constitutes the environment wherein the structures are either transformed or reproduced. In other words, we should not study either structures or agents, but rather the relation between them (Archer, 1995). However, the interplay between structure and agency cannot be discerned

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<sup>13</sup> In critical realism the concept of social structure is used as an umbrella term, which refers to configurations of causal mechanisms, rules, relations, powers, position and practises (Fleetwood, 2005). Agent as used here stands for an intentionally acting subject or collective, which occupy a structural position (Danermark et al., 2003).

empirically without social scientific analysis. Building on Bhaskar, Archer (1995) has formed an analytical model (figure 2) that illustrates this interplay.

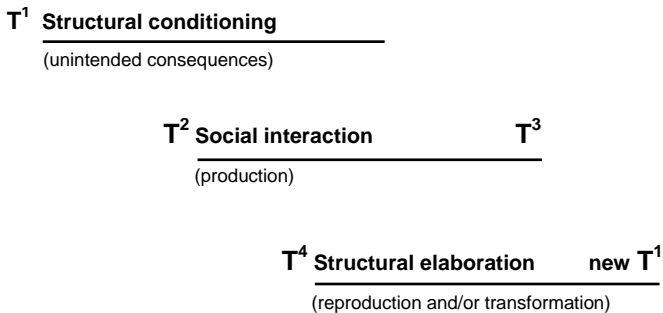


Figure 2: Adaptation of the morphogenetic/static cycle and the transformational model. (Archer, 1995, pp. 157-158)

This process is constantly ongoing, but if it was possible to freeze it for a moment we would see that the first position (T<sup>1</sup>) consists of social structures, which are the emergent results of previous cycles. These social structures condition the social interaction between agents (T<sup>2</sup>-T<sup>3</sup>), in terms of enabling or restricting the possible alternatives of action. The structural conditioning constitutes the mechanism that functions as a link between the agent and the structure. However, this does not imply that the social interaction of agents is determined by the structure, since agents have the power of intentionality. In the last phase of the model (T<sup>4</sup>) the social interaction has led to a structural elaboration, which implies that it has been reproduced in a modified form, transformed into another structure or simply ceased to exist. The elaborated structure then becomes structural conditioning for a subsequent cycle (new T<sup>1</sup>) (Archer, 1995, 2003).

Furthermore, we can also argue that this implies that leadership does not reside within the individual leader, but rather that it is something that occurs between leaders and followers. However, this does not imply what Barlebo Wenneberg (2001) refers to as a naive social constructionist ontology, which considers leadership to be a phenomenon that only exists through our knowledge of it and by virtue of the language we use to describe it (cf. Grint, 2005). Instead, an assumption in the thesis is that while leadership is a socially produced and activity-dependent phenomenon, it is not reducible to being a mere discursive phenomenon. This would lead to a position where knowledge of leadership is always relative and subjective, making it impossible to explain and understand what underlying mechanisms generate or influence the phenomenon (Barlebo Wenneberg, 2001; Fleetwood, 2005).



Another assumption in this thesis is that leadership is not reducible to empirically-observable actions of an individual. Bhaskar (1998) refers to this as the epistemic fallacy and argues that reality can be understood as stratified and consisting of underlying generative mechanisms that cause the events we observe in the empirical domain. From a critical realist standpoint it is possible to argue that there is a real dimension of leadership, which can be made an object of scientific study, but regardless of the methods used, our knowledge of it is always conceptually mediated (Danermark et al., 2003).

Judging from this discussion, it appears as if leadership can appear in different modes of reality. In this thesis, leadership is conceptualized as the process of practising leadership, i.e. the actual social interaction between agents, but also as the result or product of this interaction, i.e. in terms of a structural elaboration. The phenomenon is also understood and interpreted in a structural dimension, in terms of discursive constructions of leadership at global and local levels (Czarniawska, 2005; Sjöstrand & Tyrstrup, 1999). In addition, leadership also appears in a subjective and cognitive mode, which holds the leaders unique notions of, attitudes towards and experiences of leadership (cf. Archer, 2003, 2007). It is of course possible to focus the attention of a study on one or two of these dimensions, but to gain comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon and the mechanisms that affect it, it would be meaningful to study all three of the dimensions as well as the interplay between them. In this sense, the critical realist view permeates both the research questions of the thesis and the methodologies used to answer them. Hence, the focus is on describing and analyzing the spoken dimension of leadership, in relation to the practiced dimension and leadership discourses in the organizations. This implies what Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000) refer to as a reflexive methodology where interpretations and reflexivity becomes crucial in the interface between theoretical perspectives and empirical data.

## 4.2 A qualitative case study

Another contributing reason to why we still do not fully understand leadership is related to the traditional predominance of quantitative methods in previous studies (Yukl, 1999). Therefore, this thesis draws on the gradual change towards leadership studies of a more qualitative kind (Bryman, Stephens & Campo, 1996; Conger, 1998).

More specifically, the methodology in the thesis can be described as a case study, which Yin (2003) defines as an empirically-based investigation that studies a phenomenon in its natural context. Building on Yin, the foundation for this thesis is a multiple-case study, in the sense that it

encompasses two organizations. The rationale behind using two cases is not only to make comparisons, but also to achieve a contextually-grounded empirical material. In addition, Yin argues that if you have the choice and resources, a multiple-case design increases the chances of doing a high-quality case study, compared to a single-case design. Single-case studies are more vulnerable since then you will have put “all your eggs in one basket” (Yin, 2003, p. 53). He also argues that the analytical benefits from having two or more cases may be considerable in terms of possibilities for replication and strengthened external validity.

Furthermore, I have used multiple sources of evidence that have been collected using different methods, i.e. interviews, observations and documents, and analyzed using different theoretical perspectives. In this way I have worked with a kind of triangulation, which is a method often used in case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994; Yin, 2003).

### 4.3 An interactive research approach

Another way of interpreting the shortcomings of previous leadership research is related to the critique of its inadequate capacity in linking theories to the practices where leadership is applied (March, 1984; Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). Many current theories and models are not sufficiently sensitive to different contexts, while practitioners on the other hand often approach leadership problems with anecdotal knowledge and influences from popular management fads (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). An approach that aims at closing this gap between theory and practice is interactive research, which instead of viewing the researcher as the sole bearer of knowledge emphasizes the importance of joint knowledge creation between actively participating practitioners and researchers (Svensson & Aagard Nielsen, 2006).

#### 4.3.1 *The concept of interactive research*

According to Svensson (2002), the ambition of an interactive approach is to carry out research together ‘with’ instead of ‘on’ or ‘by request of’ the participants. In this way, possibilities are created for a collaborative production of knowledge that is both theoretically and practically valuable (Svensson & Aagaard Nielsen, 2006). Interactive research can be seen as a continuation and elaboration of the action research approach (Svensson, Ellström & Brulin, 2007). However, while action researchers have been criticized for prioritizing development at the expense of critical research, the interactive approach stresses the importance of separating the roles of researcher and developer and of carefully considering issues of validity. This does not imply that interactive research is free from critical issues. On the

contrary, there are a lot of aspects in the interactive process that could be potentially difficult to handle in relation to performing valid research.

Through the interactive relationship between researcher and practitioner it is possible to reach a deeper understanding of organizations and to gain access to processes that would otherwise remain hidden. By integrating inside and outside perspectives in a joint analysis, a foundation is created for generating new knowledge with a higher validity in comparison to using more one-sided approaches (Svensson & Aagard Nielsen, 2006). This also creates potential for greater commitment and participation on the part of the actors involved. Thus, an important condition for the interactivity is that all of the actors have chosen to participate and are given actual possibilities to influence the research process (Svensson, 2002).

In this study, the interactive research process has been based on a model (see figure 3 below) consisting of two interacting activity systems; a research system and a practice system (Ellström, 2008).

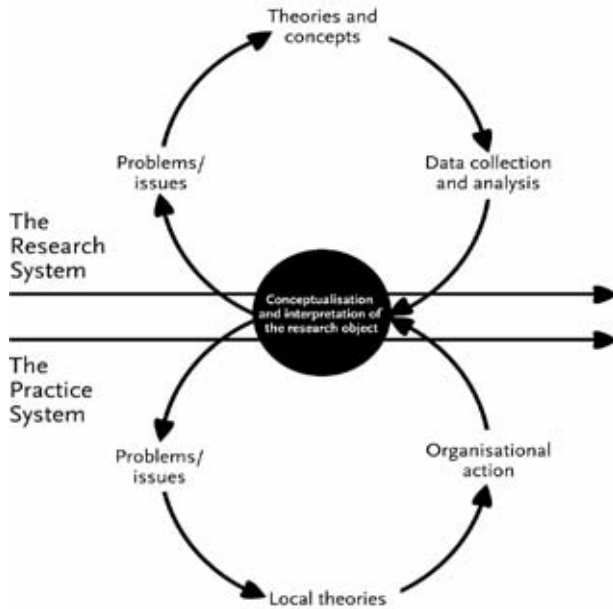


Figure 3: The interactive research process. (Ellström, 2008, p. 9)

The research system can be described as a cycle driven by the researchers' problem formulations, theories, data collection and analysis. The practice system can correspondingly be seen as driven by the need to find knowledge and methods for solving problems in the organization. The interactive model creates opportunities for a close link to be established between these activity systems. A central tenet is that the process of interactive research is assumed

to produce common conceptualizations and interpretations of the research object that are fed back as input into the next cycle of problem-solving activities, but also into the next cycle of the research process. Because of this process of knowledge creation the activity systems may be seen as two joint, collective learning cycles that produce successive versions of common conceptualizations of the ongoing change process (Ellström, 2008).

### *4.3.2 The research process*

In line with the interactive approach, the research process in this thesis can be described as emergent, in the sense that one phase of the process has added to the next. Furthermore, the design of the study is a result of the joint collaboration between researchers and practitioners. In the first case, AlphaCo, the process was initiated by two meetings between me, one of my tutors and three representatives of the company, including the MD, the HR manager and a production leader. During these meetings, we discussed the focus of the study and decided that the initial stage of the process would comprise an interview study. After I had conducted the interviews, the results were presented and analysed jointly in the form of two dialogue and analysis seminars (cf. Svensson, Ellström & Brulin, 2007). The first one included the managerial board of the company and the second one included all the participants of the study. These seminars led to a decision to continue the data collection with an observation study of leaders in the company. It was also decided to arrange three subsequent seminars, where data from the observations was used to discuss leadership development. During these development-oriented activities I functioned as a moderator and summarized the main points of the discussions.

At BetaInc the interactive process has been similar, but not identical. We started with two meetings between me, my tutor, the factory manager and representatives of leaders at different levels, where the scope of the study was discussed. We presented the design from the first case but were open to suggestions concerning the unique situations of BetaInc in comparison to AlphaCo. The representatives from BetaInc found the design suitable, but it was decided that the feedback sessions would be initiated after the observation study in order to shorten the time frame of the study. After the data was collected and analysed, two dialogue and analysis seminars were arranged. The first one included the top management of the factory and the second one included approximately 25 leaders in the company. Based on the joint analysis in the seminars, it was decided to initiate a series of development-oriented seminars called ‘production leader forums’. These were led by voluntarily selected leaders and I participated on the first

occasion as a speaking partner. These seminars focused on the changing role of the production leader.

The phases of the process in the two cases are illustrated in figure 4 below.

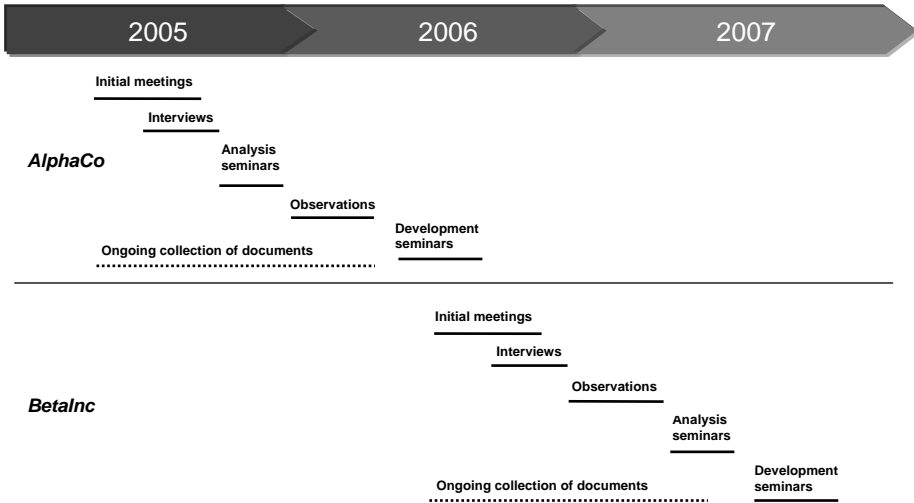


Figure 4: The phases of the research process

In relation to this design it is important to note that the more development-oriented phases are not included in the thesis as primary data. The purpose of the study is not to follow the change processes initiated by the research project. For me, these phases have mainly served as a basis for deepened analysis of data.

### 4.3.3 The role of the researcher

An important aspect to discuss in relation to interactive research is the role of the researcher. Svensson, Ellström & Brulin (2007) argue that being an interactive researcher can be seen as more complex than its counterpart in traditional research. The interactive researcher must be able to partake in a development process, without becoming its captive, and to alternate between on-stage performance and back-stage reflection (Eikeland, 2006). However, it is relevant to consider the critique of action researchers not being able to maintain the distance to the practice needed to perform high-quality research with regard to interactive research as well (Svensson & Aagard Nielsen, 2006).

On this note, Svensson, Brulin & Ellström (2007) identify a number of dilemmas concerning the role of the interactive researcher. They argue that it is necessary to ask how the research process has been affected by the

closeness between the two activity systems. Has it been possible to establish a mutually trusting relationship with the practitioners without risking ‘going native’ and not daring to be critical? In addition, ethical considerations may not be downplayed at the expense of the research and development interests (ibid.). In section 4.7, I further elaborate on how my role as a researcher may have affected the quality of the study.

## 4.4 Selection of cases and participants

In the spring of 2005, I started glancing more and more towards the ‘field’ and my interest in different organizations and the upcoming data collection phase grew stronger. On the basis of a literature review I had identified a strong notion of a ‘new and change-oriented leadership’, which seemed to appear in both private and public sector organizations, regardless of size or orientation. Furthermore, it was also possible to link this notion of leadership to new production philosophies and to organizations that reported an increased pressure from their external context. At the same time, the formation of the HELIX VINN Excellence Centre<sup>14</sup> was in its initial stages. Among the potential partners were AlphaCo and BetaInc, two companies that were undergoing a number of transformations due to both internal and external conditions. These companies were approached about participating in research connected to leadership, development and change processes, and they responded positively. The companies are further described in chapter 5.

When it comes to the selection of participants the procedure has differed between the cases. At AlphaCo there were twelve individuals who – at the time – worked in leadership positions. Some of these had more than one position in the company. During the initial meetings with the management and representatives of the leaders, we agreed to include all of the leaders in the interview study. Three of these leaders were identified as belonging to a higher level in the organizational hierarchy, while the other nine worked at a lower level in the organization. A total of five leaders were selected to participate in the observation study. This was seen as a reasonable amount in relation to the scope and time frame of the case study. The criterion for selection was to include leaders at the lower level, but also to attain a variation so that different departments would be represented in the study.

At BetaInc it was not possible to include all of the leaders in the company. Instead, after discussions with the factory management, it was decided that the study would encompass the production flow of a specific product model and leaders who in some way were connected to this flow.

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.liu.se/helix](http://www.liu.se/helix) for more information.

The idea was also to make a selection of leaders that was similar to the AlphaCo case and a criterion was therefore to include both leaders in the immediate production departments, but also leaders in non-production departments, for instance the planning department and the HR department. More specifically, 18 leaders from BetaInc were selected to participate in the study. Six of these leaders were identified as belonging to a higher hierarchical level, while consequently 12 belonged to a lower hierarchical level. Six of the leaders were also selected to participate in a subsequent observation study. As in the AlphaCo case, the criterion for selection was to include both leaders from production departments and from non-production departments in order for the study to encompass different functions of the organization. Additional information on the cases and the leaders is included in chapter 5.

## 4.5 Methods for collecting data

As was previously stated, the focus in the thesis is to describe and analyze the subjective dimension of leadership, in relation to the practiced dimension and leadership discourses in the companies. When it comes to methods for data collection, the subjective dimension is primarily represented by interviews, the practiced dimension by observations and the leadership discourses by document analysis and literature reviews.

### *4.5.1 Interviews*

In both organizations I have conducted an initial study based on semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996). The basis for the interviews has been a guide with questions concerning background, work situation, notions of leadership, and notions of leadership and learning (see appendix 1). The background segment included questions on education level, age, previous work experience, previous leadership experience and how they became leaders in the first place. The daily work and leadership segment concerned the everyday activities of the leaders and with whom they normally interact. The leaders were also asked to reflect on what constitutes good leadership and how they perceive their own leadership. The segment on learning and development included questions concerning the leaders' views on these two concepts, but also more directed questions that targeted what actions the leaders would take in relation to their co-workers learning and development. At the end of this segment there were also questions concerning ways of taking care of the co-workers' learning and development in terms of opportunities for internal mobility.

The interview guide has been developed in several steps, including a pilot study of six leaders in a municipality. The questions have been formulated based on the purpose and research questions of the thesis. However, the ambition has been to make it possible to have a relaxed conversation in order to make room for the respondent's story and experience to govern the interview process (Kvale, 1996). It has also been possible to ask follow-up questions to find new angles and possible perspectives not included in the guide.

At AlphaCo, the interview study was carried out in November 2005 and at BetaInc in September 2006. All of the interviews took place during the leaders' regular work hours, at the premises of the companies and more specifically in locations that ensured privacy, e.g. the leaders' offices or conference rooms. The length of the interviews varied from approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes to 2 hours. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All of the interviews were conducted by me. In connection with every interview the respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and the planned usage of the empirical material.

#### *4.5.2 Observations and follow-up interviews*

At both companies, an observation study was conducted in order to understand the leaders' work practice. The aim was to observe the daily work ranging from coffee breaks to events specifically oriented towards learning and development. Before entering the field, I had limited experience of studying industrial firms, which is one reason why the focus of the observations can be characterized as broad and holistic (cf. Wolcott, 1999).

To record data I used a small notebook which I carried at all times during the observations. In this book I made field notes, which typically consisted of a date, time and location, followed by an account of who was involved, what kind of activity took place and how it played out. Taking notes while being on the move is one of the most difficult aspects of conducting this kind of fieldwork (Czarniawska, 2007). I tried to make notes continuously during the observations. In addition, every evening after each observation was spent re-writing the notes more thoroughly. These extended notes have then been typed on a computer and in total the material comprises 160 pages. An important thing to note is that it has not been possible to register, note and remember exactly everything that went on during the observations. The observed events and situations have been interpreted by me as a researcher, thus making me an instrument in the data collection process. In this sense the data cannot be seen as neutral or objective.



At the end of each observation the leader and I had a brief conversation to sum up the content of the day and to discuss how my presence had been perceived. The general opinion among the leaders was that they have not acted differently because they knew they were being observed. Instead they report that they carried out their assignments as usual and that it would have been too difficult to take on another role than the one they are accustomed to. Furthermore, they responded that the days included in the study to a large extent could be considered as normal.

The observations at AlphaCo were conducted during one and a half weeks in February 2006. The observations at BetaInc also encompassed approximately one and a half weeks and were carried out in October 2006. In total, I have observed five leaders at AlphaCo and six leaders at BetaInc by accompanying them in their daily work. The total time observed is 90 hours, i.e. five days at AlphaCo and six days at BetaInc. The average time spent with each leader is one work day. Since the observations were made during a cohesive period of time it was possible for me to observe the same problem from the perspective of different leaders, which gave me a comprehensive image of the organizations. In both cases, the observations of one leader also led to indirect observations of other leaders in the companies (Merriam, 1998).

When the field notes had been transcribed I returned to the companies for follow-up interviews with the 11 leaders in the observation study, which Patton (2002) refers to as evaluation feedback. The purpose of these interviews was to validate my notes and to find specific sequences or critical incidents (cf. Flanagan, 1954) concerning learning and development that would be interesting to discuss in the dialogues seminars. The follow-up interviews lasted approximately one hour and were held at the companies. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### *4.5.3 Documents*

The third method used in this thesis is a study of documents related to the companies. In this sense, the term documents is used as an umbrella term for data that has originally been produced for other reasons than the research at hand (Merriam, 1998). The aim of the study has been to gather information in order to better understand the two case organizations. To begin with, the study has included internal documents on organization, leadership, learning and development, which have been provided by the companies' management, the human resources departments and the participating leaders. In addition, information from the companies' web sites has been included, as have newspaper articles concerning the companies. The documents vary in

character. As examples I have studied annual reports, organizational schemes, production system descriptions, process schemes, job descriptions, personnel strategic policies and guidelines and reports concerning specific activities such as personnel development dialogues, salary dialogues and improvement work. Some of the documents have existed in printed form, while others have been gathered from the companies' Intranet.

#### *4.5.4 Being on location*

In addition to the main methods for data collection presented above, it is also important to point to the significance of the continuous interaction, in terms of time spent in the companies during visits, meetings and seminars. These occasions have generated summarizing notes concerning our discussions on the studies, but above all they have included presentations of the organizational structures, introductions of key actors, tours of the facilities and other knowledge of a more intangible nature. This is not presented as primary data, but rather seen as helping me to learn more about the two cases.

## 4.6 Data analysis and presentation of results

The analysis of data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but at the same time it is also the most difficult and least codified part of the research process (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this section follows an account of how the empirical material has been analysed and a guide to how the results are presented in the upcoming chapters.

### *4.6.1 Cross-case analysis*

The two cases have initially been analysed and written separately in order to get an understanding of the similarities and differences between them. As a next step, a cross-case analysis has been made to find themes common to both of the cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Chapters 6-8 are written on the basis of the cross-case analysis in order to make the text more to the point. However, differences between the cases are accounted for as well. In chapter 5, the backgrounds of the cases are presented separately.

When it comes to the categories in the empirical material they are representations of the most common responses, but answers that indicate alternative notions are also included in the text. The interview data has been the main source of evidence in the thesis, while data from the observation study is included in chapters 6-8. The document study has been used as a foundation for chapter 5.

### 4.6.2 Analyzing the interview data

The analysis and interpretation of data can be seen as a process that has taken place at varied intensity during the entire study, from the early research questions to the final text in the report. The first step of the analysis began during the interviews in order to make the process sensitive to arising needs to collect new data or use different methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

When the interviews were completed, the work of analyzing the transcribed texts was initiated. The transcripts, which totalled approximately 17-20 pages per interview, have been analyzed by classifying, categorizing and thematizing the text in relation to the research questions of the thesis (cf. Kvale, 1996). Thus, the analysis can be characterized as data-driven in the sense that the categories are empirically based, rather than defined by a theoretical framework. However, the entire analysis and interpretation process can be seen as an iterative interaction between data and theory through abduction (Danermark et al., 2003). The second step in the process began with several readings of the entire material, while making notes when important passages or possible categories were discovered.

During the third step, I started working with the material on a computer, using a word processing programme. This included sorting and reducing the data, in order to make it easier to manage (Eisenhardt, 1989; Kvale, 1996). This process has included colour coding of sections of the texts in accordance with overarching themes. The themes are similar to the ones used in the interview guide; i.e. background, work situation, leadership and learning and development. Within the themes I then identified a number of sub-themes that were partly related to the questions in the interview guide and partly generated from the early steps in the analysis process. The work then continued with reducing and condensing the material. I read these documents and tried to find the concentrated meaning in every statement (Kvale, 1996).

In the fourth step, I worked with the condensed material to find regularities which could be grouped into categories. The data has been sorted depending on its convergence and divergence with the emerging categories. The aim in this process was to create categories with internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Merriam, 1998). During this step, I tried to find quotes that illustrated the categories. Furthermore, I also went back and re-read the original transcripts to ensure that I had not missed something at a more overarching level.

