

---

## **Project leadership revisited: towards distributed leadership perspectives in project research**

---

Monica Lindgren and Johann Packendorff\*

KTH – Royal Institute of Technology  
School of Industrial Engineering & Management  
10044 Stockholm, Sweden  
E-mail: monica.lindgren@indek.kth.se  
E-mail: johann.packendorff@indek.kth.se  
\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** While project management research in general has become a rapidly expanding field during past decades, scientific inquiry into project leadership has not been a major issue. The extant literature on project leadership also does not make much use of the current developments in leadership research in general – not even those appearing as suitable, such as distributed leadership perspectives. The aim of the paper is threefold: (1) to review the existing research literature on project leadership, (2) to summarise and discuss this research and (3) to make some notes towards a new research agenda built on the current debate in leadership studies on distributed leadership perspectives. Current project leadership research is found to focus exclusively on individuals and their leadership competencies rather than the leadership practices in project settings and does not fully use the perspectives in current leadership research. We then outline a distributed leadership perspective on project leadership research, including the practical consequences of such an ideal and the basic assumptions for future research.

**Keywords:** project leadership; research perspectives; research methodology; distributed leadership; shared leadership; leadership practices; social constructionism; critical project studies.

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2009) 'Project leadership revisited: towards distributed leadership perspectives in project research', *Int. J. Project Organisation and Management*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp.285–308.

**Biographical notes:** Dr. Monica Lindgren earned her PhD in Business Administration at Umeå University, Sweden, and is currently an Associate Professor of Business Administration at the School of Industrial Engineering and Management, KTH – Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. Her research interests centre on issues of social constructionism, project work, entrepreneurial processes, gender and organisation and identity theory. She is currently part of an international group of scholars arranging workshops on project work from critical research perspectives and is also co-leading a research programme on leadership from a constructionist perspective.

Dr. Johann Packendorff earned his PhD in Business Administration at Umeå University, Sweden, and is currently an Associate Professor of Industrial Economics and Management at the School of Industrial Engineering and Management, KTH – Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden.

His research is focused on issues relating to project work, entrepreneurship, gender and social constructionism. Involved in the organisation of a series of international research activities related to project management and critical theory, he currently co-leads a research programme on leadership from a constructionist perspective.

---

## **1 Introduction**

### *1.1 On the need to (re)visit project leadership studies*

Project management is a rapidly expanding discipline in society, both in practical and theoretical terms. A project is an increasingly common form for organising deliveries, developments and changes in all sectors of the organised world and, as such, it has also become an increasingly common focus for academic research. From an initial interest in operations analysis-based models for planning and control, project research has expanded to cover almost all aspects of project management, drawing theoretical inspiration from several academic fields (Packendorff, 1995; Söderlund, 2004). The aims of project research are also becoming increasingly pluralistic, as outright normative ‘how to’ studies are challenged and complemented by descriptive and critical approaches (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). A crucial aspect of this development is the ongoing inclusion of practical, theoretical and methodological perspectives from other fields of science, making the project research frontier a place where general organisational theorising meets the specifics of the project management field. One such meeting place should be the notion of project leadership, *i.e.*, where the general field of leadership studies meets the established notion of leadership as a crucial aspect in the understanding of project work in practice.

### *1.2 On the importance of project leadership studies*

The ongoing development of project leadership studies is vital for several reasons. First, it is the most frequent leadership assignment for professionals in contemporary organisations, implying a general need for knowledge development. Second, it is a leadership assignment that is often not based on a formal managerial position, but rather a temporary team mission where responsibilities regularly exceed authority – making it a leadership of special interest to both practitioners and scholars alike. Third, this leadership assignment is – unlike many others – rapidly undergoing a formal process of professionalisation through the standardisation of knowledge bases and the increased importance of individual certification (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2007). Fourth, it is a field that – like most other subfields within project research – may lack a substantial critical research debate based on ongoing general theory development outside project research (cf. Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). Fifth, it is also a field suffering from practical inadequacies in that the failure rates among projects are high (Cicmil *et al.*, 2009) and many project leaders express feelings of stress, overload and lack of control (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006; 2007; Zika-Viktorsson *et al.*, 2006). Although there are recent research suggesting improvements of project governance structures in general (Olsson, 2008) as remedies, most of the responsibilities and expectations are still put on the shoulders of the project leader.