When it comes to the presentation of the data, quotes have been used to illustrate the lines of reasoning and to give a rich image of the aspects or phenomena being discussed. The number of quotes has mainly been guided by the ambition to show a variation in the material (Larsson, 1994). All of the quotes that are presented in the following chapters have been translated from

Swedish to English. This implies that some smaller corrections have been made to the spoken language. For instance, some dialectal expressions have been rather difficult to translate and instead I have focused on the meaning in the quote in order to produce an accurate translation. Furthermore, when specific technical jargon has occurred, it has in some cases been replaced by more general expressions in order to not reveal the respondent's identity.

#### *4.6.3 Analyzing the observation data*

The data that has been collected in the observation studies has mainly been analysed qualitatively with a focus on what kinds of activities the leaders engaged in during their everyday work. The focus has also been on studying the actual interaction between the leader and other organizational actors, such as other leaders or co-workers.

Apart from the fact that the note taking during the observations could be regarded as a first analytical step, the main analysis started when I every evening after an observation re-wrote my notes in running text and with more elaborated descriptions of the encountered events. Furthermore, upon completion of the data collection phase I have also written my notes out fair using a computer. In each and every one of these steps there has of course been a kind of analysis work going on. However, I have tried to omit my own interpretations in the observational transcripts. Instead, these aspects have been noted elsewhere. The following step in the analysis was to condense the material into tables that illustrated 'when', 'where', with 'whom' and 'what'. These tables included estimations of the point in time when certain activities occurred as well as their duration, which I recorded in my field notes. Based on the tables I made an estimation of the time spent in various work spaces in the organization. The identified work spaces include 'in the office', 'in a meeting', 'at a break', or 'in the department'.

A summary of the observations and the distribution of time were included as a foundation for the follow-up interviews with the leaders. During the interviews, we recapitulated the observed day and halted when we came upon an event that I wanted to know more about or that the leader felt a need to explain further. This made it possible for me to assess the reasonableness of my description of the occurrences in comparison to the leader's image of the particular day or event. All of the leaders have reported that my descriptions matched their perception of the observations.

Regarding the presentation of the results, my reflections and the extended field notes combined have constituted the basis of the parts in the thesis called 'glimpses from the observation study', which are included in chapter 7 and 8. A glimpse comprises a certain situation which exemplifies one of the

empirical categories. In addition, the estimations of how much time the leaders spent in different spaces are presented in two diagrams in chapter 6.

#### *4.6.4 Analyzing the document data*

When it comes to the analysis of the documents, I regard them as official descriptions which do not necessarily reflect actual conditions in the two cases. Nonetheless, I have found these documents very useful, especially those which describe the organizations and the activities used to facilitate learning and development. They have increased my understanding of the cases greatly in the sense that they provided additional information on issues that were touched upon in the interviews or during the observations.

The actual analysis can, in accordance with Patton's (2002) wide definition, be categorized as a simplified form of content analysis. Patton argues that content analysis is used to describe any qualitative data reduction and analysis procedure that attempts to find core meanings and consistencies in a qualitative material (ibid.). The stages in the analysis have included determining the nature of each document in terms of why it was produced, who produced it, when it was produced and how it has been used in the organizations. According to Merriam (1998), these questions are needed to assess the authenticity of the document. In the next step, I have searched for sections of the documents that concern the companies' history and their business and organization, in terms of production processes and ongoing change processes. Furthermore, I have also studied the companies' views and policies on personnel development matters. I have more specifically targeted documents concerning the activities that the leaders have described during the interviews or that I have seen for myself during the observations.

#### *4.6.5 Joint analysis seminars*

Important parts of the analysis process are both the dialogue and analysis seminars and the development seminars that were arranged in cooperation with the companies (Svensson & Aagaard Nielsen, 2006). The purpose of the seminars was to create opportunities for joint analysis and a critical and reflective learning process (Argyris & Schön, 1989; Svensson, Ellström & Brulin, 2007). As previously described, seminars were held at the companies where the results of the different studies were presented and analysed jointly. In addition, we also arranged different types of development interventions with the companies. Here, the results of the studies have served as point of departure for discussions concerning leadership development. Both of these types of seminar allowed the participants to react to the findings and to contribute more input (Svensson & Aagaard Nielsen, 2006). The main use of

these seminars and analyses was therefore in terms of an increased understanding of the cases and different ways of interpreting the data.

## 4.7 Quality of the study

This section contains a presentation of quality issues that must be discussed in relation to the study. Initially, I problematize my role as an interactive researcher in relation to the dilemmas described by Svensson, Ellström & Brulin (2007). In addition, the validity of the study, the transferability of the results and ethical considerations are also discussed.

### *4.7.1 My role as an interactive researcher*

When it comes to my role as a researcher it is important to critically discuss the consequences of the interactive approach. Has it, from a scientific point of view, been problematic that I have been so close to the studied practice? When working interactively it can be hard to beforehand determine in detail what activities will be included in the process and where the responsibility should lie. The emergent nature of the process demands flexibility on the part of both the practitioner and the researcher in the sense that many issues related to responsibility must be resolved when they arise. While working with the cases I sometimes encountered uncertain situations when my role has not been clearly definable. This may have led to situations during the development-oriented activities where I have ended up performing tasks that are not normally associated with being a researcher. For instance, besides the more traditional tasks of collecting data, an important role has been to organize learning processes and to act like a moderator in connection with the development seminars.

Moreover, there have also been situations where actors in the companies have wanted to hear my opinions on specific leadership and organization-related issues. Even if I have explained that I could not act as an evaluator or expert consultant, there is a risk that the lines between the roles have been blurred in the heat of these discussions. A similar problem concerns occasions when the individual leaders have asked me about my opinion on their leadership in certain situations. At these times I have refrained from commenting and instead explained that the purpose was not to evaluate their performance at an individual level.

How then has the research process been affected by the closeness between the two activity systems (Ellström, 2008)? In my opinion, the opportunity to have joint discussions with the practitioners on a regular basis has been positive for the research process. It has been possible to discuss issues concerning design and applicability in an open climate. Furthermore, I

feel that the actors involved at the companies have shown an interest in the project and actively contributed with their knowledge and perspectives during meetings and seminars. Another consequence of the closeness is that the results of the case studies were fed back to the companies early on in the process. This implied a hasty initial analysis, which led to preliminary results in need of further elaboration. However, the elaboration of the analysis was then performed together with the practitioners and my tutors, and afterwards I have continued analysing the data thoroughly with the support of my research environment.

Another dilemma with interactive research concerns the risk of uncritically adopting the perspective of the practitioners. It is difficult to spend time in an organization without being influenced by their language use, local theories and culture. Especially since I was not particularly familiar with the companies before the project started, I approached them with curiosity and it is possible that I, in my initial encounters with the cases, may have been a bit naive. In these processes I have been supported by my tutors, who have made me distance myself from the practice system and warned me when the critical distance could be in jeopardy. Together we have tried to keep the scientific interest in focus and to balance the local and limited perspective to a holistic understanding, trying to see the value of practice without it being at the expense of theory generation and the search for generally-applicable knowledge (Svensson, Ellström & Brulin, 2007). When it comes to the level of knowledge in the analysis dialogues and development seminars, I have deliberately tried to use common sense knowledge as a starting point for a deepened analysis aimed at finding the mechanisms behind the observed situations. For the practitioners it was sometimes provocative to be questioned on their assumptions and during the seminars we have not always initially agreed on the correct interpretation.

In connection with this dilemma follows the question of whether I have managed to establish a mutually trusting relationship without 'going native' and refraining from being critical. I feel that I have certainly come close to the practitioners, especially those who participated in the observation study. It would have been difficult for me to conduct the observations if the leaders did not trust me. Regarding my ability to be critical of the two cases, I would like to point to some circumstances that I feel have made my role as a researcher less problematic. During the entire project I experienced openness and an interest from the practitioners regarding critical viewpoints. Moreover, I felt that the demand for critical comments and theoretical concepts grew stronger as I came closer to the companies and the participants. Even though I have critically addressed some problematic issues in relation to leadership for learning in the two cases, I have not felt that this

has led to defensiveness on the part of the practitioners. I also feel that the practitioners have been aware of what kind of knowledge comes out of a research project compared to hiring an organization consultant.

#### *4.7.2 Validity of the study*

An important aspect to consider is the consistency of the study seen over time and methods, and the possibilities for other researchers to arrive at similar conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For a study to be trustworthy it is important that aspects such as awareness of perspectives and internal logic are discussed (Larsson, 1994). The concepts used for analysis need to be accounted for and there should be a harmony between philosophical and methodological assumptions on the nature of the study object, the methods used for data collection and the techniques for analysis. These aspects have been addressed in previous sections of this chapter and in the first chapter in the thesis. Regarding theoretical points of departure, I have chosen to work with three research traditions in order to create possibilities for alternative explanations and interpretations (Yin, 2003). According to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000) an important prerequisite for a reflexive methodology is the variety and width of the interpretation repertoire, where meta-theories such as critical theory can stimulate reflection and reduce the risks of a naive empiristic approach (Bhaskar, 1998).

Yet another question to consider is to what extent the presented conclusions are reasonable and anchored in the reality of the studied organizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994)? As has previously been discussed, the data has been presented to the companies in various constellations as a form of respondent validation (Larsson, 1994) and the leaders have both confirmed the results and provided new angles to use in the analysis. Furthermore, due to the purpose of the thesis, I have only targeted the leaders in the cases, which implies that the co-workers' perspectives have been totally excluded. In retrospect, it would have been fruitful to include co-workers in the study to be able to see the other side of the coin as well.

The ambition has been to get as close as possible by working with thorough descriptions of the context and of the leaders' notions and actions (Patton, 2002). The combinations of methods for data collection are another way of ensuring accuracy in the results. When taken together, I think that the interviews, observations and documents reflect a coherent picture of the cases (Stake, 1994).

Furthermore, I consider it to be important that I have spent time on location in the companies, while engaging in continuous dialogues with the leaders. This has made it easier for me to understand and write about the



organizations. Another aspect of credibility is the presence of other reviewers in the processes. Even though I have collected the data on my own there has constantly been an interaction with the academy. My tutors have of course been present throughout the process, and I have also presented my research in a number of different academic contexts, such as seminars and conferences. It is also important to note that the research project – of which I and the two cases have been a part – belongs to a strong research environment, i.e. HELIX VINN Excellence Centre, where the results of the study have been presented and discussed with researchers from other disciplines and practitioners from other types of organization.

#### *4.7.3 Transferability of the results*

To what extent is it possible to make analytical generalizations of the results of this study to other contexts or to some broader theory (Stake, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2003)? It is my opinion that the results may be related to previous leadership research and that they may also have theoretical implications for the field. Furthermore, in line with Larsson's (2001) discussion on generalization from contextual similarities, it would be possible to discuss the results of the thesis in relation to other manufacturing companies where Lean Production, leadership and learning are currently on the agenda. The two cases are not extremes and it is likely that we could find other contexts where the external environment and symbolic level are similar (ibid.). In this sense it is possible that the findings of the thesis may be valuable to other companies. However, this does not imply that the results should be seen as transferable in any simple and direct sense. In the end, it is also up to the reader to determine if comparisons are possible to make (Kvale, 1996).

#### *4.7.4 Ethical considerations*

When using case studies and an interactive approach the ambition is to generate detailed descriptions of the cases. This implies a closeness to the organizations in question, which makes it important to consider ethical aspects of the research process in terms of protecting the individuals and their personal integrity (Merriam, 1998). In the study, I have worked in line with the requirements set by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The participants in the case studies have been invited to reflect upon and influence the design of the studies. Prior to every part of the data collection process, they have been informed of the procedures, the aim of the study and the intended usage of the data. Moreover, the participants were encouraged to get in touch at any time if they had any questions concerning the study.

#### *Chapter 4 – Methods*

In relation to the data collection and the joint seminars, it is important to be critical of how my presence may have affected the practitioners. This is especially relevant when it comes to the observation studies. Even though the observed leaders reported that they had not worked differently because of me following them around, it is likely that my presence may have had some kind of unintended effect on their behaviours. Before the observations, I made it clear that I did not have any intention to evaluate the participants on their performance and they were also informed that they at any time could stop the observations if they were to encounter especially problematic situations. No such situations occurred, but there is still a potential risk that my presence may have affected situations without this having been brought to my attention. When the observations have generated material or educational cases for discussion in seminars, I have involved the leaders in question in the process of defining and writing the cases. They were allowed to approve the material before it was presented to the other participants in the seminars.

## 5 The case organizations

In this chapter, the two cases in the study are presented. The aim is to give a description of the companies and their organizations. The statistics included in the chapter represent the state of the companies during the data-collection period. The data from AlphaCo was gathered in 2005-2006 and the data from BetaInc in 2006-2007.

### 5.1 Introducing AlphaCo

In this section, AlphaCo is introduced in terms of the company's background and context, organizational structure and business and official standpoints on learning and development. Furthermore, the background of the leaders in the study is also presented.

#### *5.1.1 Background and context of the company*

AlphaCo is a medium-sized sub-contracting company located in a small Swedish municipality. The company specializes in industrial customer applications and offers the development and production of electric, electronic and mechatronic products. As a subcontractor, AlphaCo does not have its own line of products. Instead the company supplies expertise and resources to product-owning companies in the Swedish manufacturing industry.

AlphaCo was founded in the early 1980s and initially the company manufactured wood splitters. During the 1990s, the focus shifted towards mechatronics and electronics and AlphaCo's production was influenced by the rapid rise of the telecom sector. For many years, AlphaCo acted as a supplier of manpower to a global cellular manufacturing company. At its peak, AlphaCo employed approximately 400 co-workers, but with the recession of the telecom sector in the late 1990s, the company again focused its attention on manufacturing on a subcontract basis. In 1997, cooperation with a company in a Central European country was initiated to offer low-cost production. In 2003, the owner-manager recruited a new MD in order to ensure that the company would not be too closely associated with the owner and to have new leadership behind the wheel for upcoming business ventures.

#### *5.1.2 Organization and business*

Since 2005, AlphaCo has been part of a Group that also comprises the company in Central Europe. AlphaCo is managed through a board of

directors, where the owner of the company is chairman. The board also consists of the Managing Director, the Deputy Managing Director and the Managing Director of the operations in Central Europe. AlphaCo has a total of 140 employees in Sweden, of which 36 are office workers. The approximate annual turnover is SEK 116 million. The factories in the Central European country have approximately 660 employees and an annual turnover of SEK 30 million. However, these factories and employees are not included in this case study.

The main part of AlphaCo's production consists of cable assembly, which is carried out manually on the receipt of customer orders. The production is divided into three segments; specialized vehicles, industrial automation and communications systems. The organization is divided functionally and includes a number of departments (see figure 6). The MD is also Head of the Production Department, which consists of four sub-departments run by production leaders. In addition, there is a Construction and Development Department, a Market Department, a combined Planning and Purchasing Department and a Supply Chain Department headed by the deputy MD. There are also support functions in terms of a Human Resources and Finance Department and a Quality Department. The owner has a specific position for Business Development.

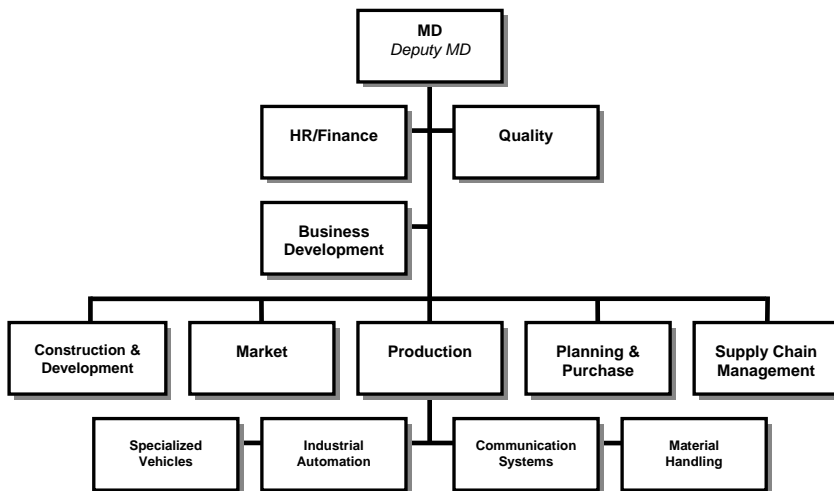


Figure 6: Organizational outline for AlphaCo

### The ongoing change process

At the time of the study, the company is undergoing a change process which aims at creating an organization that is better equipped to deal with further

development and to meet the demands from the market and the customers. Furthermore, the company sees itself as being subjected to increasing competition from other manufacturers in the market. In addition, AlphaCo also competes with some of its customers, which have internal manufacturing possibilities. The board of directors feels that it is important to have legible leadership at all levels in the organization to integrate all parts of the company in this change process. As a result, they have decided to carry out leadership development initiatives and to rejuvenate the leader cadre.

Another part of the strategy for long term development is to implement Lean Production in the organization's production system. The first step in this process has been to work with 5S, which is a Lean Production tool for standardized clean up and continuous improvement in the production areas.<sup>15</sup> The implementation of these new production principles is performed by the Supply Chain Department. In addition, selected departments and leaders in the departments have taken courses in Lean Production principles. There has also been cooperation with other industrial companies and universities in terms of courses and workshops.

### *5.1.3 Official standpoints on learning and development*

At the time of the study, AlphaCo is working on a so-called Personnel Handbook, which aims at gathering the company's guidelines and routines for Human Resources Management and Development. This handbook consists of a number of sections that are related to the development and learning of the co-workers. A specific HR policy is not available, but there are two other documents in the handbook that the company considers to be the foundation of the work on the development of the co-workers. The first document contains the company's view on the purpose and function of the personnel development dialogue and the second document concerns guidelines for the salary dialogue. In addition to the handbook, there are also guidelines directed towards the leadership in the organization.

#### Guidelines for personnel development dialogues

According to the handbook, the purpose of the personnel development dialogue (PD dialogue) is to ensure that the leader and the co-worker will have especially designated time for a relaxed discussion concerning issues that do not usually come up during the daily work. The dialogue offers a

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<sup>15</sup> 5S is a mnemonic for the Japanese words; Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu, Shitsuke, which in English roughly translates to Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardize and Sustain (Liker, 2004). The last S is also known as continuous improvements.

chance for the co-worker to influence the work situation, future competence development and the development of the department. For the leader, the dialogue provides an opportunity to give feedback on the co-worker's development and to formulate visions and goals for the future cooperation.

The handbook provides guidelines for how these dialogues are supposed to be conducted. There are specific documents that concern the preparation of both the leader and the co-worker. There are also checklists to ensure that the actual discussion takes a productive form. The dialogue is supposed to cover the current work situation and future changes in terms of the need for competence development. Furthermore, the handbook also specifies that the leader should take notes which will serve as a contract between the co-worker and the leader. Every dialogue should also end with an evaluation.

In the handbook, the responsibility for different aspects of the PD dialogues is listed. The HR department is responsible for updating the routines. The leader is responsible for conducting the dialogue on a yearly basis and for reporting the dialogues to the HR department. The length of the dialogue is not specified in the handbook; rather the leaders are encouraged to let it take as much time as needed. The co-worker is responsible for preparing for the dialogue by reflecting on the need for development. Furthermore, both the leader and the co-worker are responsible for following through with the plan. In addition, the leader has a responsibility for monitoring the progress.

### Salary model for union contract employees

The second part of the personnel handbook is a salary model for union contract employees. The model consists of three parts to be taken into account when the salary is decided upon. The first concerns occupational groups and levels, the second personal qualities and the third the number of employment years.

The first section contains five different occupational groups wherein a number of positions are listed. Connected with these groups are different levels of achievement which explain the company's expectations of a co-workers performance at each level. The higher the level, the more independently the co-worker is expected to work. A review of which group a co-worker belongs to should take place yearly during the salary assessment.

The second section concerns the co-workers personal qualities and is divided into quality, mobility, cooperation and information, and efficiency. In the personal qualities section, the co-worker's attitude and ability is assessed within a number of areas not connected to a competence area. The assessment is detached from the competence section and earns the same effect on the

salary regardless of competence level. In relation to quality, the co-worker's attitude and ability to work with the company's quality goals is assessed. In relation to mobility, the co-worker's attitude and ability to contribute to flexible production by being open to job rotation and new assignments is evaluated. In the area of flexibility, it is important to be able to work with different customers and products, but also to be useful in other work groups than the regular group. In relation to cooperation and information, the co-worker's ambition and ability to cooperate with other parts of the organization to achieve better performance are assessed. Finally, efficiency is related to the co-worker's ambition and ability to contribute to goals regarding productivity and the use of time. However, efficiency should not occur at the expense of quality.

As in the case of the competence requirements, each of these personal qualities is measured against a number of criteria at different levels, here ranging between 3-4 levels per quality. The more independent and responsible the co-worker is in relation to the four qualities, the higher the salary he or she gets. The leaders are responsible for reporting the results of the assessment using a form included in the handbook, and then for informing the co-worker of the outcome.

### Leadership strategy

As was previously mentioned, the management of the company decided to develop the leadership in the organization. This led to an external leader development programme, run by a consultant, and an internal development initiative, which was led by the MD. The entire leader staff participated. The internal programme was held in 2004 and consisted of lectures and seminars. The topics of these activities included the relationship between efficiency and leadership and factors that affect development. The leaders' role in the organization as well as the culture and climate at AlphaCo were discussed. In addition, the more structured parts of the programme were complemented by training activities linked to the leaders' daily work. They were given assignments to practice between the sessions. The programme resulted in thirteen leadership principles, which were formulated by the leaders. The purpose of the principles is to act as guidelines and a source of inspiration. They also incorporate the values of the leadership in the organization. As an example, the principles include creating common goals, being open to changes, being demanding, creating a positive work climate, having an open communication, being role models and learning from each other.

### 5.1.4 The backgrounds of the leaders

The managerial body at AlphaCo consists of twelve leaders, all of whom are included in the case study. The hierarchy has three levels, with the highest being the owner, MD and Deputy MD. The middle level consists of department managers, while the line-management level consists of production leaders. In this study, the middle and line manager levels are treated together and referred to as the lower lever. The managerial body of AlphaCo is presented below.

Table 1: The managerial body of the company

Title	Gender	Education	Managerial exp.
Chairman of the Board/Owner/Manager of Business Development	Male	Upper secondary school	22 years at AlphaCo
Managing Director/Manager of Production Dept.	Male	University	2 years at AlphaCo
Deputy Managing Director/Head of Supply-Chain Dept.	Male	University	5 years at AlphaCo
Manager of HR Dept.	Female	Upper secondary school	1.5 years at AlphaCo
Manager of Quality Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	5 years at AlphaCo
Manager of Marketing Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	1 month at AlphaCo
Manager of Construction & Development Dept.	Male	University	1 year at AlphaCo
Manager of Purchase & Planning Dept.	Female	University education	1 year at AlphaCo
Technical Supervisor	Male	Upper secondary school	2.5 years at AlphaCo
Production leader in Production Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	1 year at AlphaCo
Production leader in Production Dept.	Female	Upper secondary school	2 years at AlphaCo
Production leader in Production Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	3 years at AlphaCo

The average age of the managers in the company is approximately 37. The majority of the managers have limited managerial experience in the company. If the founder/owner of the company is excluded, the average is approximately 2.5 years. However, the period of employment is 7 years on average, which indicates that many of the managers have worked their way upwards within the company. In addition, some of the managers have previous managerial experience from other companies. Most of the leaders have the upper-secondary school as their highest educational level. Four of the leaders have a university-level education.

In the interviews, the leaders described how they became leaders and what it was that made them interested in a managerial position. In their responses, two major types of driving force are discernable. Some of the leaders primarily accentuate some form of internal driving force, in terms of a desire to influence things and an ambition to make a difference in the organization. These leaders locate the ambition to lead within themselves and refer to other leader assignments that they have outside the workplace, which have come from the desire to make decisions and to be in charge. Furthermore, the leaders also motivate their taking on a leadership role more in terms of it being a challenge and a possibility to reach new career levels.

The other image that appears in the interviews is one where more external forces led to the acceptance of a leadership role. For instance, one



leader explains that because of an organizational change, the leader role was assigned to him without being something that he had ever considered. Another leader claims that it was more a question of working with interesting assignments that led to a leadership role, since these assignments were located at a higher organizational level. The leadership “sort of came along as a bonus”. These two categories are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that a leader is driven by both external and internal forces.

## 5.2 Making acquaintance with BetaInc

This section presents BetaInc in a similar manner to the presentation of AlphaCo, i.e. in terms of background and context, organizational structure and business, official standpoints on learning and development and the backgrounds of the leaders in the case study.

### *5.2.1 Background and context of the company*

BetaInc is a manufacturer of warehouse trucks for material handling applications, located in a small Swedish municipality. Since the turn of the century, BetaInc has been part of a global Group and together they constitute the world’s largest manufacturer of lift trucks.

BetaInc was founded in the mid-1900s and one year after the start the company began manufacturing manual trucks. During the 1950s, the electric-powered warehouse truck was introduced into the segment. At the same time, BetaInc contributed to the development of a standardized load carrier. This load carrier had a positive effect on the earnings from the truck sales. In the 1960s, BetaInc started building its own international sales and service organization in Europe with companies in countries such as Great Britain, Denmark, Germany and Belgium. The internationalization process continued in the 1970s and 1980s with establishment of sales and service companies in the USA, France and Canada and with the acquisition of companies in the USA and Canada. During the same period, a number of sales and service companies were also formed in Sweden. The 1990s were characterized by an extensive restructuring programme that aimed to increase the company’s basis for improved profitability and growth. In 1997, a North-American Group was acquired. This made the BetaInc Group a world leader within the area of warehouse trucks. By the acquisition of an Italian company in 1999, the product programme was widened to also include counterbalanced trucks. In 2000, BetaInc was acquired by a global corporation and with this merger, BetaInc as the largest manufacturer of warehouse trucks and the parent company as the largest manufacturer of counterbalanced trucks formed a world-leading constellation in the field of industrial trucks.

### 5.2.2 Organization and business

When BetaInc was acquired, only limited changes were initially made to the Group structure and the two organizations existed alongside each other. However, in the middle of 2006 a new organizational structure was launched and BetaInc then became part of the parent company’s European region. Today, BetaInc’s largest unit is located in Sweden with three operating divisions complemented by central resources for the Group and business areas. In 2005, BetaInc employed approximately 9000 employees, of which 1300 work in Sweden. In turn, about 1000 of these employees work in the division where the case study was conducted. Other parts of BetaInc are not included in the case study. When the name BetaInc is used henceforth it refers to the division included in the case study.

BetaInc develops, produces and distributes manual trucks and electric-powered warehouse and counterbalanced trucks. The company also provides service, parts and rental possibilities. Manufacturing is mainly steered by customer orders, but some of the material is purchased against forecasts.

The organization of the division in the case study (see figure 7) is functionally divided and includes seven departments. The division is run by a Factory Manager. The production is divided into the three product groups; ‘Walkies’, i.e. trucks which you walk with, ‘Riders’, i.e. trucks which are driven and ‘Masts’. In addition, there is a Maintenance Department, a Logistics Department, a Sheet Metal Components Department, and a Production Technology Department. The departments are run by department managers. The departments are divided into sub-departments which are run by line-managers, such as production leaders, the head planner and the head of materials management. Furthermore, there are support functions such as the HR Department and the Finance Department and an internal consultant office that handles matters related to the production system.

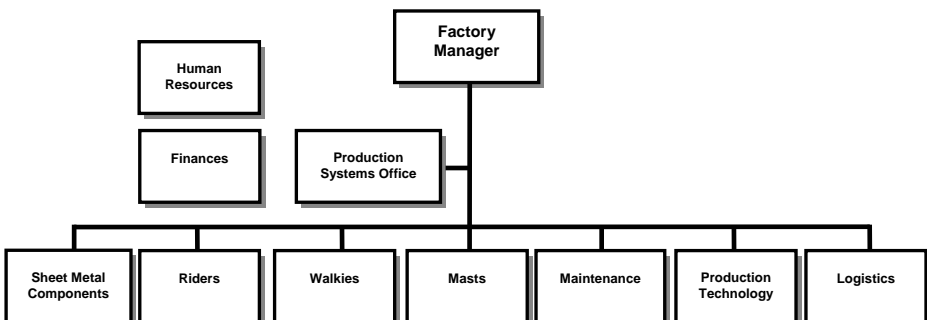


Figure 7: Organizational outline for the parts of BetaInc included in the case study

The production of Walkies, Riders and Masts consists of sub-departments for welding, painting and assembling. The Walkies and Riders departments also include bending, and Walkies also has a sub-department for laser cutting. The workplaces vary in design, depending on the area of production. The welding is either done with robots or manually in welding booths. Most of the painting is done in two large paint shops, while assembly and testing are organized in production lines.

### The ongoing change process

Naturally a company of BetaInc's dignity is constantly undergoing changes. But according to the factory management, the need for transformation has increased drastically since the turn of the century. The industry is becoming more competitive and, even though the customers are growing, production is being concentrated to fewer actors. In addition, the market has matured and the prices of the products are falling. Continuous rationalization and increases in efficiency are seen as necessities for the future development of the company. Furthermore, BetaInc is currently undergoing a change process that aims at adjusting to the parent company, which implies synchronizing some parts of the organization and the production systems.

In line with these demands for changes, BetaInc has developed its production system. The company's goal is to create a general system that describes how the daily work should be performed in the organization. The basic influences for the production system come from Japanese production philosophies and especially from Toyota's Production System (TPS). The principles that constitute the production system are standardization of the work processes, tact time, steady work flows, pull system, visual control, capable processes, direct feedback and go and see leadership. Standardization implies establishing standards for the work processes so that a procedure should be performed equally no matter who is doing it. Tact time refers to the average time between the production of two following products in the line. The goal is to have the same tact time between every product in order to ensure a steady production flow, which in turn leads to a steady work load for the co-workers. Consumption-based production implies initiating production only when it is needed, which reduces the risk of over production. By visualization BetaInc means making it visible to everyone how the company is doing. For instance, in the factory ceiling there are large monitors that display how many trucks have been produced in comparison to the production quota. Having capable processes refers to living up to the customers' expectations and to delivering that which has been agreed upon. It is very important that all of the actors in the processes take their

responsibility to deliver a functioning product or service to the next actor. If a problem should arise, it is also crucial that it is discovered quickly. This is possible with a direct feedback. In order to make the correct decisions, BetaInc believes that the leader should have an accurate picture of the current state of affairs. A prerequisite here is that the leader sees with own eyes and communicates with those who have the correct information.

Another important part of the production system is the concept of 5S, which is a series of activities to eliminate waste. The basic idea is that there should be a place for every item and that every item should be in its place when it is not being used. This is the same Japanese concept that was previously mentioned in the description of AlphaCo. When the pace of production slows down or comes to a halt due to problems beyond the reach of the co-workers, they are supposed to work with 5S.

### *5.2.3 Official standpoints on learning and development*

At BetaInc there are a lot of documents that in some way relate to the company's views on learning and development. The official standpoint is that the development of the co-workers is crucial to the success of the company. Based on this standpoint, BetaInc has formulated a personnel strategy which aims at clarifying how the company should work with personnel-related matters. This strategy contains specific sections that deal with learning and development. It is argued that competence development should be viewed as a constantly ongoing process where new knowledge is acquired by mobility, education and recruitment. According to BetaInc, it is crucial to work with competence development to attract and keep qualified co-workers. BetaInc also points to the importance of working actively with those who are ready for retirement to ensure that their competence stays in the organization.

The company has a goal for internal mobility and, according to the personnel strategy, the HR department is obliged to work with mobility-enhancing initiatives such as internal trainee programmes and personnel exchange programmes with other companies in the Group. Furthermore, BetaInc has initiated a system for rewarding co-workers who are recognized as especially competent within their line of work. These co-workers are appointed as specialists which earns them a pay increase and a sum of SEK 30 000 to spend on competence development. This is a way to signal to the co-workers that management is not the only career path.

### **Agreement on competence development**

An important part of BetaInc's work with competence development issues is an agreement made with the unions that represent the co-workers in the

organization. The agreement is meant to function as a foundation for a continuous, systematic and goal-oriented development process that creates advantages for the company in terms of increased competitiveness and profitability, and advantages for the co-workers in terms of secure employment, increased employability and a good work environment.

Concerning the observance of this agreement, it is especially emphasised that both the company and the individual co-worker have a responsibility. Instruments for reaching the development objectives include PD dialogues, but also relating salary increases to competence development. The need for competence that has been identified during the dialogues, or by other measurements, should guide the direction of the company's development initiatives. The goal is that all co-workers should be given an opportunity for personal development in their work, so that they can take on more qualified tasks. The acquisition of new knowledge is closely connected to the possibility of working with new assignments. For the co-workers this implies the will to explore new possibilities, and for BetaInc it obliges the company to provide challenges and to support the co-workers who take the leap.

To support the work in accordance with the agreement, a committee made up of company and union representatives has been appointed. Its assignment is to map the need for new knowledge and to follow up on the development initiatives that have been launched. According to the agreement, every department in the company should have a development plan.

### Guidelines for personnel development dialogues

As was evident in the agreement described in the previous section, the personnel development dialogue is considered to be an important instrument. The goal is that the company will carry out 100 per cent of these dialogues every year, since they are believed to be developing for both the co-worker and the leader. However, when the case study was conducted, the success rate for the dialogues was about 82 per cent. It is mainly the leaders in the production departments that do not reach the goal.

As a support for the PD dialogue there are a number of templates for the leaders to use. There is also an extensive report on the PD dialogue as a forum for development, written in connection with a leadership development programme. In the report, which is based on a survey of leaders and co-workers in the organization, a number of recommendations are presented regarding how to conduct the dialogues. For instance, it is considered important to discuss development with new employees at an early stage and to use the PD dialogue for mutual feedback. The length of the dialogue should preferably not exceed two hours, unless the leader and co-worker need

more time. To show that PD dialogues are a part of the regular work, they should be conducted during regular work hours and at the workplace.

Every PD dialogue is documented by the leader in a training plan, which is sent to the HR department. In addition, the co-worker is supposed to evaluate the dialogue in order to measure the quality of the instrument. Regarding responsibility for the PD dialogue, the leader is supposed to act as a coach who encourages the co-worker to try new things, but the co-workers are also responsible for actively searching for development possibilities.

### Salary model for union contract employees

In line with the previously described agreement on competence development, BetaInc has included development variables in the models available for salary dialogues. The salary-influencing factors are divided into attitude, quality and responsibility. Attitude refers to variables such as goal orientation, power of initiative when dealing with divergences, active participation in improvement work, the ability to come up with ideas for how to solve problems and being able to develop other co-workers. Quality refers to working according to the principle 'right from me', following a standardized work procedure and working with 5S. It is also very important that there is high quality and output in the co-workers production. Responsibility refers to using the work time in an efficient manner, following the safety routines and, in addition, acting in a responsible fashion.

The demands on the co-workers' competence are illustrated in plans for the different work areas, i.e. welding, painting and assembling, regardless of which department the co-workers belong to. The demands are directed at different levels. As an example we can look at the plan for the company's paint shops. Level one includes participating in a number of specified training courses, being aware of the health risks in the work and being self-reliant in at least one station. Level two includes having basic robot training, being able to manage the shop, knowing how to perform specific analytical assignments, being self-reliant on most stations, being able to resolve simple alarms and being flexible between the company's paint shops. Level 3 includes understanding how the entire process works, being self-reliant on all stations, being able to manage preventive maintenance and being able to train other co-workers. The last level concerns coordinators, who should be able to coordinate the painting and logistics in the sub-department.

### Learning and development through continuous improvements

When it comes to BetaInc's view on learning and development there is a strong belief in continuous improvements of the daily work. This view is

influenced by Toyota's fourteen basic principles, the so-called 'Toyota Way' (Liker, 2004), which aim at explaining the success of the company. Principle number 14 says that you have to become a Learning Organization by relentless reflection and constant improvements. According to the Toyota Way, the key to learning is 'hansei', which roughly translates to reflection and implies that you need to know your weaknesses and find ways to overcome them. No matter how good something appears to be, it can always be improved. If there is a chance for improvement you have to take it. This is the basis of 'kaizen', also known as continuous improvement.

At BetaInc, this Japanese philosophy has been translated into the work with so-called improvement groups. The purpose of these groups is to create involvement and commitment amongst the co-workers to reaching the company's goals. The basic idea is that the improvement groups should function as a support for BetaInc's production principles. As an example, an important task for the groups is to eliminate all forms of waste, 'muda', which according to Toyota comes in seven major types; overproduction, waiting, unnecessary transport, over processing, excess inventory, unnecessary movement, defects (Liker, 2004). According to Liker there is an eighth type of waste in unused employee creativity, which concerns losing improvement and learning opportunities by not listening to the co-workers' ideas. For the work to function systematically and in a structured way, BetaInc has developed a three-step model. The first step is to arrange the workplace, the second is to control the equipment and the third is to optimize the processes. An improvement group starts off with the first step and moves on to the next after an internal audit of their performance.

It has been decided that every co-worker should belong to an improvement group of 7-12 people. The groups have half an hour every week at their disposal for group meetings. At a meeting, the group members discuss suggestions on how to make improvements, which have been noted on a whiteboard. Those issues that are deemed necessary to continue working with are assigned a person in charge. The group is led by an appointed group leader, who is also responsible for documenting the progress of the group.

### Leadership strategy

The outlook on the leaders in the organization is also connected to the production system and the Japanese production philosophies. As was previously mentioned, communication and information are pointed out as cornerstones of the leadership. The production principle to go and see, 'genchi genbutsu', should permeate the daily work of the leaders. In order to truly see and understand a problem in the organization, it has to be viewed

with one's own eyes and it is unacceptable to rely solely on second-hand intelligence. However, it is also recognize that leaders, especially those at higher hierarchical levels, do not always have the time to go and see. In these cases it is crucial that the leader is surrounded by co-workers and colleagues on whom he relies. Then he can see through their eyes. The co-workers can report the daily events to the leader, who gives them feedback and advice in return, as a part of their development.

Another Japanese leader philosophy that is important for BetaInc is to grow leaders who truly understand the work processes and who are able to pass this knowledge on in the organization. The leaders should involve and develop the co-workers so that they can think and act on their own. The leader's role is to support and guide them. This is seldom done by giving orders, rather by asking questions.

#### 5.2.4 The backgrounds of the leaders

The managerial body in the entire division consists of approximately 50 leaders at different levels. The hierarchy has three levels, with the highest being represented by the factory manager and the HR manager. The middle level consists of department managers and the like, while the line level mainly consists of production leaders. In this study, eighteen leaders in the division are included and they are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: The managers included in the case study

Title	Gender	Education	Managerial exp.
Factory Manager	Male	University	3 years at BetaInc
Manager of HR Dept.	Male	University	17 years at BetaInc
Consultant at production system office	Male	University	1 year at BetaInc
Manager of Riders Dept.	Male	University	4 years at BetaInc
Manager of Sheet Metal Component Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	10 years at BetaInc
Manager of Masts Dept.	Male	University	6 months at BetaInc
Manager of Logistics Dept.	Female	University	2 months at BetaInc
Production leader in Riders Dept.	Male	University	5.5 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Riders Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	6 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Riders Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	3.5 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Riders Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	2 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Riders Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	2 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Sheet Metal Components Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	3 years at BetaInc
Production leader in Masts Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	3 months at BetaInc
Production leader in Masts Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	3 months at BetaInc
Production leader in Masts Dept.	Male	Upper secondary school	9 months at BetaInc
Head Planner	Female	University	1.5 years at BetaInc
Head Material Handler	Male	Upper secondary school	3 years at BetaInc

The average age of these managers is approximately 37. The majority of the managers have limited managerial experience in the company. The average duration of experience is approximately 3 years for all of the leaders in the study. However, the average managerial experience for line-managers and department managers is 1.5 years. The period of employment is 8.5 years on average, which indicates that many of the leaders have made a career within



the company. In addition, some of the leaders have previous managerial experience from other companies. Most of the leaders have the upper secondary school as their highest educational level. At the higher levels it is common with a technical university education.

In the interviews, the leaders described how they became leaders and what it was that made them interested in a managerial position. In their responses, two major types of driving force are discernable. The majority refer to an internal driving force that led them towards leadership. This often has to do with an inner desire to be in charge and to be a part of where the action is. The leaders explain that taking on a leadership role has been connected to their own personal development and search for challenges. They describe it as constantly present in their lives, both inside and outside the workplace. The other kind of driving force stems from the surrounding environment. This is exemplified by leaders who argue that they had never intended to become leaders. This was rather a result of organizational occurrences where one thing led to another. One leader explains that he was recommended by his superior to become a leader and yet another concludes that it was probably an interest in more overall and strategic work assignments that led to a managerial position. In addition, the will to become a leader is explained by an interest in working with people rather than technology. These two categories are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that a leader is driven by both external and internal forces.

### 5.3 Summary

In comparison, there are a number of differences and similarities between the cases. At a first glance it is obvious that the companies vary in aspects such as history, size and type of production. BetaInc can be characterized as a big, multinational company with a long heritage, while AlphaCo can be seen as a younger, medium-sized company with most of its customers on the Swedish market. There are also similarities concerning some of the background variables. For instance, both companies are located in small municipalities and have recruited many of their employees in the region.

When it comes to the companies' development processes since the turn of the century, both can be seen as undergoing a number of significant changes. These changes are in many ways different, but they originate in similar adjustments to pressures from the market and competitors. AlphaCo has located low-cost production in a Central European country and tried to rejuvenate the organization, and BetaInc has developed a tight bond to its parent company in order to secure its position as a world leader in material handling. Both of these processes are linked to the concept of Lean

Production and the so-called ‘Toyota Way’ (Liker, 2004). Lean Principles such as evened out work flows, just-in-time production and 5S have been implemented in both organizations. The difference is that BetaInc started working with this production philosophy earlier than AlphaCo and has therefore come a lot longer.

Regarding the official standpoints on learning and development, both of the companies have documentation that is aimed at helping the leaders in their work with these issues. A difference is that BetaInc, being a big company, has a large HR department and a more systemized HR system in terms of policies and guidelines. At AlphaCo, the HR department is small and it has recently started working with HRM and HRD in a more structured manner. The co-workers in AlphaCo’s HR department do not have university level education in HRM or HRD, which is common at BetaInc. Both of the companies pay a lot of attention to formal competence development and tools such as personnel development dialogues and salary dialogues. In addition, in the agreement with the unions, BetaInc also highlights the importance of informal learning and continuous improvement in the daily work. This is also connected to the Lean Principles, where BetaInc has an extensive framework for working with so-called ‘Kaizen’, in the form of improvement groups.

Concerning the leaders in the cases, there are more similarities than differences. Aspects such as age, gender and education level are very similar. Many of the leaders have worked in the companies for a long time, but in several cases they have just recently become leaders. The leaders in both companies have received some sort of formal leadership training, and many of them have in fact attended the same training course with an external consultant. Furthermore, we see that the leaders report similar internal and external driving forces for becoming leaders.

## 6 The leaders' work and leadership

In the following chapter, results are presented that concern the leaders' work and leadership. This includes accounts of the leaders' daily work practise in the companies and descriptions of how the leaders perceive the meaning of their leadership.

### 6.1 The leaders' work

The work of the leaders in both case studies can be characterized as varied and complex. In the leaders' responses it is possible to discern three main categories; the ordinary work situation, the interaction and communication, and the allocation of time in different work spaces.

#### *6.1.1 The ordinary work situation*

To begin with, the leaders' descriptions of their ordinary work situation reveal a hectic tempo and a wide range of issues that require their attention. The leaders answer say that every day holds new surprises and that the only thing they can be sure of is that their plans will probably have to change.

It is actually pretty varied, and in certain periods it's really hectic. Since the vacation there has not been a single day when my planning has held together. There is always something happening that makes everything go south and you wind up doing something other than the thing you had planned. Fixing this and taking care of that and so on. (BetaInc12)

In a longer perspective, for instance over the course of a year, the leaders argue that the issues being dealt with have a tendency to repeat in cycles. Tasks like making budgets and setting salaries have to be performed every year, but do not require time every week. This implies that certain periods of the year are busier than others.

According to the leaders, a normal day starts between 07.00 and 08.00 in the morning and ends somewhere between 16.30 and 18.30 in the evening. During the day there are shorter and longer breaks. The leaders say that the tempo is high and that they often feel as if they are behind schedule. A leader at BetaInc responds that there is always more work to be done.

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I try to come in at 07.30 at the latest and usually stay until 17.30 in the afternoon. The flexible hours are rapidly increasing; there is just no end to things that need to be done. (BetaInc1)

Concerning the working hours, the production leaders who have night shifts also say that they come in earlier a couple of days during the week to have a chance to talk to these co-workers before they go home.

The night shift finishes at 06.15, and I always try to get here so I can check how things have gone during the night. (AlphaCo8)

Furthermore, a difference between the cases is that the production leaders at BetaInc also work one evening shift every sixth or eighth week, depending on which department they belong to. They then come to work late in the afternoon instead of in the morning. This system is used to ensure that there is always a leader on site.

The ordinary situation is very similarly described by leaders in both case organizations. A difference is that leaders at higher levels report a greater flexibility than those at lower levels. Their calendars are still full, but they report having more control over their day in comparison to a leader who works closer to the co-workers on the factory floor.

### *6.1.2 The leaders' interaction and communication*

During the course of a day, the leaders interact and communicate with a number of different actors in the organization. These actors include co-workers, fellow leaders, their own superiors, customers, suppliers and representatives of support functions from other departments.

The leaders say that they interact a great deal with both their own co-workers, and with those who belong to other departments. This interaction covers a variety of different issues, but they usually relate to the conditions of the co-workers' assignments. However, it is usually not possible to speak with all of the co-workers every day.

... otherwise I try to have daily contact with everyone, but I don't speak to everybody every day, that's not possible. (AlphaCo4)

The production leaders in both cases say that they mostly communicate through the coordinators or production technicians, instead of trying to interact with all of the co-workers at once.

The leaders describe that they regularly interact with other leaders in the organization. These are represented by leaders at the same hierarchical level,

but also include superior leaders, such as the company management. The communication with other leaders mostly concerns daily work processes, but the leaders say that they sometimes turn to their colleagues for support.

But then sometimes I step into the office of another leader or whoever is your ventilation channel, just to sit for five minutes and vent on an issue. (BetaInc16)

In addition, the leaders also mention that they interact with representatives of various support functions in the organization. For instance, the leaders say that they regularly work with the human resources department, the quality department and the maintenance department.

Finally, the leaders also report that they on occasion interact with customers and suppliers. For the leaders in the logistics departments and at higher levels in the organization, this is a natural part of the work. For the production leaders, meetings with customers and suppliers are not part of the weekly activities, but occur often enough for them to be accustomed to it. In addition, the leaders at AlphaCo report that they interact with the company's production plants in Central Europe. This is usually the responsibility of the company management and supply chain department, but sometimes other leaders work with their counterparts in Central Europe.

The common communication channels include face-to-face interaction, but the leaders also report that a lot of information is exchanged via phone and e-mail. At both companies, the leaders carry phones which are used frequently and the e-mail is usually checked first thing in the morning.

In the mornings, I usually try to make some plans for the day. I check my calendar to see if there are any appointments and then I go through my e-mails to see if I have gotten anything to deal with. (AlphaCo2)

However, the e-mails have a tendency to pile up and the leaders explain that this can be very frustrating. One leader at BetaInc says that he does not like e-mails, even if they are a useful tool.

Well that would be those damn e-mails. I hate them. I mean, I know it's a good tool, but when you get in to the office in the morning after saying good morning to the guys and there are over 20 mails waiting. Then you just know it's going to take a lot of time. (BetaInc13)

When it comes to communication and interaction, a difference in the material is that leaders at higher levels report a larger variation in their interaction, since they to a greater extent meet with actors outside the organization.