Where the stream on project leadership is concerned, it started out in 1959 when Paul O. Gaddis published his seminal article in the *Harvard Business Review* that defined the new task of being a project manager and identified some important characteristics that such an individual needed to have to be successful. Among those were the ability to handle both technological research and business matters simultaneously and advance the project process both in relation to the project team and to the external stakeholders. Already from the outset, project leadership was thus described as a new kind of leadership assignment compared to the existing ones, a kind of assignment requiring special qualifications, methods, skills and behaviour. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the important research publications on project leadership reported on empirical inquiry into this new field, questioning what qualifications were needed for someone to become a project leader, what methods would help this leader achieve success, what skills were most important for the leader to develop and what behaviours worked best in communicating with stakeholders and building the team (cf. the overview in Turner and Müller, 2005). To get answers to these questions without being able to consult any existing body of literature, scholars (allegedly) looked up successful project leaders and simply asked them what they were doing. As the set of tools and methods for the management of projects gradually increased, it also implied that it was possible to ask informants about their use of tools and methods and relate this to project success. During the past decade, the assumption that there are certain qualifications, methods, skills and behaviours – usually referred to as ‘competences’ – that can be seen as predictors to project success has also become embodied in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide and strict evaluation procedures for project management certifications (Turner and Müller, 2005). Project leadership started out as a practical problem to solve and it has remained so in the form of the deeply embedded assumption that there are identifiable project leadership competencies that can be directly linked to superior organisational performance (Crawford, 2005). As there are considerable differences between different types of projects (Söderlund, 2004), it is often argued that the continued development of project research should focus on understanding various forms of project organisation as empirical phenomena to identify differences in the desired leadership style in different project forms (Kaulio, 2008).

Parallel to the development of empirically informed research on what constitutes good project leadership, the theoretical development within general leadership research has expanded in all directions. Several different schools of thought have been involved in the research debate, questioning the definitions of leadership, the methodologies of leadership research and the foci of scientific inquiry within the field. As noted by Turner and Müller (2005), many of these schools of thought have indeed been brought into the project management field, even though much additional work is needed.

### *1.3 On the developments in general leadership studies*

The field of leadership studies has traditionally been leader-centred, *i.e.*, focused on the individual leader and his/her traits, abilities and actions. This was a part of the general modernism introduced in the management sciences during the early 20th century, where the best leaders were to be identified and chosen for their suitability and formal merits

rather than for pre-modern bases such as kinship or charisma. The problem was still determining what constituted a suitable leader and this question gave rise to a series of different theoretical schools (cf. the overview in Parry and Bryman, 2006).

One stream of thought was psychological, trying to identify the personality *traits* that distinguished successful leaders from other people and assuming these effective leadership traits to be unchangeable qualities held by a small number of suitable individuals. Against this, others claimed that leadership was about interaction between leaders and followers and that different interaction *styles* (e.g., autocratic, democratic and *laissez faire*) implied different groups' atmospheres and hence, different groups' productivity levels. Another stream of research advocated a *situational* perspective, according to which leaders are only effective if their characteristics can be matched to the situation at hand; very simple or very complicated situations are best handled through task-oriented leadership, while most other situations are better handled through socio-emotional leadership styles. The situational perspective became very influential, but it has also been subject to recent criticism for focusing too much on the leader and not enough on group interaction.

Under the heading *The New Leadership Approach*, Parry and Bryman (2006) argued that several current streams of thought present a perspective on leadership as the articulation of visions and the management of meaning. Today, it is often emphasised that the leader is a member of a group (albeit with specific possibilities to influence the group) and leadership is actually a series of interaction processes wherein leaders inspire followers by creating common meaningful images of the future. Central to the argumentation is the distinction between *transactional* and *transformative* leadership, i.e., the difference between leadership as a contractual relationship between leaders and followers and leadership as a social relationship where the aspirations of followers are raised to those of the leaders themselves (Bass, 1990). For example, the old concept of *charisma* has been revisited from this perspective (Conger, 1999) and new concepts such as *authentic leadership* (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) have been suggested to overcome the risk of manipulation inherent in the transformative ideal.

In the recent developments, we also find additional leadership 'schools' in emergence, usually evolving around a distinct conceptual perspective conveying new images or metaphors of leaders and leadership. One example is *emotional intelligence* (Dulewicz and Higgs, 2000), where the leader's personal, social and emotional competences are seen as crucial for success, as the emotionally intelligent leader has a high degree of awareness of both self and his/her social setting and the ability to be optimistic, emphatic, inspiring and team-oriented. Another example is *post-heroic leadership*, built on an ideal wherein leadership is about taking responsibility and gaining knowledge, encouraging innovation and participation even in ambiguous situations, seeking input and aiming for consensus in decision making and wanting everybody to grow and learn, even at the expense of the formal leader becoming dispensable (cf. Eicher, 1997; Fletcher, 2004). There are also recent developments suggesting a combination of several sources of leader attributes into a *competence perspective* (cf. Spencer and Spencer, 1993). Most of these and other suggested theoretical constructs of recent origin still have to undergo a lot of theoretical and empirical work to qualify as 'leadership schools' along with the traditional ones.