### *6.1.3 The allocation of time between work spaces*

A typical feature in the leaders' daily work is that they frequently move between different locations in the factory. It is possible to distinguish four main types of work spaces where the leaders allocate their time; in the department, in a meeting, in the office, or at a break.

The leaders estimate that a great deal of their total time is spent somewhere in their departments, observing the work processes and talking to the co-workers. For instance, for a production leader this is equal to being in the production facilities. In the observation study, the average time spent in the department was estimated to be 37 per cent for the participating leaders at BetaInc and 22 per cent for the participating leaders at AlphaCo. In the follow-up interviews, the BetaInc leaders commented that they had expected it to be more, but that the observed work days did not differ from the ordinary. A possible explanation for the difference is that the leaders count the daily check-up meetings as time spent in the production facilities.

The time spent in the department usually consists of so-called 'tours' that are taken regularly during a work day. In addition, the leaders move in close proximity to the department while being on their way to other locations in the factory. The tours of the factory do not only include the leaders' own areas of responsibility. They also visit each other's sections on a regular basis. The leaders say that they want to gather information first hand and this usually implies encountering assignments that need their attention. They also argue that they need to be available if the co-workers encounter any problems and that the tours give them opportunities to socialize with the co-workers.

Yes and it is basically to see it with my own eyes. I have some places that I usually check and on the way there I talk with the ones I meet, the usual social chitchat so to speak. (BetaInc9)

The leaders describe a number of different meetings that they attend, which are either scheduled or spontaneous. The consensus amongst the leaders is that there are simply too many of them. Especially leaders at higher levels have their calendars filled with all sorts of appointments. They report that most of the meetings are necessary for their work, but they also say that they sometimes feel as if they are better needed elsewhere. In the observation study, the total time spent at meetings was approximately 23 per cent at BetaInc and 41 per cent at AlphaCo. Most of the observed meetings were

short. Only a few lasted more than one hour. In the follow-up interviews, some of the BetaInc leaders explain that the number of meetings during the observed period was on the small side. Normally they would have had at least one more meeting per day. During the observation study, the leaders at AlphaCo participated in a strategic meeting which lasted over four hours, which explains their elevated percentage in comparison to BetaInc.

Scheduled meetings include daily check-up meetings with the co-workers in the department. Furthermore, there are also daily meetings with other leaders. At BetaInc, the department has a meeting every afternoon and at AlphaCo similar meetings are held in the morning. At AlphaCo, the meeting is usually led by the GM or the leader of the planning and purchasing department. The purpose of these types of meeting is to inform each other about what is going on in the department and whether there are any problems that will affect the other leaders.

We always have morning meetings, about half past eight, and then nearly all of the leaders attend. We have been told that it takes a damn good reason not to show up. The meeting usually lasts about fifteen minutes and I think they are great because then everybody stands up and briefs us on what happened yesterday, what will happen today and if there are any important events coming up. If there's a problem it is put on the whiteboard as an item that needs to be fixed. We also note when it should be done and who is in charge of doing it. (AlphaCo9)

Every week there are longer meetings with the co-workers. These meetings usually concern the state of the work in the department, but they are also a forum where the leader informs the co-workers of events in other parts of the company. There are other meetings that recur on a weekly basis. For instance, there are production meetings, booking meetings and transfer meetings and meetings with the highest level of management concerning strategic issues.

The leaders also describe meetings that they are called to at short notice. These often concern acute issues and production-related problems.

There are a lot of things happening continuously, so many times we have spontaneous meetings when we gather just to figure out what to do about a problem and then we go out and do it. (AlphaCo4)

The third work space that the leaders describe is the office. This is where they do the paperwork and prepare for meetings. For the leaders at lower levels, the office is located close to the production facility and there are

always many leaders and co-workers running in and out of the building. The leaders have their own spaces, but not all of them have a door that can be shut. The leaders in higher levels have their offices in an administrative building which is separated from the factory floor. The time in the office is described as a scarcity. Furthermore, when the leaders do find time to sit down at their desks, they are usually interrupted by someone who knocks on the door. The leaders report that it is difficult to get undisturbed time for planning and preparation. For the leaders it is frustrating to never have time alone to get things done, which makes them feel the need to sometimes isolate themselves from the other actors in the organization.

Sometimes I have to lock the door and turn the phone off just to get anything done. (BetaInc1)

The results from the observation study show that both the BetaInc leaders and the AlphaCo leaders spent 25 per cent of their time in the office. The leaders at BetaInc commented that this was probably more than a normal week due to the fact that they had fewer meetings than normal.

The fourth work space consists of breaks, which in both cases are usually taken in the company's lunch rooms. The leaders at BetaInc report that they have a breakfast break in the morning. At AlphaCo this is referred to as a coffee break. Then follow a lunch break and another coffee break in the afternoon. At BetaInc, there is also a special break every Friday morning, when all of the leaders in the factory gather. The leaders explain that the two coffee breaks usually last between 10-20 minutes, while the lunch break takes between 30-40 minutes. During the observation study, the leaders at BetaInc spent approximately 15 per cent of the total time on breaks, while the leaders at AlphaCo spent 12 per cent.

At BetaInc, the leaders from different departments of the company sit together during these breaks. They rarely sit with their co-workers. At AlphaCo, the leaders and co-workers mix in the lunch rooms. According to the leaders, discussions during the breaks often involve family, sports, leisure activities and current events. However, it is also common that the leaders discuss work-related issues. They report that the breaks provide good opportunities for exchanging information with the other leaders and to learn about how their departments are doing.

...yeah, and then it's time for breakfast. That's why I need the information from the guys because usually during the breakfasts I exchange a lot of information with the other leaders. We talk about soccer and other stuff as



well, but there is some seriousness to these breakfast meetings, so to speak and that feels good. (BetaInc17)

However, one leader at AlphaCo explains that he feels that you should not let the breaks take precedence over the work load. He argues that coffee breaks are appropriate if you have the time to spare. But he also points out that the chat during the breaks could lead to an important exchange of information.

Figure 8 shows an estimate of the total allocation of time between the different work spaces. The data originates from the observation study.

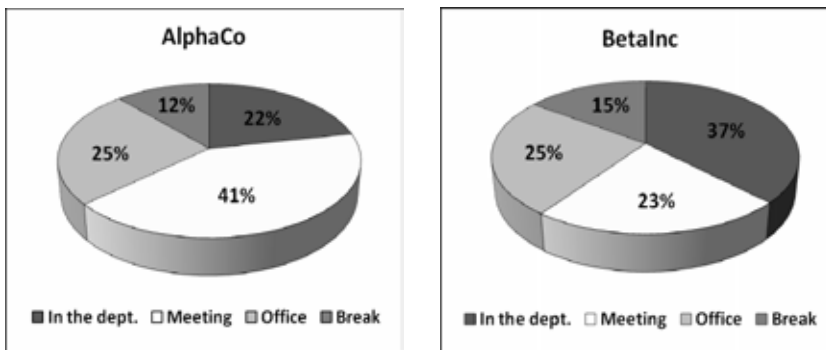


Figure 8: Allocation of time between different work spaces at AlphaCo and BetaInc

However, the time spent in different work spaces is not coherent. In fact, both the interviews and the observations indicate that the leaders move a lot between the different locations. This pattern is consistent at the higher and lower levels of both organizations. Tables 3 and 4 below show excerpts from the field notes and illustrate the movements in time and space.

Table 3: Field notes from BetaInc

Time	Space	Issue
07.30	B's office	Attends meeting concerning the daily needs
07.35	Production facility	Walks towards the office. Talks with production leader about a product
07.38	Own office	Checks the calendar and e-mail
07.45	Riders paint shop	On the way to a meeting. Talks with painters about a problem
07.46	Walkies dept.	Gets a cup of coffee
07.48	Conference room	Meeting with production manager and production leaders
08.05	Riders paint shop	Informs painter about problem with other dept's paint shop
08.06	Own office	Leaves the coffee mug
08.07	Welding shop	Tour of the factory, talks with various co-workers
08.33	J's welding shop	Walks towards canteen. Fetches other production leader on the way
08.35	Canteen	Breakfast. Discusses what restaurant to book for the Christmas lunch
08.56	Improvement paint shop	Discusses improvement painting with a co-worker
09.04	Walkies paint shop	Checks how many hoods for the XX they have got
09.05	Riders paint shop	Asks co-worker to hang more hoods for XX
09.06	Welding shop	Looks for a co-worker, but doesn't find him
09.11	Own office	Following up time-cards and working with the business system. Makes a phone call to production technician

Table 4: Field notes from AlphaCo

Time	Space	Issue
07.55	Supply chain dept.	Discussion about stock values and transfer
08.01	Own office	Phone call with customer concerning an article
08.10	By the white boards in the planning dept.	Updating the white boards. Talks with operative buyer. Talks with planner
08.20	Own office	Preparing meeting about the account for the previous month Following up on sick leave in the department
08.30	By the white boards in the planning dept.	Morning meeting
08.53	Own office	Continues preparing meeting about the accounts for the previous month Talks with receptionist about a customer
08.59	Finance dept.	Meeting about the accounts for the previous month
09.30	Lunch room	Coffee break. Discusses priority orders with other leaders
09.42	Own office	Following up on priority orders. Reading e-mail concerning customer contract. Discusses customer contract with operative buyer
09.53	Supply chain dept.	Discussion with strategic buyer concerning the customer contract
10.05	Lunch room	Discussion with head of market department. concerning the customer contract

These field notes exemplify the fragmented state of the leaders’ work. The first example is taken from an observation of a production leader and the second one from an observation of a leader in a non-production department.

Regarding the time spent in different work spaces there are similar patterns between leaders at higher and lower levels. The leaders occupy the same kind of work spaces. The difference is that the leaders at lower levels are closer to the co-workers in the production facilities than leaders at higher levels, who more often move in close proximity to their closest co-workers’ work stations. It is also more common for the leaders at higher levels to leave for engagements outside of the factory.

## 6.2 The meaning of leadership

When it comes to the leaders’ descriptions of how they perceive their leadership and what it means to them, it is possible to discern a number of categories. The first one is related to the responsibility for getting the daily work done, while the second one concerns how to work with development. Furthermore, the leaders reflect on their position in terms of aspects of leadership that are perceived as demanding, stimulating or difficult. They also describe their view of competence requirements in relation to their leadership and work.

### 6.2.1 Responsibility for getting the work done

A common response is that leadership boils down to responsibility and attainment of the goals that have been set in the organization. This responsibility is concerned with both the production process and the social relationship with the co-workers. The responses regarding this category show

that it entails a comprehensive responsibility for ensuring a smooth production process and that the department functions as intended.

Being a leader implies quite a lot. You have a responsibility towards the people you lead and at the same time there is a responsibility towards your colleagues. I'm also responsible for doing the things we are supposed to do in the department. Even though this is my co-workers' responsibility, I feel that I'm the one with the overall responsibility. (AlphaCo3)

The leaders argue that this implies that they have to have a wide understanding of the entire organization, rather than detailed knowledge of a specific task. The responses in this category speak of the leader as someone who should represent the organization and take charge. The leader should have a vision and set the goals to match. It is important for the leaders that the goals are connected to the daily work and evaluated on a regular basis.

Furthermore, this dimension also includes the distribution and coordination of resources, both in terms of putting the right person in the right place, as well as providing the prerequisites for doing the work.

Sometimes you need to put the right man in the right place, because if you're in a tight spot you want to have the competence where it is most needed. (BetaInc5)

Some of the leaders accentuate that the ideal mode is when everything functions as planned, but that it is their responsibility to step in if something happens. If possible the leaders feel that the responsibility should be carried out with or through other actors in the organization, but when push comes to shove; the leaders see themselves as front figures with the duty to provide clear guidelines, be demanding and make decisions.

As I see it, it is best to reach a mutual agreement within the group. But as a leader you have the final word if there are some tricky choices. That's what's expected of a leader, to make that decision. (AlphaCo11)

As previously mentioned, this dimension also includes a concern for how to involve the co-workers in the process of reaching the goals that have been set. This means that the leader has to be able to communicate these goals in a clear fashion and to help the co-workers break them down into manageable work tasks. The leaders respond that much is dependent on their ability to explain and instruct, but also to be open for discussions and to listen to the viewpoints of the co-workers. The leaders assert that the social and relational

dimensions of leadership are important, and that it is crucial to have an environment where the co-workers feel free to express their opinions and trust the leaders with their troubles.

Leadership should also be social; I mean you need to be able to trust one another. They should feel that it's okay to come and talk with you and trust that it will stay there. (AlphaCo8)

Besides being able to communicate, this dimension also includes the leader being able to foster an environment that makes the co-workers enjoy their work. One leader says that no one should feel bad about coming to the workplace in the mornings.

In addition, the leaders report that the relation towards the co-workers and colleagues is dependent on their availability and their ability to show individual consideration. One leader explains that this comes down to the fact that as a leader you need a genuine interest in working with people.

I can't be a good leader if I'm not interested in people. And to have some form of empathy and an ability to try and understand them, and that's how I can support, help and contribute. (BetaInc2)

The leaders in both cases accentuate this responsibility in similar terms and to an equal extent. It is also evident that this pattern is common regardless of which level in the organization the leader represents.

### *6.2.2 Developing personnel and production*

If the first category concerns following through with that which has already been decided, the second one rather consists of responses dealing with how to change and develop the production and the co-workers. The foundation of this category is the notion of a leader that moves the performance forward to bring about a development that is valuable for both the organization and the individual co-worker. This category holds answers that suggest an interest in moving the performance forward a little bit at a time.

...so that next time we'll reach the goals a lot easier than we did the first time and keep on moving our performance forwards. And in all that there is a pretty crass purpose to create or do something better. That we get better and better at reaching the goals, and that's kind of the leader's job. (AlphaCo2)

In addition, albeit to a lesser extent, the responses also entail an ambition to break the limits and to exceed the boundaries for what can be achieved and find new potential areas of development for both the company and the co-workers. The leaders accentuate the importance of trying to think in new and innovative ways in order to find alternative solutions and novel ideas that will lead to development of the production.

Reaching the results here and now is one thing, but another is to do it in a way that develops the group to reach a better result next time and to grow and take on new roles. (AlphaCo2)

In comparison to the responsibility for the daily operations and work tasks, the development dimension is not as apparent in the material when the leaders speak of what their leadership contains.

When it comes to differences between the two case studies, it is possible to see that the development dimension is more present amongst the leaders from BetaInc. One of these leaders stresses that developing the co-workers is in fact the most important aspect of his leadership.

Although it is important to make the deliveries, that's not my primary goal. It's rather to develop the individuals and spend time with them, to be more like a coach. (BetaInc1)

It is also possible to see a difference regarding the hierarchical level of the leaders. Leaders in higher positions often speak of development in relation to the entire organization, while the leaders at lower levels are primarily focused on their own department or section. This pattern is similar in both cases.

### *6.2.3 A demanding position*

Being a leader is something that the respondents perceive as demanding. However, the notions of what kinds of demands the leaders face and from whom they come differ. A common response is that the leaders identify the demands of the management and co-workers as most important. In addition, some of the leaders perceive demands from fellow leaders or that they put the highest pressure on themselves.

The demands from the organization are described as having increased during the last years. The board of the company and the highest management is perceived as demanding more of the leaders in terms of efficiency, quality, safety and productivity. The leaders at BetaInc answer that the production goals are most frequently asked for.

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Above all it's the daily and weekly goals. They are number one, and it's no use denying it. When it comes to demands, these goals are absolutely the most frequently asked for. (BetaInc17)

The leaders also perceive the expectation from the management to understand how everything fits together in the organization, rather than to be the one with most specific knowledge of a product or process. The responses are often connected to the concept of Lean Production and the ability to follow a flow in the production processes. In order to be credible as a leader, you will have to understand the grand picture.

The leaders of BetaInc say that the pressure on them to know what is going on in their departments has been manifested in demands for them to be out in the organization more often. They perceive a demand to collect firsthand knowledge, so that they quickly can answer questions from the management and the other leaders in the organization. In addition, the organizations also want the leaders to be demanding of other leaders and the co-workers. This is especially accentuated by the leaders at AlphaCo. Other demands from the organization include keeping the co-workers motivated and healthy. Furthermore, the leaders respond that there are demands from the management and the HR department to conduct annual PD dialogues.

The demands from the co-workers are also perceived as increasing. These demands are primarily related to the availability and competence of the leaders. The leaders argue that the co-workers sometimes demand that they should know everything and be available at all times. It is not uncommon that the leader is expected to have detailed knowledge of a specific part of the production process or to remember a problem that a specific supplier has reported. Furthermore, they feel expected to always be at hand to support the co-workers when something happens with their work or at a personal level. One leader explains that he sometimes feels that they even expect him to take over and solve the problem.

Actually, I have to say that they are rather demanding of me. They want me to know everything that's going on in the department, and that's just impossible because I'm just not there all the time. But, that's one big demand, and other demands concern helping them to solve the problems that they encounter. Many times they want me to solve the problems for them, but I try to return the questions as often as possible. (BetaInc12)

In addition, the leaders report that they feel obligated to always have time to talk with the co-workers. They should be prepared to listen to, discuss with or comfort the co-worker who seeks their attention.

Regarding demands that come from other leaders, the respondents answer that it is common for colleagues to request to have their specific problems dealt with first.

And then there are demands from the side as well, from leaders who demand that they should get their information first. They always think they should be prioritized and they are first in line, which is not the case. But that's their demands and I just have to deal with it. (BetaInc3)

All of the leaders do not feel that the demands of the organization are particularly high. Instead these leaders perceive that they place higher demands on themselves. Especially accentuated is that the leaders have a need for personal development and a fear of being stuck in the same position too long. Another kind of demand is mentioned by a leader who has difficulties accepting the fact that sometimes everything does not go according to plan. One leader feels a pressure to always do everything right.

I demand more of myself than anyone else. I don't want to make mistakes and I really want to do things right for everyone. (AlphaCo3)

A couple of the respondents also point out that they demand a lot of themselves to set a good example. One leader said that he has to bridle his temper and not become angry. Another leader argues that this includes treating everybody fairly and behaving in an ethically and morally correct way.

The perceptions of demands are in general similar between the two cases. Demands that come from outside of the leader are often referred to, while the internal demands are not as frequently mentioned. The leaders from BetaInc more often speak of demands that are related to the production process and to being the one who has the knowledge of what is happening in the department or section. The leaders from AlphaCo highlight these demands as well, but their answers are more oriented towards the demands from the co-workers. There are no apparent differences between leaders at different levels.

#### *6.2.4 A stimulating position*

In regard to the leaders' notions of their leadership, a number of stimulating issues were evident in the interviews. To be able to work with people is something that is often stressed as satisfying. The leaders appreciate their influence on the group processes and being in a position where they can support the co-workers to function well together and feel enthusiastic about their work. The leaders also find it stimulating to feel needed and

appreciated. Furthermore, the leaders assert that it feels nice to witness the development of co-workers, especially those that may not have been positive towards making changes.

Well, that's to see people develop. It can be silly little things like seeing someone who's 60 years old and who has done the exact same thing for ten years, and then you take over and in a year he's rotating between five work stations, has learned the computer and is engaged in an improvement group, which would earlier have been considered absolute torment. Those sorts of things make you childishly happy. (BetaInc4)

Furthermore, the leaders also pointed to the satisfaction that comes with the success of reaching a particular goal or solving a difficult problem. This includes a sense of pride in being a leader. Many leaders reported that they find it stimulating to be in a position from where they can have an impact on organizational events and are able to affect the further development of the company.

For me personally I find it satisfactory to be able to influence things, so that's a part of it. It's a large part for me to feel that I can affect things and drive them forwards. (AlphaCo11)

In addition, the leaders point to the stimulation that comes from the variation of their work situation, which has been previously described. No day is like any other, since unexpected situations and problems have a tendency to constantly pop up.

The leaders' views that the stimulating aspects in their leadership are primarily related towards the co-workers are evident in both cases and do not differ between lower and higher levels of leadership.

### *6.2.5 A difficult position*

Being a leader is by no means always a positive experience. On the contrary, the leaders speak of a number of less inspiring aspects of their leadership. These are also concerned with the co-workers and include difficult personnel matters such as conflicts and health-related problems. The leaders argue that the conflicts and quarrels that occur amongst the co-workers are sometimes very frustrating to deal with. The leaders explain that they often have to take on the role of a mediator, which is perceived as tiresome. These less stimulating sides of leadership often linger in the minds of the leaders when the work day is finished.



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In the long run there's stuff that isn't exactly good for you. I mean you want to do so damn much, but sometimes you're not able to influence as much as you had hoped to and then it's difficult to let it go. Instead you end up thinking about it when you get home. And then there are of course difficult conflicts, and having to transfer co-workers and stuff like that. That's never fun. (BetaInc14)

Other less stimulating aspects are related to failure to reach the goals or to manage the responsibility for a specific task or function. Furthermore, the respondents specifically highlight that the time that they would like to use for planning and preparation is often claimed by issues of a much more urgent nature. These errors, deficiencies and problems that demand immediate action takes time away from more long-term engagements that the leaders perceive they are supposed to work with. This creates a feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the leaders.

In addition, some of the leaders at BetaInc respond that it is less stimulating to work with colleagues and co-workers that show a lack of commitment and understanding of the work that needs to be done. These leaders perceive that their colleagues are sometimes so occupied with their own problems that they do not consider the realities of other sections in the organization. There are also tendencies to blame other leaders and departments when something has gone wrong.

Sometimes I get the feeling that we're too serious. Sometimes the mood gets really agitated and negative. I mean it's not like anyone of us causes problems deliberately, so what's the point in yelling and putting each other down? (BetaInc9)

This difficulty is spoken of as an area for self improvement and it is also said that communication needs to be improved in the entire organization. The leaders at AlphaCo also respond that the dialogue between the different sections is sometimes insufficient.

### *6.2.6 The leaders' need for competence development*

The presentation of the leaders' background (see chapter 5) shows that many of them are new to their positions. In fact, some of them have just recently become leaders. Most of the leaders have undergone some sort of basic leadership training, but few have participated in courses specifically directed towards the development of co-workers. In the leaders' answers, it is possible to see that they reflect on their competence in relation to developing others.

They identify needs for improvement in their daily leadership as well as a need for increased theoretical knowledge.

When it comes to the need for personal development the leaders say that they wish to improve their communications skills. This includes giving and receiving feedback, being able to say no more often, and being better at giving straight answers and informing the co-workers in a clear fashion. In addition, the leaders also mention a need to improve their dialogue skills and become better at having PD dialogues and salary dialogues.

Furthermore, there are also leaders who answer that they should be better at delegating assignments to the co-workers. They respond that they sometimes end up being the one who has to do everything, just because this is easier than letting go of control. According to the leaders, it would be preferable to delegate in order to free-up time for other assignments, but also to give the co-workers a chance to grow. One of the leaders at AlphaCo argues that the need for control risks becoming very tiresome.

I need to delegate. I have previously found it difficult and often tried to manage on my own. I thought that I'd better do it myself so it would get done properly and turn out the way I like it. But that doesn't work; you get totally stressed out if you go on like that. It just doesn't work if I'm supposed to control everything. (AlphaCo3)

The leaders have also identified a need for theoretical knowledge in order to be better at developing the co-workers. For instance, they mention that they need to understand how organizations function and argue that increased knowledge of financial matters and production systems would make them better suited to teach the co-workers. One leader argues that this is also a necessity in order for him to advance in his own career. In addition, the leaders also speak of theoretical knowledge that is specifically related to the co-workers. They describe a need to learn more about issues such as how to handle conflicts and how to understand group psychology.

Finally, there are also leaders who argue that they need opportunities to exchange their experience of personnel development work with other leaders. Especially the leaders at BetaInc describe a need for meetings or other forums that would focus on the softer matters, instead of numbers and statistics. They respond that they need a time and place to discuss and reflect on these issues.

We ought to have meetings where we can discuss personnel-related issues to a larger extent. Where we can ignore the numbers and all that and focus on problems with the co-workers and what to do about them. (BetaInc14)

One of the leaders at BetaInc also argues that it is especially important for new leaders to have a channel for these kinds of discussions.

Regarding the leaders' view of their competence, the responses are similar between the two cases. Other than a greater need for discussions on development at BetaInc, the leaders agree. A difference can be seen between new leaders, who more often describe these needs, and those with more experience of leadership.

### 6.3 Concluding remarks

The overall work situation of the leaders in both cases can be characterized as hectic, difficult to plan ahead and involving a variety of different assignments and people with whom the leaders interact. The leaders are often on the move between different locations in the companies, which continuously feeds them with new assignments. Due to a lot of unforeseen problems, the time for administrative work is limited and this is seen as frustrating. When comparing the observation data with the interview responses it is evident that the leaders are poor estimators of the time spent in different work spaces. This could be seen as a consequence of the complexity of their work situation, which makes it difficult to overview.

The leaders' notions of the meaning of their leadership involve a number of dimensions. The actual content of leadership can be seen as mainly consisting of various upholding operations, concerning both production and personnel. The leadership that is related to the production process is depicted as monitoring, controlling, administrating and following up, while the corresponding leadership in relation to the co-workers can be characterized by social relationships and a focus on comfort, communication and trust. In addition, it is possible to distinguish a developmental dimension as well. This dimension is also related to both production and personnel. In contrast to the upholding dimension, this leadership is concerned with making changes and finding innovative ways of developing the production process, the actual products and the competence of the co-workers.

In the chapter, the leaders' feelings in relation to being a leader have also been described. The results suggest that the position of being a leader is both demanding and difficult, but also holds stimulating elements. The demands that the leaders' perceive are complex in the sense that they come from different actors and vary in clearness. It is also possible to distinguish between demands from outside and from within. The stimulating aspects include a sense that working with personnel is an important source of job satisfaction. The leaders also feel satisfied when they manage to reach goals and succeed with their assignments. The difficulties in the position of being a

leader are related to the opposite situation, i.e. when they fail to reach the goals or when conflicts or other personnel-related problems arise. These often linger with the leader after the end of the work day. In connection to this, it is also evident that the leaders perceive a need for competence development in terms of increased knowledge concerning conflict management and group psychology. They also report a need for reflection and discussions with other leaders on personnel-related matters.

## 7 Learning, development and leadership

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the leaders identify both an upholding and a developmental dimension in their leadership. In the following chapter, these dimensions are further elaborated upon by a more specific focus on leadership in relation to learning and development. The chapter consists of two main parts. Initially, the leaders' notions of the concepts of learning and development are presented and then we take a look at what characterizes the leaders' descriptions of how they act when working with these issues.

### 7.1 Notions of learning and development

This section concerns the leaders' notions of what learning is and their view of their own leadership in connection to learning in terms of a responsibility for working with these matters and putting them on the agenda.

#### *7.1.1 The meaning of learning and development*

When it comes to the leaders' view of learning and development in relation to the workplace, there is little doubt that they consider this to be an important issue for the entire organization. The common notion is that the individual needs learning to improve in the daily work, in order to become a better assembler, painter or key account manager. They also need to learn how to approach the work assignments in a new way to find potential for the development of the entire work group, department or organization. This development is crucial for the health and motivation of the individual co-worker as well as for the entire company's ability to keep up with the competition.

Learning, I guess that's what it takes nowadays. You can't stand in the same place all the time, you have to keep up with the rest and preferably even be one step ahead of them. (AlphaCo8)

When the leaders describe their view of what learning and development is, they mostly speak of it as something that happens in connection with courses and other educational initiatives inside and outside the organization.

Learning and development for me is that they get to go to the courses they need in order to do their job properly. (BetaInc13)

Another response is that the co-workers' learning and development is seen as connected to the daily work. An example of this could be a welder who becomes better at using a certain method. The notion of learning as always being present is often related to continuous improvement, but the leaders also describe a learning that is connected to being faced with new problems that require expanded thinking, or learning from previous mistakes.

Development is like, well like I said earlier, sometimes you make mistakes and take a hit, but then you learn from it. It's an experience and when you're learning, you develop. Not just to do better at work, but for life really. (AlphaCo1)

However, the leaders also respond that some of the co-workers have less potential for learning in their daily work, since their assignments do not offer enough variation. This is especially evident in BetaInc's and AlphaCo's production departments, where many tasks imply a relatively small amount of room for flexibility. Many operations in the production processes are robotized and every step of the procedure is standardized and structured.

If you look at someone who works with welding, you'll see that there's not much possibility for development. When you weld the same thing day in and day out, the work is exactly the same. For them development or an expansion of the work could be learning how to weld other parts, but I'm not sure if it is really that developing to weld differently. It's basically still the same thing. (BetaInc15)

The two case studies resemble each other concerning the view of learning and development. When it comes to differences in views stemming from organizational levels, it is possible to see that the leaders at higher levels speak of learning in broader terms and more connected to a strategic dimension, while the leaders at lower levels more often see learning as related to the goals in daily work.

### *7.1.2 Responsibility for learning*

When the leaders speak of learning and development in the workplace it is clear that they consider their leadership to be very important. The leaders say that it is their duty to work with these issues and to put them on the agenda. Other responses also accentuate the responsibility of each individual and a third category of answers highlight the responsibility of the organization.

The view of the leaders' responsibility often comes down to the question of how to balance and prioritize development, in contrast to the regular work load. This must also be done with a long-term perspective in mind.

And the leader is supposed to be the one who looks around the corner. Considering the current plans for what we are supposed to do in 1, 2, 3 years, he needs to ask; "what skills do I need in my area of responsibility?". (BetaInc8)

The leaders answer that it is their job to provide the resources and time for the co-workers to have the opportunities to try new assignments or attend courses. This often implies that the leaders must convey the needs for development to the management and the HR department.

Another pattern in the responses is that the leaders stress the responsibility of every individual for learning and development. The leaders argue that it is important that the co-workers have the right attitude and an interest in developing. This notion is more evident in the BetaInc case in comparison to AlphaCo. As an example of this, one of the leaders in BetaInc specifically points out that this responsibility is perhaps not accentuated enough when new co-workers are recruited to the company.

We fail to emphasise the co-workers' responsibility for learning and development when they are newly employed in the company. (BetaInc7)

The leaders argue that most of the co-workers are interested and actively try to engage in learning activities. Some of them are even extremely interested, while others more or less go with the flow.

Some are really hungry when it comes to development and doing new things, I have a couple of co-workers who actually feel ill if they are not allowed to do new things and learn new stuff. They need it. (BetaInc12)

On the other hand, there are a smaller number of co-workers that are reluctant or unwilling when it comes to trying new things or attending courses. The leaders attribute this resistance to factors such as how long the co-workers have worked in the company, if they have more important commitments outside of the workplace, or if learning is related to negative experiences of educational institutions.

I mean, learning is synonymous with school or studying and then there are those who feel that this is just the most boring thing ever. And for them

picking up a book is out of the question, it's just not an alternative.  
(AlphaCo2)

The leaders refer to the unwilling group as difficult to handle. However, there are also leaders who feel that it is equally hard, or sometimes even more challenging, to deal with the overachievers. It is hard to turn down someone that is really eager, without breaking their spirit and willingness to learn. One leader gives an example of co-workers who are interested in learning only to gain a unique position in the group. They are unwilling to share their knowledge and experience.

I have two guys that like to shine. They are actually quite good, but don't put very much energy into teaching the others. Instead they like to be the ones who know things and want people to come and ask them. (BetaInc1)

In addition, the leaders also point to the responsibility of the company to provide and coordinate courses and educational initiatives. The leaders argue that it is up to the company's representatives to measure and follow up on the learning initiatives, but also to put these matters on the agenda. According to the leaders, it should be the responsibility of the HR departments to introduce learning opportunities. One leader argues that it should be a shared responsibility between the HR department and the leaders.

A certain responsibility naturally falls on the leaders, but I feel that the main responsibility must lie with the HR department. They must be the ones who manage the largest parts. So it's kind of a shared responsibility.  
(AlphaCo12)

The responsibility of the organization is more accentuated in the AlphaCo case in comparison to BetaInc. The leaders at AlphaCo explain that the company has applied for funding for competence development from the Objective 3 programme. The HR department has been very involved in this process.

### *7.1.3 Taking time for learning*

When it comes to the perceived time for learning, it is evident that there are two notions represented in the material. The first one is most common and consists of the view that time for production is separated from time for development. The second category consists of notions where development is seen as something that could be interwoven with the production.



The responses in the first category show that the time for working with learning and development is perceived as rather small. It is common that the leaders view the pace of production as difficult to cope with, which makes it hard to find room to work with the development of the co-workers.

Sometimes I wish that there was more time for the development of the co-workers and above all to increase their competence. Because sometimes it gets a bit ambiguous, for instance when the production is overbooked, then you just can't manage the development. (AlphaCo4)

They also report that the pace of production has negative effects on the learning that occurs in connection with the work, since there is little time to reflect on what is actually happening. They solve the problem, but do not take the time to reflect on how to prevent it from happening again.

One of the best things you can do at AlphaCo is to run out to the yard when the truck driver has tired of waiting and throw the product up on the truck bed. Then they celebrate. Then they feel that they have shown flexibility. But to stop for a second to reflect on if the situation could have been avoided, so we won't have to stress as much the next time, even if it may cost us more, that's a point we haven't reached yet. We deal with the symptoms and not the problems. (AlphaCo2)

Furthermore, they also feel that it is easy to set aside the need for development, when something has gone wrong with a machine or if there is a component missing from an important order. The leaders respond that it is sometimes easy to get caught up in this 'fire fighting', since it is immediately rewarding, in comparison with the long-term developmental work which may or may not bear fruit for many months, or perhaps even years, to come.

However, in the second category there are responses indicating that room for learning can be arranged through prioritizing and by trying to find developmental steps in the everyday work. These leaders are aware of the need to invest time in order to gain time in the future. One leader exemplifies this as allowing the training procedure of a new co-worker to take its time, since he knows that this will pay off in the long run.

The introductory learning phase must take as long as it needs to be successful. If you cut it off too soon, you will have to deal with the problems later instead. (BetaInc5)

In addition, one of the leaders specifically points out that you should not underestimate the learning that occurs when everything seems to be going

wrong. When you're having a bad day with lots of problems, you are given the incentives to assure that it does not happen again and to find new and smarter solutions to prevent the problem from arising one more time.

And at the same time it is usually the other way around. It's when you're under pressure that you come up with ideas that could make it easier. (AlphaCo6)

In conclusion, the leaders also respond that no matter how good you are at prioritizing working with development, many times it comes down to the available resources. The general notion of resources for development in the organizations is that there is an outspoken ambition to support the leaders work with these questions, but on the other hand many of the leaders report that their ideas on how to develop the co-workers are not always compatible with the budget or the production goals. One leader at BetaInc argues that at the end of the day courses are not as prioritized as building trucks.

I actually don't think that training courses have a very high priority. At the end of the day, it's the number of forklifts that has reached the dock that counts. If the quality is bad, then you deal with that too, but I guess you could say that it stops there. (BetaInc10)

The leaders' perceptions of their own leadership and their possibilities to work with learning and development are similar between the cases. These perceptions will be further explored in chapter 8 where the activities of the leaders in regard to these matters are described.

## 7.2 Leader roles for learning and development

When the leaders describe how they act when trying to lead the co-workers to engage in learning and development it is possible to identify three different roles, or sets of behaviours, that the leaders alternate between depending on the situation and which of the co-workers are involved. The first role is the supporter, the second is the educator and the third is the confronter. In this section the roles are described and, in addition, each role is also exemplified by glimpses from the observation study which show the roles *in situ*.

### 7.2.1 The supporter

A clear pattern in the leaders' responses is that they often refer to situations where they have acted as supporters of the co-workers' learning and development. The leaders explain that this implies that they encourage and

motivate the co-workers to take further steps in their development. One of the leaders argues that encouragement is often better received than orders, which tend to send the co-workers into a defensive mode.

Positive encouragement; “you can do it; if you want to you will be able to!” You know, constantly cheering them on. (AlphaCo3)

The leaders explain that in the supporting role they are careful not to take over responsibility from the co-worker. Instead, they point to the importance of being a speaking partner and of offering comfort if things do not work out as the co-worker had hoped. One leader describes a situation where he talked with a co-worker who did not get a position that he had applied for.

Well, then I had to cheer him up. He was very disappointed so I explained why he didn't make it and what he should improve in the year to come. I haven't had a PD dialogue with him, but we have talked a lot anyway and discussed it in the salary dialogue. I tried to make him see the coming year as an opportunity to learn the things that he was missing, so it's been a bit of coaching. (BetaInc14)

Furthermore, the leaders explain that they try to send the signal to the co-workers that they want them to engage in learning activities. One way to do this is to highlight individual co-workers who have made an effort in terms of development. According to the leaders, this is intended to strengthen the co-workers' self-confidence and belief in their competence, while it also sends a signal to the groups that development is something positive. In addition, the leaders respond that by targeting and promoting the ones who are positive towards development this could encourage the hesitant to take the plunge.

A great deal of the answers relating to this role concern the environment in the department and how the leaders try to make the co-workers feel secure and comfortable in their development. The leaders explain that they act supportively in terms of allowing the co-workers to contribute opinions and ideas.

Furthermore, the leaders also describe that in order to create a secure environment it is important that they act tolerantly even if things do not go as planned. The co-workers do not always have the best ideas, but the leaders explain that they must allow them to find that out for themselves. The leaders argue that the co-workers must feel that it is okay to try and that the leaders will not get upset if they sometimes fail.

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That's extremely important and I really try to make the personnel realize that I don't cut someone down just because they make a mistake. But on the other hand I can oppose those who won't even give it a chance. (AlphaCo7)

In connection with this, the leaders argue that they make an effort to listen to everybody's ideas, without judging too quickly. One leader explains that an idea that initially sounds terrible may in fact grow into to a great one when it is further developed.

The leaders also say that they try to support everyone and try not to give preferential treatment to some co-workers. They argue that there are some individuals who, by their fellow co-workers, have been labelled odd. According to the leaders, it is important to talk to these co-workers as well, since it is likely that they too want or need to learn new things.

I never listen to what the others are saying; I'd rather form my own opinion. And like I said, it doesn't matter if people are bad-mouthing someone, when I take my morning tour it doesn't matter if they think he's stupid, I will still go and talk with him. (BetaInc1)

A final aspect of the supporting leadership is that the leaders need to show individualized consideration in terms of not rushing those who need more time to be motivated to learn. One leader explains that this implies being patient and to keep on trying until they get through to the co-worker.

The supporter role is also represented in the observation study. One specific example comes from a situation where a leader gives a co-worker a new assignment and then has to act supportively to help him finish the task.

While in the office the leader gets a phone call from the construction department. They need someone to help them with a paint job on a new demo product that is supposed to be finished the next day. The leader takes a look at the product and promises to help out by assigning one of his co-workers to do the puttying and painting. However, the assignment proves to be much more demanding and time consuming than the leader had expected and after a discussion with the co-worker who has started working on the product, the leader says that he may have put the co-worker in a tight spot. During the rest of the day, the leader frequently checks up on the co-worker's progress and encourages and praises him. He also assigns another co-worker to help out in order to make the deadline. (Field notes)

In the follow-up interview the leader explains that he thought that the assignment would be fun and developing for the co-worker but that for a while it looked like he had totally misjudged the situation. However, in retrospect the leader concludes that the co-worker did enjoy the task and regarded it to be a nice break from the routine work. The product turned out nicely and the leader says that he has forwarded the commendation from the construction department to the co-worker.

In conclusion, the role of being a supporter is evident in both the cases and there do not seem to be any differences that are dependent on the organizational level.

### *7.2.2 The educator*

The second role involves a leadership that aims at educating the co-workers, both in terms of teaching them procedures and helping them reflect over their daily work. The leaders explain that they try to teach the co-workers new things and to show them how problems can be solved in order for them to do it themselves in the future. This role implies that the leader has knowledge that can be passed on to the co-workers, but also that the leader has the ability to explain and instruct. One leader explains that when teaching it is crucial to give the co-worker time to understand what the leader is trying to say and really let it sink in.

I mean, if it's me who's going to teach her something, then I have to provide the right prerequisites from the start. I can't hurry through some parts. I have to make sure she understands what I'm saying and that I supply the correct information. (AlphaCo1)

The role of being an educator includes a lot of communication with the co-workers. The leaders explain that they try to keep them informed about what is going on in the company so that they will understand how their work will affect and be affected by other operations in the organization.

One example of acting as an educator comes from a leader at BetaInc, who had to sit down with the co-workers to give them an introduction to the purpose of continuous improvement. The leader argues that this was necessary, since many of them were not used to conducting their own meetings or to reflecting on how to improve their work situation.

I've sat with them in groups for about one to two hours extra in relation to these issues, talking about how to get the first meetings started. I've given them ideas on topics to work with so that they wouldn't have to stand there at the first meeting, not knowing where to begin. And if the others in

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the group were quiet I gave them the advice to go and look at other group boards to get inspiration and to avoid strained situations. You see, not all of them are experienced at having meetings on their own. (BetaInc14)

Being an educator implies knowing how to explain how the different parts of the organization fit together, which often implies using didactical manoeuvres to get the message across. One leader describes a situation where he had to illustrate the flow of the work processes by drawing it on a whiteboard and explaining each step.

Among the first things I did was to draw up the production flow on the white board to illustrate what it looks like and so I could explain what everyone else is doing before them. That led to some realizations and they were saying “oh, so that’s how it is” And that’s a kind of learning. (BetaInc11)

The leaders argue that at other times their role as educators consists of helping the co-workers by making the new knowledge more manageable. The leaders say that this can be done by dividing it into smaller portions.

Furthermore, in the role as educators, the leaders explain that they try to increase the co-workers’ capacity for reflection. According to the leaders, this implies putting matters into new perspectives and challenging them to see things from a different angle. They respond that they sometimes need to twist and turn their reasoning in order to get through to the co-worker. One leader describes a conversation with a co-worker who had started longing for retirement.

I had a guy who was really difficult to get going. He was saying “I’ve only got five years left to retirement”. But I tried to make him see that five years, that’s like 1200 work days for you to spend here at the company, and are you going to do that without being involved? That’s another angle to it. (BetaInc16)

The leaders also explain that one way to make the co-workers reflect on their development is to put it into a wider context and to explain why it is that learning is important in relation to the development of the entire organization.

We had a couple of guys down here when we were starting up a trial electronics course during the spring. At a meeting one of them said “why do I have to learn about electronics? It’s enough that I know how to build it”. And then I tried to give him the background and explain that now he’s building it, but in the future he may be the one who has to test it as well.

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“What if you built it wrong and you discover that while doing the tests, what are you supposed to do then? Then you should be able to find the fault and correct it, and then it could come in handy with some knowledge of electronics”. And then he got it. (AlphaCo5)

Other ways of making the co-workers reflect is by asking questions instead of giving answers. According to the leaders this is a way to make the co-worker reflect without having to resort to orders and instructions.

Exactly, and also it was a bit funny because when they came to me they said; “Oh, you ask so many strange questions”. I saw the entire thing from my perspective, which I’m used to, but I noticed that they appreciated it and that it made them think that well “I guess that’s another way of seeing it”. (BetaInc11)

In addition, the leaders also argue that a part of the role of being an educator is letting the co-workers have time and space to try and solve their problems and to experiment with new assignments, without interference from the leader. For instance, a leader describes a situation where a work group one day had to manage without their coordinator. The group turned to the leader and expected to be directed by him, but instead he gave them the possibility to deal with the situation themselves.

There was this one group that couldn’t do anything just because their coordinator was gone. And then I explained to them that one of you guys has to take charge now and that was a good learning experience for that group. At first there was complete chaos, and they thought it was wrong that I didn’t step in with instructions, but I argued that they were basically doing the same things as usual and that they could work it out on their own. So in spite of their complaints, I think it’s good that I didn’t step in considering what the group learned from it. (BetaInc14)

During the observation study situations occurred where the leaders acted as educators. One example comes from a meeting with the co-workers in the department, where the leader spontaneously decides to use the whiteboard to illustrate an upcoming change to the department.

After going through the weekly numbers the leader informs the co-workers of a planned change that has recently been decided on by the company management. The change is related to the implementation of Lean Production principles and aims at reducing the queue-time in the production. The leader tries to describe how this is going to affect their

department, but soon realizes that they are not following his line of reasoning. Instead, he turns to the whiteboard where he draws up an outline of the production flow between the production departments, while continuing to explain what they are going to do. He makes up an imaginary order, which he follows through the process, illustrating where there is time to save and explaining what consequences it will have for the machines and procedures in the work groups. The leader says that hopefully this change will help create a more even production flow, which will free time to work more with development issues. (Field notes)

Afterwards the leader explains that even though he was not completely satisfied with his unrehearsed performance by the whiteboard, he still thinks that most of the co-workers understood what he was trying to teach them.

The role of being an educator is more commonly referred to by the leaders from BetaInc than those from AlphaCo. Furthermore, there are also differences depending on the level of leadership. Leaders at lower levels usually refer to teaching and explaining, while the leaders at higher levels more often speak of how to initiate reflection.

### *7.2.3 The confronter*

The third leader role that is evident in the material mainly concerns the small group of co-workers who the leaders perceive as having a negative attitude towards learning and development. The leaders describe this role as being confronting and putting demands on the co-workers' development. The leaders explain that they keep an extra eye on some of the co-workers and monitor their work in order to quickly be able to correct erroneous behaviour. They argue that it is important to directly deal with situations when they encounter this attitude, instead of waiting for an appropriate time and place.

I try to take the bull by the horns and go straight at it. For instance I can say that "I feel that you and I aren't functioning together, what's the deal? I would like to have it this way instead, could you consider contributing to that?" So I'm particularly content with one person today who has been a real sourpuss for a long time, but now seems to have turned a corner /.../ but if I see something that I don't accept, I try to deal with it right away. It's no use waiting for the PD dialogue six months later. (AlphaCo4)

Furthermore, the leaders explain that it is quite common that the co-workers respond by getting defensive. According to the leaders they have to stand their ground and not give in when the co-workers talk back. However, being a confronter does not imply getting upset and arguing with the co-workers.



Instead the leaders stress that it is important to maintain their professionalism and not to be aggravated when the co-workers cause problems. They argue that it is important to be constructive and to present facts that back up their arguments instead of just running them over. One leader describes a situation in which he confronted two co-workers, but did it by being clear and calm.

We have some who still work here that I've had really serious talks with, where the next step would have been to transfer them if things hadn't improved. But they have really cleaned up, so there are some out there that I've managed to reach. Where it has helped that I've talked with them during salary dialogues and that I've, despite being called an idiot and lots of other things, continued to calmly explain that I'm not happy with their performance and that they're not living up to the standards. Some of them have been mad as hell, but today they've almost completely turned around. (BetaInc18)

However, according to the leaders, this approach does not work with everybody. They argue that with some co-workers they really have to be tough in order for them to realize that the demands concerning development cannot be ignored.

Instead I tried to get him to some kind of realization, to understand that I'm serious, "you can't go on like this". And that's a leader thing as well. In order to get an individual to change you may almost have to push him over the edge before things start shaking. And that's very dependent on what kind of person you are, some have to come really close to the edge before anything happens. (AlphaCo5)

One leader at BetaInc describes a situation where a co-worker refused to rotate between work stations, which limited other co-workers' possibilities to learn the station that he occupied. The leader explains that this creates vulnerability, since no one can take over if this co-worker for some reason becomes indisposed. The leader says that he eventually had to force the co-worker to leave the station.

The leaders explain that they have to be very hard on the co-workers who oppose changes and who have a negative influence on the others. The leaders respond that they try to minimize the influence of these individuals on the work group. It is okay for a co-worker to be neutral when it comes to changes, as long as they do a good job and contribute to the continuity of the department, but it is not acceptable to work actively against them.

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When you're clear about the fact that this is something we are doing for the group, you have to let them know that they don't have a choice. You're allowed to be passive or neutral, but I will never accept being opposed by those who don't want changes. Those I will be really vicious to. You can sit there with your mouth shut, but you don't oppose. (BetaInc7)

A dimension of the confronting leadership is also applicable to the co-workers who the leaders perceive as sometimes being too interested in learning and development. According to the leaders, some co-workers are so eager to learn new things that it affects the quality of their work negatively. Then the leaders say that they have to say no when these co-workers want to attend a course or to get new assignments.