During recent years, there has been an emerging debate in the field of leadership studies on the notions of shared and distributed perspectives on leadership (cf. Pearce and Conger, 2003; Parry and Bryman, 2006), a debate emphasising leadership as a collective activity rather than as the doings of formal leaders. This debate emerged from the practical advantages of sharing leadership duties between two or more persons in suitable situations (Pearce, 2004; Sally, 2002; Spillane, 2006), advantages that are increasingly becoming the subject of empirical research (Crevani *et al.*, 2007a–b). This notion of leadership as a shared phenomenon is also being translated into a de-individualised perspective wherein leadership is *a priori* viewed as distributed. Hence, from a scholarly perspective, *the distributed leadership perspective points to the need to study leadership in terms of activities rather than individuals – i.e.*, viewing leadership as something that is co-constructed in a team rather than exercised by a single person (Gronn, 2002; Parry and Bryman, 2006; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Uhl-Bien, 2006). To advance such a perspective, it is not enough to say that leadership is about interaction between leaders and followers, a stance taken by several scholars in the past and is actually often maintaining rather than dissolving the leader/follower distinction (Küpers, 2007). If we want to take leadership research beyond the leader-centred tradition, we must also try to redefine leadership in terms of the activities between people in interaction and study that interaction without becoming preoccupied with what formal leaders do and think.

#### *1.4 Aim of the paper*

Given this rough characterisation of the project leadership literature on the one hand and the general leadership literature on the other, it should be of importance to analyse how and to what extent the project leadership literature has benefited from the rapid developments in the general leadership field and what future benefits there are to be exploited. In such an analysis, we hold a special interest in contemporary leadership thoughts that emphasise less traditional views on leadership and, therefore, should be suitable for research and practice in project-based settings, such as the distributed leadership perspective. The main reasons for this interest is that contemporary projects are often built upon intense teamwork, project leaders rarely hold formal leadership positions and they are often unable to exercise any traditional authority (Dodgson *et al.*, 2005). Instead, project teams have often been described as the opposite of traditional hierarchical structures, as natural ingredients of the wave of post-bureaucratic organisational forms (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006) and as suitable settings for distributed leadership practices.

The aim of this paper is threefold. First, we will review the existing research on project leadership – *i.e.*, research explicitly relating (1) to the leadership function in project settings and (2) to the theories and perspectives derived from general leadership theory. Second, the problems and insufficiencies of the current research will be summarised and discussed. Third, we will take this critique towards a new research agenda built on the current debate in leadership studies on distributed leadership.

## 2 Project leadership literature: a brief review and analysis

### 2.1 *The antecedents of project leadership studies*

Research specifically aimed at the phenomenon of project leadership has not been a major issue, neither in general project studies nor in general leadership research. In a sense, reflecting over project leadership can even be seen as an unnecessary waste of time:

“Since a temporary system operates over a limited period of time, there is not much motivation to investigate the management problem in itself; instead the focus is on the task problem, so that one learns little about how to manage temporary systems from actually running them, as compared to what one might learn from running a more stable, functionally organized system.” (Goodman and Goodman, 1976, p.494)

In the early project literature, the notion of project leadership mainly departed from a task-oriented perspective. Leadership was often seen as a ‘soft’ or ‘human’ phenomenon that was needed to make the project team deliver according to plan (Packendorff, 1995). At the same time, from the start, it was already acknowledged that the management of projects and temporary systems had its own specific problems and characteristics (Gaddis, 1959; Miles, 1964).

The basis of project management is the need for the rational handling of temporary tasks that could not be handled through permanent organisational arrangements. Thus, project leadership can be seen mainly as a task-oriented phenomenon where relations could (temporarily) be set aside for the efficient execution of the project plan (Bryman *et al.*, 1987; Goodman, 1981). At the same time, both projects and the people in them belong to a surrounding permanent organisational context that must be handled. Consequently, the traditional project leadership literature has focused on leadership as the simultaneous task of the project-internal team management of technical specialists and the project-external management of business managers and clients, often in the structural setting of matrix organisations. This does not necessarily make project leadership a unique phenomenon compared to other forms of leadership; it implies neither a distinct set of practical tools or tricks nor a special theoretical body clearly separated from general leadership theory. But it is still treated as a special subfield of leadership, socially constructed as such through the general differentiation of project management from other managerial fields – not least through the very labelling of certain organisational processes as ‘projects’ and the intense efforts undertaken by associations such as International Project Management Association (IPMA) and Project Management Institute (PMI) to create a project management profession (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2007) and identify the features of successful project leadership (Turner and Müller, 2006). Consequently, project leadership research is much in demand and treated as a distinct area of knowledge.