Well, some of them you have to put the brakes on. They want to do everything at the same time, but that doesn't work either. (BetaInc16)

Furthermore, the leaders explain that the ones who like to shine, but who will not share their knowledge, sometimes need a firm hand. When it comes to these co-workers the leaders respond that they confront them and explain that they have more to gain by teaching others than by keeping everything to themselves. One leader answers that if these situations occur he tells the co-worker that the group does not usually like this kind of behaviour.

Situations where the leaders act as confronters can be found in the observation study. One specific example includes a leader who during a meeting suddenly puts a lot of pressure on a co-worker. The observed situation concerned a problem related to unclear demands from a customer.

The problem is that a customer has changed an order and now wants a different type of batteries, which are more difficult to solder. After a brief discussion, where they try to determine what the problem is all about and why it has come up, they realize that they need to contact the customer for further information. The leader decides that the co-worker should be responsible for dealing with the matter. The co-worker hesitates and argues that the quality department ought to handle it, but the leader will not hear of it. Instead the leader confronts the co-worker with follow-up questions such as; "when can you call the customer?" and "what are you supposed to find out from them?" (Field notes)

When the meeting has ended the leader explains that the reason for confronting the co-worker is that he has a lot of potential, but sometimes needs a kick in the behind to make use of it.

The role of being the confronter is described by leaders regardless of case and level. The leaders refer to this role as necessary, but not preferable.

### 7.3 Concluding remarks

The results presented in this chapter indicate that the leaders consider learning and development to be important issues, but that the understanding of the actual meaning of these phenomena varies. Learning is mainly seen as connected with formal competence development in courses, but there is also recognition that learning can be understood as a constantly ongoing process in the daily work. When it comes to the question of responsibility for working with these issues, the leaders speak of this as their duty. The company management and support structures such as the HR functions are also mentioned. In BetaInc, the spotlight is also directed at the responsibility of the individual co-worker, which is not mentioned to the same extent by the leaders from AlphaCo. Concerning the leaders' views of the co-workers it appears as if there are different categories to be considered. The majority can be characterized as pro learning, but do not make a big deal of it. Two smaller groups consist of those who are eager or reluctant and the leader feels that both of these demand a lot of their attention.

The actual time for working with the co-workers' learning and development is perceived as limited and this is seen as a result of a heavy focus on the daily production. However, there are also leaders who see these processes as two sides of the same coin and instead point to learning that occurs during the daily work.

Furthermore, the results in the chapter have also shown that the leaders' descriptions of how they work with learning and development can be characterized as three complementary leadership roles. The leader as a supporter aims at creating a secure and tolerant environment, where it is acceptable to fail as long as you try to learn from your mistakes. The leader does not judge too quickly or rush decisions. It is important that the co-workers are on board and that their ideas are encouraged. The supporter will cheer and motivate the hesitant co-worker and gently try to slow down the overly enthusiastic. Everybody is allowed to make their voices heard, but at the same time the supporter wants the group to take a lot of responsibility for creating an encouraging climate. The supporter will also be there to comfort and look for the silver lining if the learning and development processes do not go as planned.

The leader as an educator aims to create possibilities for learning by actively engaging in the process. For simple procedures this implies instructing and showing the co-workers how it is done, for more complex

processes such as production principles, the leader must use his pedagogical and didactical skills to teach the co-workers. The educating role is concerned with finding new and innovative ways to solve old problems and with creating situations where the co-workers must think outside the box and apply other perspectives than the ones they are used to. The educator illustrates the problem on the whiteboard, tries to divide it into smaller portions or simply asks tricky questions that get the co-workers to reflect on their daily work. The educator also sometimes takes a step back to let the co-workers experiment and find the solutions themselves.

The leader as a confronter takes a somewhat tougher approach to the co-workers' learning and development, in terms of demanding changes and commitment. The confronter does not back down or let the co-worker give up. Instead of steering clear of a potential conflict, the confronter goes in head first and takes the discussion right away. Being a confronter is also about acting professionally and not getting angry, since this could cloud one's judgement and affect the relation to the co-worker. But in some cases, when nothing else has worked or when the co-worker in question is working actively against the good of the department, the gloves need to come off.

## 8 Doing leadership for learning and development

As shown in previous chapters, the daily work situation of the leaders is characterized by a multitude of activities that take place simultaneously in the organizations. However, when the leaders speak of the specific activities that they employ to facilitate learning and development, it is possible to distinguish differences in the degree of planning and organization. Three main categories are found in the material; planned activities, partially planned activities and spontaneous activities. The first category is characterized by a high degree of formalization and planning and consists of different types of organized intervention within or outside the organization. The second category is characterized by a lower degree of formalization and planning than the first, but is still part of an overarching structure or system for competence development in the cases. The third category is characterized by spontaneous activities that occur in connection with the co-workers' daily work. These categories are not to be seen as mutually exclusive. The daily work consists of a combination of activities.

### 8.1 Planned leader activities

The planned activities that the leaders describe consist of various formal competence development interventions that they try to enrol the co-workers in. Here we can differ between shorter courses, long-term training programmes and planned benchmarking activities. The planned activities also include dialogues for development and activities that are related to Lean Production and the production systems of the companies.

#### *8.1.1 Shorter courses*

A common response from the leaders is that they describe a variety of shorter courses and educational/training activities that are available to the co-workers within and outside the company. These educational interventions are often arranged in cooperation with the HR department and their extent is dependent on the leaders' yearly budget for competence development. The leaders explain that their part in this process is to determine the need for the competence development of both the individual co-worker and the work group, which they then signal to the HR department. As an example, we can see that there in both cases are in-house courses such as quality and safety training courses. Other commonly mentioned courses are driving courses for

forklifts, computer courses, and courses in Lean Production principles. At BetaInc there is also an internal welding school that offers competence development. The leaders' aim with these shorter courses is to develop the co-workers in their current position or to ensure that a specific competence is represented in the department. The leaders are not willing to pay for competence that the co-worker intends to use in a position outside of the department or the company.

I can't reserve, let's say two hours, times ten occasions, just so he can take an Excel course which he doesn't have any real use for today. And often they argue that, "I have applied for this or that position", but then I have to say that if he gets it then he can take the course, not otherwise. (BetaInc9)

The leaders agree that it would be preferable if more of these shorter courses were offered to the co-workers and that they should have a higher priority. One of the leaders at BetaInc says that he receives mixed signals when the company first decides that everyone in the department should attend a course, and then cancels it because of a production lag.

It's not very often that more directed courses come along, when we're able to send many of the co-workers. That only happens about once every other year. We had a course where the goal was to send all of them, but I think we only reached 50-60 per cent before it was cancelled because of the bad situation in the production. (BetaInc14)

However, it is not just the leader who tries to find suitable courses for the co-workers. One of the leaders at AlphaCo especially argues that he involves the co-workers in the process by telling them to keep their eyes open for interesting opportunities for competence development.

I've told them to keep their eyes open and that has worked out very well. If they find a course or a seminar that they think is interesting or if they come up with something else that they would like to study, then they come and ask me. (AlphaCo10)

When it comes to shorter courses there are only small differences between the two companies. Nor is there any greater variety regarding the levels in the organizations, except from the obvious fact that the content of the courses may differ depending on who they are directed at.

### *8.1.2 Long-term programmes*

When it comes to formal leader activities that are connected to long-term development programmes, both of the companies have their own alternatives. The leaders at BetaInc refer to an internal trainee programme for future production technicians and production leaders. These programmes are open to applications from all co-workers', but the leaders argue that it usually requires a recommendation from a leader to be eligible for a position. The leaders use the programmes to find ways for their co-workers to advance in their careers.

For instance there is a trainee programme which everyone can apply to be enrolled in. (BetaInc10)

The leaders at AlphaCo refer to a long-term training programme that has been run as a project with resources from the European Social Fund's Objective 3 programme. They say that it started with an analysis phase, where the HR department, the leaders and the co-workers cooperated to compile a competence development need profile. The programme has been directed at all categories of co-workers and included package solutions for the groups.

Now we have a competence development programme, which we didn't earlier, and it is quite complex and covers everything from technical English for our technicians to computer training for our operators, so it's really wide. (AlphaCo4)

When it comes to long-term programmes there are some differences between the companies regarding the form and content of the courses. However, the leaders speak of the purpose of these initiatives in a similar way. Regarding differences between levels in the organizations, the leaders at lower levels more often relate to their respective co-workers development, while leaders at higher levels more often adopt a company perspective.

### *8.1.3 Benchmarking trips to other factories*

The third variant of planned activities for learning and development is letting the co-workers take benchmarking trips to other factories. This method is mainly described by the leaders at BetaInc, but they explain that it is not a common form of development. It could rather be seen as an exclusive combination of reward and development. For instance, some co-workers have been given the opportunity to visit the parent company's factories in Asia.

And one leader describes an occasion where an entire production line was sent to visit a factory in a Western European country.

When they started reorganizing for the new production lines they took those work groups abroad to look at the assembly lines in another company. So then they took the time to go away which also created a demand from the other co-workers when they got back. (BetaInc16)

The leaders at AlphaCo mention that there have been trips to other factories and to the production facilities in Central Europe, but the extent to which this occurs is small. Furthermore, benchmarking trips are more common at higher levels in the organizations.

#### *8.1.4 Dialogues for development*

The leaders explain that there are three types of dialogue that concern the development of the co-workers. There are personnel development dialogues, salary dialogues and dialogues related to specific development problems.

The personnel development (PD) dialogue occurs on a yearly basis. Among the leaders there are both positive and more sceptical accounts of the dialogues. Most of the leaders view them as being important, since they perceive a need for private discussions with the co-workers. They argue that the possibilities to discuss development are limited in the daily work and that the PD dialogues offer an earmarked time when nothing else interferes.

And then it's good to have them, at least for me, because I need to make myself sit down, lock the door and have a proper talk. (AlphaCo2)

Concerning the content of the PD dialogue, the leaders respond that it often centres round getting to know the co-worker and discussing what they think of their assignments. This initial part of the dialogue often focuses on social issues, such as the co-worker's family life and the relations with other co-workers in the department. The following stage of the dialogue centres round the co-worker's need for development. Usually this involves discussions on more immediate actions such as attending courses or more long-term arrangements for the future career. This also includes a personal development plan which the leader and co-worker construct during the dialogue. The leaders explain that the plan is important since it helps them match the needs of the co-workers with the needs of the department.

I do that at the PD dialogue, discuss where they're going and if they're content with the current situation, if the things they're doing are exciting



or if they would like to develop in another direction. And then I have to compare the co-worker's demands with the resources to see what is possible to arrange. (AlphaCo10)

The PD dialogue is also used to give and receive feedback. The leaders see this as an opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the co-workers and simultaneously get feedback on their leadership.

However, amongst the leaders there are those with a more sceptical attitude towards the PD dialogues. One leader claims that if you execute your leadership correctly, these dialogues are redundant. The developmental needs of the organization and the individual will then be determined and acted upon continuously in the daily work. Other leaders argue that the dialogue more often results in casual chitchat than a focus on development-related issues. The leaders argue that this may depend on the fact that many co-workers are not interested in the PD dialogues. They are seldom requested and, according to the leaders, some are downright negative towards having PD dialogues.

In addition, there are leaders who are not convinced that there is a connection between the PD dialogues and the development that takes place in daily work. One leader explains that he believes the PD dialogue to be an overrated instrument.

I believe that the productivity and how we're doing in the production is connected to the things we try to communicate every day, the things you talk to the guys about. If I'm honest I feel that the PD dialogue makes up a very small part in the chain that gets the groups to move in the same direction. It's not that I don't like having the dialogues; I just feel that they're overrated. I think there are lots of other instruments we could use. (BetaInc18)

Concerning time spent on PD dialogues, the leaders at AlphaCo answer that the dialogues vary between one and three hours in length, while the leaders at BetaInc spend approximately two to three hours on average. The length of each dialogue is often dependent on the co-workers need for and interest in face-to-face conversation with the leader. The consensus amongst the leaders is that these dialogues are very time consuming. Especially the production leaders at BetaInc answer that due to the high production pace and other assignments that require the leaders time, they have trouble conducting all of the dialogues. They argue that even though the company requires them to conduct these dialogues, there are other issues that they rather prioritize, for instance the salary dialogues. However, there are also other opinions represented in the material in terms of leaders who feel that they simply have

to find the time for the dialogues. One of the leaders explains that he has one dialogue scheduled on a weekly basis and then adjusts other assignments and meetings to this recurring time.

Besides the PD dialogues, the leaders also say that they have two annual salary dialogues, which last approximately 20 minutes each. They explain that they view these meetings as important, since they feel that the co-workers should get a face-to-face explanation of the outcome instead of just being handed the papers. Furthermore, it is common for the salary dialogues to concern the co-workers development. The leaders explain that they strive to get the co-workers to understand that an interest both in personal and company development is required to get a raise. The production leaders in both cases say that they work with common criteria for the salary-setting process. In these criteria, great importance is attributed to development, both within the current work assignments and in terms of trying new things. In addition, the leaders at BetaInc have added active participation in improvement groups as a criterion.

We used that as a parameter when setting the salaries. To reach the maximum raise you had to take an active interest in an improvement group, because if you didn't you couldn't reach that level. (BetaInc14)

In addition, there is also another kind of planned dialogue between leader and co-worker. The leaders say that they sometimes need to sit down with a co-worker to discuss his or her development as a result of a problem that has appeared which the leader feels is necessary to deal with immediately. These dialogues can also occur when the leader or co-worker have identified a possibility for development, which they wish to discuss privately.

An example of how dialogues are used in relation to learning and development comes from the observation study where a leader conducted a salary dialogue with a co-worker in the department. The example indicates that these kinds of dialogue are complex and can lead to difficult situations. The co-worker was not satisfied with his raise and for a moment the discussion became quite heated.

We are sitting in the leaders' office, when there is a knock on the door and a co-worker comes in for his salary dialogue. He takes a seat and the leader starts off by explaining that this time around there has not been much money to distribute and that not everyone has got a raise. However, the co-worker has got a raise and the leader says that the reason for this is that he has taken on new work assignments in addition to performing well with his normal tasks. The co-worker does not seem very happy when the numbers are presented. He looks upset and starts arguing that he should

have gotten a higher raise and that his salary is too low in comparison to other co-workers, who he feels are less qualified. The leader repeats that there simply was no room for a higher raise, but the co-worker keeps arguing that there are recently employed co-workers who earn more than him and that the average salary at the company is way too low. Then the co-worker sits quiet for a moment before he says that he is considering looking for work elsewhere. He mentions going back to an old job, where the salary was better. He says that he does not really want to quit, but he is willing to do it if it gets him more money. The leader answers that he appreciates being notified and that it may be a wise decision considering that mobility is a way of getting on with personal development and getting a higher salary. But he also remarks that there are actually co-workers who have agreed to a lower salary in order to work in the company. Money is not everything. This statement seems to take the edge off the conversation and the co-worker gets out of the chair, while muttering that there does not seem to be much more to do about the situation. (Field notes)

In conclusion, there are only small differences between the two cases concerning dialogues for development. Instead there appear to be more differences between leaders with smaller or larger span of control. Leaders with a large span of control report more problems with the dialogues, in terms of time and resistance from the co-workers. The leaders at higher levels of the organizations, who have leaders as their closest subordinate co-workers do not answer that they have the same difficulties in motivating them to develop. However, in both cases and at all levels of the organizations, the methods and procedures for working with dialogues are described similarly.

### *8.1.5 Lean Production-related activities*

A pattern in the leaders' responses is that the companies' production systems are related to learning and development in different ways. The leaders in both cases explain that they work in accordance with Lean Production as an overarching philosophy. The idea of development and learning in Lean Production is described by the leaders as creating possibilities for continuous improvements in the daily work that later on will accumulate into larger changes for the entire organization.

The goal now when we've started working with these Lean Production principles is to have a development in the groups, so that if you make an improvement you will get more capacity left over, which then can be used to make further improvements and so on. This will create a positive spiral and hopefully it will continue growing so that we can use the capacity in relation to the production. (AlphaCo2)

In connection with this, the leaders explain that the commitment of the co-workers is important in order for the new ideas to work in practice; both in terms of implementing the Lean Production mindset in the organization, but also to work with how to integrate the solutions with the local prerequisites. According to the leaders, this will lead to development for the individual co-worker as well. One of the leaders argues that they have to help the co-workers realize their possibilities to influence both their own development and the improvements for the entire organization.

Then you get into to the question of how to get the co-workers more participative, how to get a greater power in the organization, and how we get the individual co-worker in the production department to influence changes and contribute to improvements in the ongoing Kaizen and Lean work. (AlphaCo5)

When the leaders speak of Lean Production, it is evident that BetaInc has worked with these principles longer than AlphaCo. The leaders at BetaInc frequently speak of their production system and when it comes to learning and development activities they especially highlight the importance of so-called improvement groups. The improvement groups get thirty minutes every week and usually they meet when the production pace is slower. The meetings take place by specific whiteboards close to their work spaces. The groups are responsible for identifying, documenting and working with the improvements that are discussed. According to the leaders they are not supposed to take charge of the process.

In general, the leaders at BetaInc agree that the purpose of improvement groups is to take care of the co-workers suggestions so that they can be beneficial to other parts of the organization as well. Furthermore, the leaders explain that improvement work is also a way of letting the co-workers get an outlet for their creativity and developmental needs. The leaders argue that many work tasks, such as painting, assembling or welding, hold limited learning and development potential. The improvement groups on the other hand offer possibilities to develop and to influence the work.

Well, we have to stimulate them with something and then we came up with the improvement groups. There was a lot of energy not being taken advantage of because everything was about learning the station as fast as possible, and even if there were plenty of good ideas, there was no space or forum to deal with them. (BetaInc7)

The leaders at BetaInc identify a number of positive effects once the improvement groups were up and running. The groups are functioning better since they have had practice in communication skills during the improvement group meetings. The improvement groups have also helped the co-workers to see the value of listening to others' experience and to getting more knowledge concerning how the entire organization functions. The leaders claim that the groups for many co-workers have sparked an interest in development and that the position of being improvement group leader offers yet another step on the internal career ladder. One leader says that being in charge of an improvement group has led to personal growth for these co-workers.

We've appointed improvement group leaders, but they are not coordinators. The general idea is that they should feel chosen and we wanted others than the coordinators, who are already so involved in everything that's going on. We wanted more people to get involved and interested and I think it will make them grow. (BetaInc18)

There are also answers in the material that indicate that the work with introducing the improvement groups was associated with some problems and difficulties. The leaders say that initially it was hard to get the co-workers on board. They argue that it all started in a grand fashion and that the company very loudly beat the drum for the concept. But, according to the leaders, the company failed to explain to the co-workers what the purpose of the groups was and nor did all of the leaders feel sufficiently competent to teach the concept to them.

And then they started with a bang. The white boards were thrown up and there were lots of meetings and everything. And then I got out here and said "well now it's time for improvement groups, what's the first item? What do we need to improve?" And everyone just looked like question marks. They didn't get it. "What do you mean by improvements?" they said. So I tried to explain about the need to clean, sort and straighten everything out. I actually feel that we weren't prepared to initiate the groups. I mean, we knew why we should do it, but we didn't know how to get the co-workers committed. And that's what's important with the improvement groups; that everybody's in on it. (BetaInc5)

A contributing reason for the initial problems was also that the co-workers had a negative attitude to the concept of improvement groups. According to the leaders, the co-workers argued that the company was trying to get them to do assignments that were not in their job descriptions and that they were not

paid to do. As the work has progressed the attitudes have started to change to become more positive, but the leaders report that the co-workers still have difficulties in understanding why they are supposed to write everything on the whiteboard instead of just solving the problems as they arise.

Besides the improvement groups, there is another variant on the same theme called Kaizen activities, which the leaders describe as large-scale improvement activities. The leaders say that they request Kaizen activities from their production systems office concerning developmental issues that are more extensive than the things the co-workers deal with in their groups. Usually the Kaizen activities include consultants from the production system office, leaders and selected co-workers.

For about a year now, we've worked with something we call Kaizen activities, where we for five to six weeks work with a selected group in a specific area to solve a specific problem. In general we follow an agenda that comes from Toyota, first you find out the background to the problem and then you collect all the business ratios and the capacities. Then you make an analysis and start implementing the changes. It's pretty logical actually. (BetaInc10)

The observation study included a number of Lean Production-related activities. In one case a leader approaches an improvement group in session.

We approach a gathering of co-workers who are conducting an improvement group meeting out in the production. The group is led by a co-worker and they are discussing how to create more room in a production section, to make it easier and safer to direct the forklift traffic. When we arrive the co-workers immediately look at the leader for guidance and someone starts summarizing their discussions. The leader only says that it is good that they are using the time for meetings and does not comment on their problem. One co-worker shows a drawing of the new layout. The leader looks at it and asks a couple of control questions. Then the co-workers respond by showering the leader with questions, but he says that they instead should discuss them in the group. Then the leader leaves the group to continue their work. Fifteen minutes later, he returns to see how they are doing. They have realized that they need to contact the leader of the adjacent production space to ask if they can move an iron fence a couple of inches. The leader does not look convinced that this is such a great idea, but does not say anything. (Field notes)

As we have seen, the Lean Production activities that concern learning and development are more common at BetaInc than AlphaCo. BetaInc has

implemented many of the methods that are associated with Lean Production, while AlphaCo is still in the starting phase. At AlphaCo they have so far sent co-workers on courses in Lean Production, which have been combined with workshops at the company, but they have not implemented improvement groups that resemble those at BetaInc. Furthermore, there are differences between organizational levels when it comes to working with learning from a Lean Production perspective. The improvement groups are mainly something that the co-workers engage in, while the leaders work with the more long-term Kaizen activities.

## 8.2 Partially planned leader activities

The partially planned activities described by the leaders consist of two main types; changes made to either the tasks or position of the co-workers and activities that centre around learning from each other. These activities are partially planned in the sense that they are loosely connected to the companies' systems for development and since they affect formal structures in terms of positions and work descriptions. However, they are also more connected to the daily work than the previously described planned activities.

### *8.2.1 Changes in tasks or positions*

The first category of partially planned leader activities that are used to influence the learning and development of the co-workers is related to their work position or assignments. The leaders say that they attempt to make changes within the current position in terms of increasing responsibility, adding assignments, organizing job-rotation and creating roles in the groups. In addition, they encourage some co-workers to try new positions.

A common way of making changes to the co-workers' work situation in order to initiate development is to give the person concerned increased responsibility. The leaders argue that with responsibility comes development and learning. The production leaders say that they identify co-workers who have leadership potential and appoint them to become group coordinators. In this way they get to try on a leadership of their own. These coordinators become the people that the co-workers can approach with their questions about the daily work. The leaders consider becoming a coordinator as a first step towards a formal leadership position in the organization.

And for those who are coordinators or have an ambition to become one, I think it's an excellent training if you want to move on later and become a production leader trainee. They get to practice their leadership skills and

deal with some smaller conflicts, not the big parts, but I think they learn a lot by it. (BetaInc14)

Other ways of delegating more responsibility is to send the co-workers to meetings as a representative of the department or to let them function as a stand-in when the leader is indisposed. The leaders also say that they involve the co-workers in various project groups that work with changes in the organizations. According to the leaders it is important to get the co-workers to participate, since this helps to create a positive attitude towards the changes amongst the others in the department. Furthermore, it also leads to the co-worker learning more about the organization.

The leaders explain that sometimes they try to change or add to the assignments within the co-workers current position. They argue that this is done both to create possibilities for learning for the co-worker, but also to relieve the pressure on the leader or other co-workers.

My plan is for him to take over the automation part so that I can take a step back. He's positive about testing, but unsure if he'll like it. But the plan is for him to try it out and then we'll see if it fits. (AlphaCo10)

Other activities that the leaders often refer to are various forms of job rotation within and between departments. This is most commonly mentioned by the production leaders who describe how they lend and borrow co-workers between the work groups and different sections of the departments, in order to help out where there is trouble and to get an even distribution in the work flow. The job rotation is organized and coordinated by the leaders who have the information on how the other sections are doing. They argue that there is a potential for learning and development for the co-workers to work in new constellations and to try out new assignment. According to the leaders at AlphaCo, the co-workers found it difficult when they started with job rotation. But now they have gotten used to it and even find it rather exciting. However, some individuals have asked not to be included in the rotation, which the leaders have accepted. Variants of job rotation exist at other departments in the organizations as well, but do not occur as often as in the production departments.

Job rotation is also described as a way for the leader to make the co-workers understand how the different processes of the department and the whole organization fit together. A leader gives an example of a co-worker in a night shift who had to be moved to the day shift to understand what problems he caused every time he had messed up.



## *Chapter 8 – Doing leadership for learning and development*

Well, there is one guy with whom we've had big quality problems for a long time, at least for a year. He works really fast, but makes a lot of mistakes. I've talked with him and tried to show him all the faults, but even if he saw it he quickly seemed to forget. So then I transferred him to the day shift instead where he had to be the one who corrects all the faults coming from the night shift. When he corrected his own mess, then the penny finally dropped. (AlphaCo8)

The leaders argue that the positive effects of work rotation in relation to the department are primarily to get an even balance in the work flow. Other positive effects that are described concern the possibilities for the co-workers to learn without having to go away on a course.

When I have PD dialogues it's not just about taking an Excel course or AutoCAD, it could be other things, like work in an assembly line for a couple of shifts or do something like that. So learning is not just going away on a course, but most people think so. (BetaInc16)

However, there are also answers that indicate that there may be a negative side to job rotation. One of the leaders argues that the internal mobility is good, but only up to a certain point. According to him, it should not go as far as inhibiting the developmental work in the ordinary work group, which happens when co-workers are borrowed for a long time. Then there are not enough co-workers left for development issues when the production pace slows down.

Besides job rotation, the leaders speak of other ways of working with the development and learning of the co-workers. They say that they have tried to establish different roles in the work groups, which vary in popularity. In this way a kind of internal career ladder is created.

Furthermore, the leaders explain that there are possibilities to apply for positions in other departments of the company. The leaders argue that they of course do not wish to lose a competent co-worker, but that they want to encourage them to move on. There is always someone else waiting to take their place. There is also a kind of mobility described in relation to co-workers who are urged to step aside when things are not working out. According to one of the leaders this is a difficult thing to do without breaking the co-worker's spirit.

And that's also an important part of leadership, to tell someone to step down, but doing it in a way that makes them feel it could be a good move to do something else. I mean, such a thing could easily break someone's spirit. (AlphaCo6)

An example of how the leader uses changes in positions to influence the development of the co-workers comes from the observation study. The situation occurred during a discussion between a leader and his co-worker concerning the latter's possibilities to become a coordinator for the shift.

During the day, the leader has explained that there are attitude and communication problems between the shifts in his department and that he is pondering what to do about it. He says that he could really use a new coordinator, but that he is not sure if the one he has in mind is interested. The co-worker in question is new in the department and the leader does not yet know if he fits in with the others. But he has already shown great potential and leadership ambitions that would be greatly needed in the department. In the afternoon, the leader finds time to have an informal talk with the co-worker about becoming a coordinator. The leader explains what he expects from someone in this position and says that he believes that the co-worker would be the man for the job. He points to this being a great development and career opportunity. The co-worker is interested in taking on the responsibility, but needs more time to think about it. The leader says that there is no rush with the decision. (Field notes)

In conclusion, there are some differences between the organizations when it comes to issues such as rotation and mobility. The leaders report similar activities, but the leaders at BetaInc have more possibilities since their company is so much larger. In addition, it appears to be more common with mobility in the production departments than in the departments with office workers. For these co-workers it is more common to be delegated more responsibility.

### *8.2.2 Learning from each other*

The second category of the partially planned leader activities is concerned with learning from each other in the companies. Here there are many different variations on the same theme. The work groups teach the newcomers and there are various group activities for the exchange of experience.

At BetaInc, many of the leaders speak of the training of new co-workers, which is led by the more experienced co-workers in the groups. This is by some leaders referred to as Learning Organization, which is the name of a previous project for learning and development that was initiated in cooperation with a consultant firm several years ago. One of the leaders compares this to a kind of sponsorship and argues that it both leads to a steep

learning curve for the new co-worker and development for the experienced mentor who has to take on the role as teacher.

We have a learning organization so when we get a new welder we set him up with a tutor. The tutor shows the new guy the social stuff but also how to read blueprints and do the basic welding. The tutor instructs and then the new guy gets to practice, that's what it's all about. (BetaInc9)

At AlphaCo there are no reports of similar projects, but there are other initiatives where the experience of older and newer co-workers is exchanged. One leader explains that he uses a kind of group assignment when new products are introduced in the regular production. He then divides the co-workers in different teams who work together with the aim of producing guidelines for how to build the product.

And then I divide them into groups of four and they start building different articles, and then there are lots of things in the design that they didn't know about. So many things pop up, so every time someone stands up and says that it's amazing, we sit so close to each other but still there are so many differences between the jobs. (AlphaCo7)

Another way of taking advantage of the different skills and experience in the department is to couple co-workers with each other. The leaders argue that these kinds of activity could prove to be developing for both parties, since they can entail having to deal with someone who sees things from different perspectives. One leader describes how he tries to get an experienced co-worker to share his knowledge with the other co-workers.

I can understand that he's not so interested and hungry anymore, I mean spending a lot of time on courses when you're sixty years old, when you feel content with what you already know. But I would like to get information from him. I want him to share his knowledge instead. (AlphaCo10)

According to the leaders, there are also meetings where reflection is on the agenda, rather than the usual production reports and number crunching. These types of meetings are not common in any of the cases, but are sometimes used by leaders who either want to get to know the opinions of the co-workers or when there is a specific issue that requires new ways of thinking. The leaders explain that the meetings are oriented towards sharing experience rather than finding solutions to problems.

The last way of learning from each other consists of a semi-structured sharing of knowledge gained from participating in planned activities, such as formal competence development. One leader says that after having sent a co-worker on a course he demands internal training sessions for the rest of the department.

And if I see something, like for instance I've sent a guy on a course that's relevant for all of us. And when he gets back I will have him give an internal training session for the rest of us. (AlphaCo10)

During the observation study a situation occurred where the leader arranged a possibility for the co-workers to learn from each other.

Today it has been discovered that a large number of forklifts have production deficiencies and need to be adjusted. Therefore it has been decided that a shift will work with this during the weekend. After lunch, the leader stops to talk with a coordinator who has been trying to find co-workers who are willing to work the weekend shift. He tells the leader that so far he has found a coordinator from another section and two assemblers. The leader says that it would be good for this coordinator to get a grip on what needs to be done. The leader decides that he should spend the last hours of the work day with another co-worker who can show him the ropes. About half an hour later, the leader comes across the co-worker and the coordinator who are now working together on one of the forklifts, preparing it for the adjustment. The co-worker is explaining how the procedure is done and what the coordinator needs to take into consideration. The leader talks to both of them and encourage the co-worker to be thorough and the coordinator to learn as much as possible. (Field notes)

In conclusion, these activities are mainly described by leaders at lower levels, who strive to share the collective competence in order to avoid becoming vulnerable to sudden mobility or health problems. The leaders at higher levels are more concerned with sharing values and creating common management principles than with evenly distributing specific competence among the co-workers.

### 8.3 Spontaneous leader activities

Concerning spontaneous leader activities, there are two categories discernable in the material. The first consists of the learning that occurs in relation to problem solving in daily work. The second consists of improvised

educational interventions. They are spontaneous in the sense that they are not planned beforehand or connected to a formal system.

### *8.3.1 Problem solving in the daily work*

As we have seen in earlier chapters, a great deal of the leaders' daily work situation is characterised by problem solving. According to the leaders, a contributing reason for this state is that the co-workers often unload their problems on the leader, instead of coming up with solutions on their own.

I mean you will have to face the problem anyway, and sometimes I wonder why they don't ask themselves "Why does this problem occur week after week?" But instead of coming up with a suggestion, they take the problem to me. (AlphaCo3)

When the leaders describe the problem solving process in the daily work, they contend that the co-workers sometimes get stuck in ways of thinking where they become victims of circumstances. They identify problems which are dependent on factors which they do not believe it is possible to influence. According to the leaders, this often results in co-workers who end up doing nothing. To avoid getting stuck with the co-workers' problems, the leaders explain that they work with trying to help them structure the problem solving process so that the same problem will not occur time and time again. At BetaInc, the leaders explain that upon facing a problem they should ask the question 'why' five times, which is a problem solving technique from Toyota. According to the leaders, the purpose of this method is to penetrate deeper behind the problem to find its original cause. One leader exemplifies the method with a conversation about a machine that is not running.

So then you ask "Why's the machine not operating?" and the answer is "because there's a broken part". The next question is "Why's it broken?" which could be answered with "because we didn't realize that it could cause such a problem". "Why didn't you know about it?" "Because we didn't have enough competence when we bought it" "Why didn't we have enough competence?" "Because we put the wrong individuals in the project" "Why did we put them in the project?" "Because the one in charge didn't know enough about the competence of the co-workers". (BetaInc15)

The leaders also hope that letting the co-workers deal with their own problems will help them reflect at a higher level. And if they still do not have the self-confidence or competence to solve the problem, the leaders argue

that it is better to cooperate than to take over the problem. One leader at AlphaCo exemplifies with a situation where cooperation worked out well and empowered the co-worker to deal with similar situations on his own.

I started checking the stock level on some finished articles and found that they were pretty high and at first I was going to keep checking them myself, but then I thought that I could do it together with him. It turned out really well and he had a lot of good ideas and thoughts. If I had done it myself it would have been a more theoretical approach, but he had ideas more based on his knowledge of the article. Now he came with a suggestion and then I asked him to explain how he was thinking. Then I could ask if he had thought of factors such as the time it takes to purchase the material needed for making the product and he admitted that he hadn't. So we put both our minds together and came up with really good solutions and I think he liked it. He said that this was not so hard after all; "I can do this if I just want to". (AlphaCo3)

Other activities that are related to the co-workers' problem solving are aimed at helping them prioritize which problem is best to start with. The leaders argue that it is often better to attack the smaller problems that are relatively easy to solve instead of getting stuck with a larger and very time consuming problem.

Usually the big problems demand big solutions and this often leads to a huge mammoth project that no one wants to take on. So then I say, screw it and begin with the simplest project that is easiest to complete, because then we can do a couple of those to get a positive spiral and actually notice the effects of our work. (AlphaCo2)

In the observation study a number of situations occurred where the leader and the co-workers engaged in problem solving activities. An example comes from a situation where the co-workers discovered a faulty component.

While the leader is in his office one of the co-workers comes in with a component that is faulty. He and the leader discuss what to do and it is decided that it will have to be returned to the supplier. The co-worker leaves to check if there are other components from the same shipment with the same problem. When he comes back he explains that there is a possibility that faulty components have been sent to the Central European factory. The leader realizes that they need to notify them of the problem and gives this responsibility to another co-worker who has also come in to the office. She does not seem to appreciate this task and says that she is terrible at writing in English and that it would be much better if the leader

wrote the e-mail instead. The leader does not budge and says it's better if she can do this on her own. He explains that it does not have to be perfect English as long as they understand the problem and know what to do about it. (Field notes)

The problem solving activities are described similarly in both cases. One difference is that the leaders at BetaInc refer to the Toyota technique that structures the process a bit more than in AlphaCo. The activities aim at initializing new and innovative ways of thinking. There are no apparent differences between different levels in the organizations.

### *8.3.2 Improvised educational interventions*

The second category of spontaneous leader activities concerns situations where the leaders report that they need to educate the co-workers in the daily work. This category is mainly referred to by the leaders at BetaInc, who report having undergone radical changes when implementing the Lean Production principles in the organization. The leaders at BetaInc explain that they at times have been forced to gather the work groups or individual co-workers to explain how they are supposed to work. They argue that they felt the need to deal with the problems immediately and could not wait for a formal educational intervention.

Exactly, and then you end up with a group of people out there, discussing and explaining what you want to work with and how we should move on. (BetaInc18)

The leaders at BetaInc say that a prerequisite for them to be able to act as a teacher in relation to the daily work processes is that they are present in the department and have the time to engage in discussions when they arise. One of the leaders explains that he in periods has spent many hours in the work groups talking about the new Lean Production principles.

So basically for the following six months I almost spent all my time in the shop, talking about the new concepts. And when there were questions or ideas I dealt with it right away, on the spot, instead of waiting for a weekly meeting. I tried to explain pedagogically and I took the discussion when someone said “what do we need this damn Kanban for?” (BetaInc18)

According to the leaders, these spontaneous educational interventions are intended to disseminate their knowledge amongst the co-workers. They teach one co-worker, who then in turn will teach others in the department. One

leader gives an example of a situation where he taught a procedure to a co-worker, hoping that this would help disseminate the knowledge.

Now he is out there in the department and sometime when one of the others wants him to report an error he can say “come with me and I’ll show you how to do it yourself”. So he passes on what I taught him. (BetaInc9)

Another example of improvised educational interventions in the daily work when the leaders take a couple of co-workers along to see with their own eyes how other departments are working, so that they will better understand the consequences of their work.

During the observation study a number of improvised educational interventions were evident. One example comes from a project meeting on the introduction of a new assembly line where a leader educates the other participants.

After lunch it is time for a new meeting and we arrive a few minutes late to the conference room. Two of the meeting participants have started to present a new layout for an assembly line. An image of the layout is projected on a screen and they describe the schematics in detail. The leader initially sits quietly and listens, but as the meeting progresses he becomes more involved. It is evident that he identifies a lot of problems with the suggested solution, which the project participants do not seem to have foreseen. After a while the leader comes with the suggestion that they should all go out in the factory to have a look at the place for the new layout. When we arrive at the future production area the leader starts pointing out the problems that he had talked about in the conference room whereupon the others gather round him to listen and ask questions. He explains some basic production principles that are necessary to consider in the layout and gives a couple of examples of possible pitfalls to look out for. He concludes that the suggested layout is not bad and that the work done in the project group can surely be put to use, but that they need to make some crucial adjustments or maybe find another location. (Field notes)

In conclusion, the improvised educational interventions are mainly described by leaders in BetaInc. These interventions are also more commonly referred to by leaders at lower levels of the organization.



## 8.4 Concluding remarks

To summarize, the activities that can be characterized as planned are connected to official systems for development in the companies. The competence development possibilities, in terms of shorter courses, long-term programmes and benchmarking activities, have a high degree of formalization. Other planned activities include dialogues between the leader and co-worker. They are perceived as important, since they offer designated time to talk about development issues, which are seldom a part of the daily discussions. However, it is evident that there are also a lot of difficulties and problems connected with them. The planned activities also include Lean Production-related actions. These activities offer unique potential for development of the daily work. Here we can also see a lot of difficulties and a risk that these interventions do not have the indented impact on development in the organization.

The leaders' repertoires also include partially planned activities. These are less formal, but still decided on beforehand and connected to HR related structures, such as employment contracts, work descriptions and systems for learning and development. Activities concerning changes in tasks or positions come in many different forms. The most common methods include new assignments or increased responsibility. Becoming a coordinator is described as an important stepping stone for development, and part of an internal career structure in the departments at BetaInc. The activities categorized as learning from each other imply that the leader tries to create possibilities for sharing knowledge between co-workers. This is mainly accomplished by paring co-workers with different skills together, or by arranging meetings that aim to reflect on the daily work practice.

The spontaneous activities are not easily described. They can be characterized by impromptu actions in connection with the daily work that the leaders have not previously planned, or sometimes even reflected on beforehand. The first category of these activities centres around problem solving processes in the companies, where the leader works together with the co-workers in order for them to learn from the problem at hand and to find solutions on their own, instead of just expecting the leader to take over. The second category involves improvised educational interventions, where the leaders engage in teaching activities to explain certain procedures and to get the co-workers to reflect on their daily work. The spontaneous activities occur frequently in the daily work, but are not always recognized as being a source of learning and development for the co-workers.

*Chapter 8 – Doing leadership for learning and development*

## 9 Discussion

In the previous chapters, results have been presented concerning the leaders' work situation, their notions of learning and development and the activities they engage in to facilitate learning at work. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the relation between leadership and learning, these findings are discussed in the light of the research questions and the theoretical framework of the thesis. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the implications of the study and suggestions for further research.

### 9.1 The main results of the study

The results have previously been summarized at the end of each empirical chapter, but the focus in this section is to highlight what can be seen as the main results of the study.

#### *9.1.1 Characteristics of the leaders' work and leadership*

The results concerning the work situation of the leaders show that the tempo is high and that the assignments are varied. The leaders constantly move between different spaces and interact with a large number of actors, albeit in short intervals. In total, the fragmented character of the leaders' situation makes coherent time for planning and administrative work a scarcity. This is perceived as frustrating by the leaders, who wish to avoid the 'fire fighting' and constant stream of problems landing in their laps. The leaders perceive the demands on their leadership as ambiguous in the sense that they are expected to be strategic and operative at the same time. It is clear that these patterns are similar in both cases and that they are in line with evidence from previous research within the managerial work tradition (Hales, 1986; Hultman, 1989; Mintzberg, 1973; Moqvist, 2005; Tengblad, 2002).

When the leaders speak of their leadership, the main focus in the responses concerns various maintenance activities related to the sustainment of both the work processes and the personnel in the department. In addition, the results point to a developmental dimension, which is also connected to production-related and personnel-related issues. By separating sustainment and change in relation to both production and employees, this distinction slightly differs from previous models where production-, employee- and change-centred leadership are conceptualized as three separate factors (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991).

### *9.1.2 Perceptions of the role as a facilitator of learning*

When the leaders describe how they approach situations where the co-workers' learning and development are in focus, three main roles – or sets of behaviours – are discernable in the empirical material; the supporter, the educator and the confronter. The supporter creates a safe environment for learning by focusing on encouragement and comfort. The educator facilitates the co-workers' learning by instructions or by initiating reflection on the daily work. The confronter takes a tougher approach by setting boundaries and by compelling the co-workers to learn. These roles are evident in the entire empirical material, regardless of company or hierarchical level. Furthermore, they can also be seen as complementary in the sense that it is possible for the leaders to combine or alternate between the roles depending on type of activity and on surrounding factors that enable or constrain the learning-oriented leadership.

Moreover, the results also show that the leaders consider learning and development to be important issues and that they describe them in positive terms. The leaders emphasize their responsibility in relation to the co-workers' learning, but also acknowledge a responsibility borne by the HR department and by the co-workers. However, a difference between the two cases is that the responsibility of the co-workers is accentuated more in BetaInc. Furthermore, the leaders mainly relate the concept of learning to formal competence development and see it as something that occurs apart from the daily production. In addition, but to a lesser extent, there are also responses indicating that learning is viewed as a constantly ongoing process that is embedded in the daily work (cf. Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

### *9.1.3 Activities used to facilitate learning*

The activities that the leaders have described using to facilitate learning and development have been categorized depending on their degree of formalization.<sup>16</sup> There is evidence of planned activities, such as formal competence development, different types of dialogues and activities that are connected to Lean Production principles. The results also show that the leaders use partially planned activities, with a lower degree of formalization. These activities include making changes to position or tasks and arranging situations where the co-workers may learn from each other. Finally, there are spontaneous activities with a low degree of formalization but a close connection with the daily work. These activities include the everyday

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<sup>16</sup> This categorization can be compared to the separation of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities at the workplace (Eraut, 2000; Kock, 2002).

problem-solving and the improvised educational interventions. Of these activities, the planned activities are those mostly referred to by the leaders. Furthermore, there are also differences between the two cases in terms of the Lean Production activities being more developed at BetaInc than at AlphaCo. In addition, the improvised educational interventions are also more commonly referred to by leaders at BetaInc.

#### *9.1.4 Enabling and constraining factors*

As we have seen in the empirical chapters, the learning-oriented leadership is dependent on a number of surrounding conditions. Some of the most significant of these conditions include: collective notions of learning in the organizations, change pressure, organizational structures, attitudes and motivation of the co-workers, complexity in co-workers' tasks and the competence of the leaders.

Regarding collective notions of learning in the organizations and the presence of these issues on the agenda, there is little doubt that learning has been given attention in the two cases. However, it is also evident that the companies have chosen strategies for learning that are connected with formal activities (cf. Cunningham, 2004), which appear to be time consuming and questionable from the point of view of effectiveness. And even if learning is on the organizational agenda, it is rarely prioritized higher than achieving the production goals.

Another factor that conditions the leaders' possibilities to facilitate learning is the change pressure from the external context. The demands from the customers and the competitors on the market have influenced the companies' decisions to adopt Lean Production principles, which may be seen as having had an enabling effect on the conditions for learning-oriented leadership. For instance, the implementation of the new ideas has provided learning opportunities for the co-workers in terms of dealing with innovative ways of organizing their work. In addition, Lean Production has also brought with it methods such as Kaizen activities and improvement groups, which the leaders have used to facilitate learning. However, the change pressure and fierce competition has also led to increased demands for efficiency in the business operations. There is no 'slack' and every minute counts towards reaching the daily and weekly goals, which leaves limited time to reflect on the work process and the informal learning.

As we have seen, some of the activities are also influenced by the structure of the organizations. For instance, an important structural factor that inhibits the possibilities to work with learning and development are the large spans of control in the production departments in both of the companies (cf.

Ellström & Kock, 2003; Hales, 2005). For leaders with many co-workers it is difficult to show individual consideration of the co-workers' need for development. On the other hand, there are also examples of structural factors that enable learning. For instance, the group-based organizations create possibilities to arrange activities that take advantage of the different experiences and skills of the co-workers.

A recurring factor in the empirical material is the co-workers' views on learning and their willingness to partake in learning activities. The leaders' categorize the co-workers depending on these aspects. In line with Baumgarten (2006), there is a variation in interest among the co-workers from those who are very interested to those who are totally uninterested. For the leaders to facilitate the co-workers' learning it then becomes a matter of encouraging the less motivated to engage in learning activities.

For most of the co-workers in the production departments, the development potential in the work tasks can be seen as limited. Building cables or assembling trucks consist of similar, repetitive elements regardless of the product's complexity. In a way, the standardization thus constrains the possibilities for development. However, the leaders argue that many of the tasks are too limited to begin with in order to offer a sufficient basis for development; hence the need for activities such as improvement groups that are aimed at preventing waste of the co-workers' creativity (Adler & Cole, 1993; Liker, 2004).

Finally, the results also indicate that the leaders' own competence may be interpreted as a condition for the facilitation of learning (Caroll & Gillen, 2002; Poell et al. 2006). In other words, the leaders' knowledge of learning and development processes affects their repertoire of actions. Moreover, the results also indicate that the leaders report a need for development in relation to HR issues. The educational level of the leaders is mainly upper secondary school and does not include HR-related subjects to any greater extent.

## 9.2 The leaders as intelligent improvisers in everyday work

How then can we interpret the patterns of the leaders' work in relation to their notions of leadership? As we have seen, the work situation is perceived as somewhat frustrating. An interpretation is that this stems from tension between notions of what leadership is and the actual practice of leadership. In comparison with previous studies of managerial work, this tension is well documented (cf. Carlson, 1951; Milsta, 1994). When confronted with the realities of the daily work, discrepancies arise between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996). The notion of

leadership as a proactive and planned process clashes with the constant ‘fire fighting’, and this causes the leaders to feel frustrated and unsuccessful. Previous studies have shown how these reactive sides of leadership are often given negative connotations, e.g. ‘bad micro-management’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a).

Similarly, in relation to working with the learning and development of the co-workers, the focus is on the planned activities. However, in line with Kotter (1982, 1999) and Tyrstrup (2006), we also see that the leaders use different activities of a more spontaneous character to facilitate learning. In other words, they opportunistically make use of the problems that arise in the daily work to create possibilities for learning (cf. Södergren, 1996). An interpretation is thus that the leaders are not ‘puppets on a string’ who merely react to the struggles, but rather that their leadership, albeit not proactive and planned, may also be seen as comprising intelligent improvisations made to facilitate learning (Hultman, 2001a).

In comparison to results from previous studies it is difficult to find patterns that are similar to the three types of activity in the empirical material. A possible explanation for this is that studies within the effective and critical traditions have not had any focus on the leaders’ work practice, while previous studies of managerial work have not separated ‘what the leaders do’ from ‘how they do it’ (cf. Amy, 2006; Beattie, 2006; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999). The closest we come to a similar categorization is Eraut et al. (1999) who differs between activities that are related to organizational policies, such as courses, apprenticeships and appraisal systems, and activities that are dependent on the leaders’ informal influence on the learning environment. In line with Eraut et al. (1999), an interpretation is that it is important to direct attention to the more informal activities, instead of relying on formal systems that are not always sufficient and that build on an instrumental outlook on learning. In addition, some aspects of Beattie’s (2006) and Ellinger & Bostrom’s (1999) research can be compared to AlphaCo and BetaInc. For instance, both mention the importance of various types of assessments and there is evidence of leadership that aims at creating possibilities for the co-workers to learn from each other. However, the studies do not include descriptions of what this implies in leadership practice.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that the activities used to facilitate the co-workers’ learning and reflection are in fact quite common and familiar (cf. Hughes, 2004; Viitala, 2004). They are not extraordinary interventions performed to achieve development, as one might think when looking at the more normative models for effective leadership advocated by scholars such as Bass (1985, 1998) and (Manz & Sims, 1991).

### 9.3 The three roles of learning-oriented leadership

Let us then take a closer look at the previously presented roles, i.e. supporter, educator and confronter, in the light of previous leadership research. Considering the supporter role, it is possible to see similar patterns in studies within the managerial work tradition and the effective leadership tradition.<sup>17</sup> In several studies there are descriptions of leadership that is oriented towards caring, supporting and being there for the co-workers (Amy, 2006; Beattie, 2006; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999). Furthermore, the importance of the leader for creating a secure environment where mistakes are okay is also highlighted (Eraut, 1999; Viitala, 2004). In addition, inspirational motivation is an important part of transformational leadership, while encouragement and positive thinking are accentuated in relation to becoming a so-called SuperLeader (Bass, 1985; Manz & Sims, 1991).

The second role, the educator, is also found in previous studies but in somewhat different forms. For instance, there are descriptions of the leader trying to clarify and simplify the problems for the co-workers, but also that they try to widen the perspectives of the co-workers in order for them to see their work in a different way (Beattie, 2006; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999). Furthermore, Ellinger & Bostrom (1999) include that the leaders sometimes hold back the answers in order to get the co-workers to think for themselves. The educator role can also be linked to notions of the leader trying to stimulate reflection and prospective thinking with the aim of reshaping the co-workers' understanding of their work (Beattie, 2006; Sandberg & Targamaa, 2007; Senge, 1990).

The third role, the confronter, is the one that stands out in comparison to previous research. For the confronter the focus is not on the softer leadership associated with the supporter and the educator. In previous research this dimension is not mentioned to any great extent in relation to learning and development. With the exception of Beattie's (2006) description of 'standard setting' and Manz & Sims' (1991) discussion of constructive reprimands, this kind of leadership is typically associated with being less favourable for learning (cf. Amy, 2006). However, the leaders in the two cases do not seem to view this role as less important in comparison to acting in a supportive and educative way. In line with Vera & Crossan's (2004) discussion on transactional leadership, an interpretation of the empirical material could be that a more confronting leadership need not be seen as innately negative in

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<sup>17</sup> However, it is also worth noting that it is not unproblematic to make comparisons since the leader roles or behavioural sets found in the studies are not consistent.



relation to the co-workers' learning and development. Sometimes learning and development may be initiated by setting boundaries and being demanding.

## 9.4 Leaders as facilitators of learning: two perspectives

So far the roles and activities of the leaders have been discussed in relation to previous leadership research. However, we have not yet looked at the connections between the leaders' notions, their activities and the influencing conditions on the one hand, and type of learning on the other.<sup>18</sup> Based on the distinction between the logic of performance and the logic of development (Ellström, 2006) and the ideal typical orientations of leadership that were presented in chapter 3 (cf. Bass, 1985, 1998; March & Weil, 2005, Scherp, 2008), it is possible to distinguish two patterns of practice concerning the facilitation of learning. In this section, these patterns are elaborated as two perspectives on learning-oriented leadership.

### *9.4.1 A performance-oriented leadership*

The first pattern is labelled performance-oriented leadership and comprises a view of learning as connected with formal education and as a means for reaching the production goals. The question is how to improve the co-workers' performance by building on their existing knowledge. All of the three leader roles are used, but they are mainly oriented towards keeping things running as smoothly as possible. With a focus on performance the leaders act supportively and make the effort to create a trusting relationship and a relaxed atmosphere where the co-workers feel safe to discuss their problems or their uncertainties regarding opportunities for learning (cf. Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Ellström, 2006; Eraut et al., 1999). They also act as educators by instructing the co-workers on the right ways to think or act, and by explaining why the co-workers' learning is essential for the performance of the company. The confronter on the other hand uses authority to straighten out the co-workers that for various reasons are not in synch with the others. For instance they confront reluctant co-workers who have not responded to the supportive or educative role.

Regarding the activities used, the main focus is on the standardized and planned activities, with some elements of the partially planned activities.

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that I do not try to establish whether the leadership has led to adaptive or developmental learning, since such claims would require data on the learning outcomes of the co-workers.

Concerning formal education, the main interest of the performance-oriented leader is to keep the co-workers' competence up to date, while avoiding paying for courses that are not relevant for the department. The dialogues focus on the current situation in terms of social chitchat and attempt to establish what competence the co-workers need to improve their regular jobs. Furthermore, increased salary is used as a contingent reward (Bass, 1985, 1998) to ensure that the co-workers move in the right direction. When it comes to the Lean Production-related activities, it is possible to interpret the desire to quickly implement and reach consensus about the use of improvement groups as a focus on performance. Similarly, there is also evidence suggesting that the partially planned activities may be used to facilitate adaptive learning. For the co-workers, job-rotation implies opportunities to widen the horizons and to temporarily work in other sections. However, the work is usually similar to their ordinary tasks. The spontaneous activities on the other hand are mainly seen as annoying disturbances instead of opportunities for learning. The leaders support the co-workers to manage problems on their own, but this is mainly a way to free time for working with other issues, such as administrative tasks and strategic planning. It is more important to make the problems vanish than to reflect on their causes.

#### *9.4.2 A development-oriented leadership*

The second and somewhat less pronounced pattern relates to a broader view of learning. In addition to courses and other types of formal education, the learning that occurs in the daily work is also accentuated by the leaders. In order to facilitate developmental learning, the leader aims to expand the current knowledge of the co-workers by contributing new perspectives. Similar to performance-oriented leadership, development-oriented leadership also make use of the three roles. In relation to development the supporter encourages the co-workers to explore new possibilities and cheers them on if they experiment with innovative ways of working. The leader also supports the co-workers' attempts to find logical discrepancies in the new principles and to try out new and innovative ideas that deviate from the prescriptions. When it comes to the educator, the focus is instead on challenging the co-workers by asking the tricky questions needed to stimulate the learning process and to initiate reflection (cf. Dewey, 1933/1998; Engeström, 1994). The educator trains the co-workers in meta-reflection and reshapes their views of the work processes (Sandberg & Targama, 2007). Similarly, the confronter also challenges the co-workers, but by using a tougher approach. The confronter forces the co-workers out of their comfort zones and makes it

clear that they are responsible for their own problems and does not allow them to pawn these problems off on somebody else.

Concerning the activities, the emphasis is on the partially planned and spontaneous activities in daily work. As an example, for a co-worker to get new assignments or to take on a new position, where his or her previous competence may not be sufficient, developmental learning becomes central. To prevent the co-workers from merely incorporating the knowledge in existing modes of thinking, the leader influences the co-worker to think in new ways. Similarly, by pairing co-workers in new constellations opportunities are created for exposure to alternative perspectives. Instead of assimilating the newcomer to the prevailing order of things, learning from each other implies using the outsider's perspective and curious questions to find new ways of understanding the practice. If we instead look at the daily problem solving processes in relation to developmental learning, the focus is on creating possibilities for critical reflection. The aim is for the co-workers to question the nature of the problem and to try to find out what causes it, instead of putting the fire out for the moment. Similarly, the improvised educational interventions may facilitate developmental learning by focusing on critical reflection on the daily work process and especially in relation to new procedures and principles that have recently been introduced in the companies. In addition, the planned activities may also be relevant for developmental learning. For instance, the trainee programme at BetaInc offers an opportunity for those selected to radically develop their competence and to climb the career ladder. The dialogues may also be used to engage the co-workers in reflection concerning ways of reaching new knowledge and the Lean Production-related activities may create possibilities for the co-workers to question their practice. Similarly, courses may also provide totally new perspectives for the co-workers to use in their everyday work.

#### *9.4.3 A predominant performance-orientation, with elements of development*

The two leadership orientations previously discussed can be summarized in terms of the leaders' views of learning, their roles, and their activities (see table 5 below). A performance-orientation may be assumed to create possibilities for learning that is mainly adaptive in character, while a development-oriented leadership instead may be assumed to facilitate developmental learning.

Table 5: Two complementary perspectives of learning-oriented leadership

	Performance-oriented leadership	Development-oriented leadership
<i>View of learning</i>	Planned and organized – connected with formal education	Informal and continuous – connected with everyday actions
<i>Roles</i> - Supporter - Educator - Confronter	<i>Emphasis on:</i> • Care and comfort • Instructions • Setting boundaries	<i>Emphasis on:</i> • Encouragement • Critical reflection • Provocation
<i>Activities</i>	<i>Emphasis on:</i> Planned activities with elements of partially planned activities	<i>Emphasis on :</i> Partially planned activities and spontaneous activities
<i>Assumed learning outcome</i>	Adaptive learning oriented towards the mastering of procedures and routines.	Developmental learning oriented towards developing new and creative solutions.

When taken together, the results indicate that it is possible to discern learning-oriented leadership in the two cases, but that it at the same time is far from the normative notions advocated by those who seek the all-embracing and always effective models for leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998; Senge, 1990; Sims & Lorenzei, 1992). Instead, the image of leadership in the results shows a complex process of social interaction, where leader roles and activities are combined depending on the influence of surrounding conditions.

The evidence suggests that the leaders in the two cases thus can be seen as facilitators of learning, but with a main focus on performance and adaptive learning. However, none of the leaders are extreme cases in the sense that they are one-sidedly focused on performance. In reality, the orientations seem to be combined depending on the surrounding conditions. But the facilitation of critical reflection, which can be seen as an important prerequisite for developmental learning, is not very common among the leaders in either of the two cases. Instead, the leadership can be interpreted as containing traces of the development-orientation. For instance, it is possible to interpret some leaders as having a broader understanding of learning and of the importance of individual consideration regarding the development of the co-workers.

Furthermore, it is also difficult to categorize the companies in terms of these orientations. Judging solely by the official descriptions of how these issues are dealt with in the companies, it appears as if they are both very development-oriented. But when the patterns of practice of the leaders are

taken into account the balance shifts towards performance. In comparison, it might be concluded that the leaders at BetaInc exhibit more elements of development-oriented leadership than their counterparts at AlphaCo.

In conclusion, the results suggest that a performance-orientation is predominant in actual leadership practice, while development issues are still mainly located in the organizational discourse and in the leaders' notions of leadership. However, as noted above there are also elements of a development-oriented leadership in everyday work practice.

## 9.5 Different, but yet so similar

So far the two cases have mainly been presented and discussed jointly, but it has become clear that there are a number of differences and similarities that need to be further elaborated.

To begin with, an obvious contextual difference is the sizes of the companies, which is a factor that may affect possibilities for learning (cf. Berson et al., 2001). For instance, BetaInc has an elaborated system for development and mobility in terms of the trainee programme, which would be difficult for a company of AlphaCo's size to muster. Furthermore, although both of the companies have introduced Lean Production principles with a focus on eliminating waste and creating even work flows (Liker, 2004), there are differences concerning the implementation of these principles. We have seen that BetaInc's Kaizen activities and improvement groups offer a possibility for learning that is not matched with any planned equivalent at AlphaCo. The leaders at AlphaCo have instead arranged other opportunities for learning between the co-workers that are better suited for their organization. Yet another difference is that while AlphaCo has a small HR department, the equivalent at BetaInc consists of a number of HR consultants with university degrees within the field. Previous studies have identified this as a factor with an enabling effect on learning and development (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). However, there is no direct evidence that this has made significant differences concerning the conduct of a learning-oriented leadership.

In spite of the many differences between the companies, the leadership practices in the two cases resemble each other to a large extent and there are also many similarities in the views of learning and development, at both the individual and the organizational levels. Furthermore, it is evident that both of the two cases show a lot of resemblance with studies of an older date (Carlson, 1951; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Stewart 1976). In spite of new content such as HR issues, quality and new production philosophies, the leaders' daily work situation to a large extent remains the same. An

interpretation is that this is due to the fact that many of the structural factors in modern organizations have not really been transformed. There are still hierarchies, chains of command and employment contracts which influence the work of a leader (Hales, 2005).

Another interpretation of these similarities in leadership is that the general discourses in the organizations have been influenced by the travelling ideas of learning, development and leadership (cf. Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The official documents, as well as the leaders' accounts, show traces of concepts such as Learning Organizations (Senge, 1990) and change-centred leadership (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991). Interestingly enough, leaders from both companies have attended the same leader development programme, which could explain some of these similarities. Furthermore, both companies have had connections with various research constellations, where issues such as leadership and learning have been discussed. An interpretation is thus that theoretical concepts and the latest management fashions have been institutionalized in the leaders' views of leadership and their way of describing what it implies to be a leader, i.e. espoused theories (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996).

## 9.6 Development or soft control?

According to critical studies of leadership, much of the talk about new forms of leadership is not seen as instrumental in the facilitation of individual and organizational development, but rather as a means of ideological and soft control (Grey & Willmott, 2005; Willmott, 1993). However, taking a closer look at this study from a critical perspective it is difficult to get direct evidence that HRD measures are intentionally and consciously used to control the co-workers. Of course, that does not exclude the possibility that there still may be some substance to a critical perspective on learning-oriented leadership.

First, it is certainly interesting to consider the idea of new leadership as a softer kind of control based on self-regulation and concertive pressure from other co-workers (cf. Barker, 1993). In line with such an interpretation it has been suggested that modern leadership will concern questions of how to lead those who lead themselves and how to create empowered self-leaders who are responsible for their own development (Hultman, 2001b; Manz & Sims, 1991). Based on Alvesson & Willmott's (2002) discussion this may be seen as a matter of producing the 'appropriate individual' for the company.

Second, it is also important to question to what extent learning-oriented leadership allows the co-workers to actually govern their own learning processes. In fact, based on the results of the study, the learning-oriented

leadership may be interpreted as related to traditional top-down management principles, rather than to notions of distributed leadership (Day et al., 2004; Gronn, 2002). With the leaders taking such an interest in working with HR issues, while at the same time being in control of the designated resources, the co-workers' influence mainly implies discussing development in the planned dialogues or applying for courses and new positions. But the question is whether this is really equal to being leaders of their own learning?

Third, from a critical perspective it is also possible to make alternative interpretations of the planned activities connected to learning-oriented leadership. Seemingly, the intention behind methods such as continuous improvement is to create arenas for free thinking and innovative discussions (Liker, 2004), but the question is to what extent these especially designated spaces for reflection are facilitative of developmental learning? In the initial stages of working with improvement groups the focus appears to have been on smooth implementation of the methods, rather than on facilitating critical reflections regarding their relevance for the daily work.

As a final point, one may also consider what will happen to those who are not interested in learning activities at work. The options offered by being left out of demands for learning seem rather slim when it is the co-workers' identities that are at stake and not just their brains and brawns (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Deetz, 1995; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004).

## 9.7 Implications of the study and directions for further research

With the pages of this thesis inevitably coming to an end, it is time to reflect on what can come out of the findings that have been presented, analysed and discussed. This section therefore contains a discussion on possible theoretical and practical implications and some directions for further research.

### *9.7.1 Theoretical and practical implications*

Theoretically both leadership and learning constitute well-trodden territory. There is no lack of studies either of effective leadership or of workplace learning. However, it is the connection between these two areas that has been highlighted in this thesis and this has led to some theoretical contributions. For instance, when distinctions are made between different types of learning we find that there is a lot of knowledge residing within the field of workplace learning that may enrich leadership research. As an example, the traditional distinction in leadership research where production is separated from relations and change (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991) can in the light of a

separation between performance and development instead be conceptualized as four main leadership dimensions in terms of combinations of performance, development, production and relations. Another implication is that when we separate what the leaders do from how they do it, it is possible to categorize their activities in a way that has not been attempted in previous leadership research. Much like the differences between formal, non-formal and informal learning activities (Eraut, 2000; Kock, 2002), it is possible to distinguish between planned, partially planned and spontaneous leader activities.

Furthermore, the results of this study have shown that learning-oriented leadership is conditioned by a number of surrounding factors. The leaders' ways of acting differently depend on how the interaction with the co-worker is enabled and constrained by structural and individual conditions, which may breathe new life into the situational leadership models (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). In the light of these results, it is also possible to question the universalistic notions of leadership. Even if there are many similarities between the two cases in this study, this does not imply that a facilitative leadership will look the same in contexts with radically different structural conditions.

Yet another theoretical implication is that there is still an imbalance between the enormous number of studies searching for effective leadership and the ones that take a more critical approach. There are still many questions that need to be asked concerning the function and meaning of learning-oriented leadership from a critical perspective.

When it comes to practical implications, we have seen that the leaders' notions of learning and development constitute an important condition for learning-oriented leadership. With a restricted view of learning comes a restricted repertoire of the activities used to facilitate it. Based on this argument, an implication of the results is that the leaders in the two cases need to further develop their competences in relation to working with these issues. A lot of the learning that goes on in the daily work appears to occur behind the backs of the leaders. For the leaders this would imply becoming better at identifying potentials for learning in the daily work and lifting these to the group and organizational levels. In addition, an increased understanding of the phases in the learning processes that they initiate with the different activities could help to guide the leaders' approaches to the co-workers.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the learning-oriented leadership is still dominated by a focus on performance. In order to reach a balance between the logic of performance and the logic of development, it is likely that the leaders need to become more facilitative of critical thinking. Continuous improvements are certainly needed but, to create possibilities for



developmental learning and innovation, more constructively critical questions need to be asked in relation to the work process and the goals of the department and the entire organization.

Needless to say, there are also possible implications for the organizations. For instance, the factors that have been identified as having a constraining effect on learning-oriented leadership, such as the large spans of control and the attitudes of the co-workers, could also be discussed in terms of what kind of learning the companies are interested in facilitating and what kinds of demands can then be put on the leaders and co-workers.

### *9.7.2 Directions for further research*

In the light of the conclusions and implications presented above, something can also be said about possibilities for further research in similar and different contexts. This thesis has been an attempt to clarify the connections between learning and development, but many issues have still been left untouched. An obvious continuation of this study would be to take a co-worker perspective in order to increase our knowledge of how they perceive the learning outcome in relation to the leaders' leadership and everyday work practice.

In the study we have come across a number of different activities used to facilitate learning. The social interaction patterns are very complex, which has also prevented me from digging deeply into all of the activities. A direction for future research is therefore to conduct in-depth studies of the activities and especially of those labelled spontaneous, which have previously received limited attention in leadership studies. For instance, there is still a lot more to learn about the problem-solving processes that are likely to be constantly ongoing in all types of organizations and how they are related to learning at the individual, group and organizational levels.

Finally, a suggestion that is related to the competence required of the leaders when working with HR issues. It would be interesting to study these processes from a management-learning perspective, in terms of how the leaders learn the skills needed to facilitate learning. There are currently a number of leadership development programmes available on the open market, but few studies that have targeted them. In addition, there is still a lot more to study concerning the leaders' informal learning in the daily work.

*Chapter 9 – Discussion*

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## Appendix 1 – Interview guide<sup>19</sup>

### **I. BACKGROUND**

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*I thought we could start by you telling me a bit about yourself and your job.*

1. How long have you been working in the company?
2. What is your current position?
3. How is your position related to other parts of the organization?
4. How many co-workers are you in charge of?
5. How long have you been working as a manager?
6. How did you become a manager?
7. What have you worked with previously?  
– *within the company, outside of the company*
8. What is your educational background?
9. How old are you?

### **II. LEADERSHIP**

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10. Could you tell me about your working situation and describe what you do during a normal workday?
  - a) *Do your tasks vary over time?*
  - b) *What are your working hours like?*
  - c) *Are development dialogues and salary dialogues included in your assignments?*
11. With whom do you work during a normal day?
  - a) *Are there any specific tasks that you work on together?*
  - b) *Are there any tasks that you delegate?*  
– *to whom?*
12. Could you describe in what kinds of situations you interact with your co-workers?
  - a) *In what kinds of situations do you interact with your colleagues?*
13. If we look at leadership, what is the meaning of leadership for you?
  - a) *How do you characterise good leadership?*

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<sup>19</sup> The guide consists of 28 main questions that have been covered in the interviews. The additional, italicized, follow-up questions have been used as a back-up for the interviewer in order to get more elaborated answers from the respondents.

## Appendix 1 – Interview guide

14. How would you describe your leadership?
  - a) *What do you consider as important in you leadership?*
  - b) *What is stimulating in your leadership?*
  - c) *What is not stimulating in your leadership?*
15. Regarding leadership, what demands do you perceive as a leader?
  - a) *Are there demands concerning specific knowledge or skills? Exemplify!*
  - b) *Where do the demands come from?*
16. Are there any knowledge or skills that you lack when exercising leadership?
  - *if yes – how would you obtain these knowledge or skills?*

### **III. LEADERSHIP, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

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17. Today there is a lot of talk of learning and development at work, both for co-workers and leaders. How do you as a leader look at learning and development?
  - a) *Where does learning occur?*
18. What may learning and development be good for?
  - a) *Can you see any downsides to learning and development at work?*
19. If we then look closer at your co-workers' learning and development. Do you feel that they learn new things in their work?
  - *if yes – how do you notice this? Exemplify!*
  - *if no – what could be the reason for this?*
  - a) *Do you feel that your co-workers are interested in learning and development?*
20. Are there any factors that may influence the co-workers' learning and development?
  - a) *Can you give examples of factors?*
  - b) *In what ways do they have an effect?*
    - *constraining, enabling*
21. If you look at your company, what possibilities are there to work with development, in relation to the production?
  - a) *Can you give an example of how you in the company work with the co-workers' learning and development?*
22. Who is responsible for working with learning and development?

## Appendix I – Interview guide

23. How do you perceive your own role concerning working with learning and development?  
– *how do you prioritize working with these issues?*  
– *what obstacles/possibilities are there?*  
– *what consequences does this have for your leadership?*  
a) *What kind of support do you have from your own boss?*
24. How can you as a leader facilitate your co-workers' learning and development?  
a) *Can you give examples of situations where you have tried to facilitate your co-workers' learning and development?*  
b) *Do you talk about learning and development with your co-workers? Exemplify!*
25. What possibilities are there in the company for making use of the co-workers' learning and development?  
a) *Are there any career paths within the company?*  
b) *What does the mobility look like within the company?*  
c) *Are there any strategies or initiatives for mobility?*
26. How do you as a leader view the mobility of your co-workers?  
a) *Do you see any advantages with initiatives for mobility?*  
b) *Do you see any disadvantages with initiatives for mobility?*  
c) *How can you as a leader affect your co-workers' mobility? Exemplify!*
27. Now we have talked about your co-workers' learning and development. How do you view your own learning?  
a) *If you look back 1-2 years, how have you developed as a leader?*  
b) *What do you feel a need to learn more about?*

## IV. CONCLUSION

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28. Now I don't have any more questions for you. Is there anything that you feel I have missed or something that you would like to add?



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