When presenting the new leader category – the project manager – to the world, Gaddis (1959) depicted a boundary-crossing jack-of-all-trades able to handle both advanced technological issues and complicated business matters. It was not expected from this individual to be the best engineer or businessman in the organisation, but he was to be able and experienced in both fields. In the project leadership literature, this reasoning came to be extended to a specific interest in the individuals who are actually able to perform such a role. A vast stream of empirical research literature usually based on studies of what real-life project managers did and/or said followed.

## 2.2 *Early project leadership research*

The main stream of research following Gaddis' portrayal of the middle man between management and technology thus came to focus on the extraction of success factors at the individual level. Project leaders were interviewed and surveyed and their perceived characteristics and behaviours were linked to project outcomes in various ways. The empirical setting was usually a functional matrix organisation, where project leaders worked with borrowed resources and did not entirely control their areas of responsibility (Avots, 1969; Barker *et al.*, 1988; Butler, 1973; Gullett, 1972; Hodgetts, 1968; Jonason, 1971; Middleton, 1967; Reeser, 1969).

General leadership theory was often brought in as a conceptual background to explain the discovered empirical patterns. It was thus suggested that project leaders should employ a participative leadership style and lead through ideas and visions (Barker *et al.*, 1988; Goodman and Goodman, 1976; Jessen, 1992; Silverman, 1987; Thamhain, 1987; Thamhain and Gemmill, 1974). The project manager was supposed to be more task-oriented than the average leader but, at the same time, there were studies indicating that increased relational orientation is positively correlated with project effectiveness (Bryman *et al.*, 1987).

There were also a number of competence-focused studies relating project success to various traits and abilities, a tradition still living on in good health (Crawford, 2005; Turner and Müller, 2005; Gehring, 2007). For example, the project leader should have the ability to motivate the team and make people enthusiastic about the project (Fabi and Pettersen, 1992; Jessen, 1992; Owens and Martin, 1986; Roman, 1986) and create a good organisational climate (Barczak and Wilemon, 1989; Jabri *et al.*, 1986; Jessen, 1992). Project leaders should also be able to facilitate internal communication (Barczak and Wilemon, 1989; Tushman, 1978), as well as handle external contacts and stakeholders (Barczak and Wilemon, 1989; Katz and Tushman, 1981; Slevin, 1983). Other abilities called for coordinative and integrative skills (Fabi and Pettersen, 1992; Pinto and rescott, 1988; Silverman, 1987; Thamhain, 1987), information acquisition skills (Roberts and Fusfeld, 1981; Slevin, 1983) and conflict-solving skills (Hill, 1977; Owens and Martin, 1986; Thamhain, 1987; Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975). All this while the traditional tasks to plan, make decisions, maintain discipline and control performance remained as vital parts of the competence profile (Woodward, 1982), albeit unevenly distributed over the project life cycle (Pinto and Prescott, 1988). A pro-active 'fire lighter' is what is needed, not a reactive 'fire fighter' constantly preoccupied with handling chaotic situations (Barber and Warn, 2005).

## 2.3 *The research frontiers: project leadership studies today*

As a third part of our brief review of the project leadership literature, we have looked into the publication activities of the leading in-field research periodicals *International Journal of Project Management* and *Project Management Journal* during the past two decades. The aim of this reading was to analyse the extent to which project leadership is a current topic within the project research community and identify any current themes and/or trends in this research. It appeared that the number of articles explicitly dealing with the theoretical aspects of project leadership was actually very small<sup>1</sup> and intrafield authors

such as Sotirlou and Wittmer (2001) indicated dissatisfaction with the tendency to rely on early studies such as those of Thamhain and Gemmill (1974) and Hodgetts (1968). Kangis and Lee-Kelley (2000) made a similar observation:

“Despite the plethora of leadership studies in diverse situations, relatively little attention seems to have been given to examining the variables involved in the context of managing the operations of temporary, small groups [...]. Project management is a powerful tool for operational management as well as for strategic change. It is also useful for the implementation of initiatives such as business process re-engineering and total quality management, hence its increasing use. Projects are goal-oriented, budget-driven, timeline specific and generally operate outside the conventional organization structure of a firm. Such characteristics can create interesting challenges for the project manager, who has to cut across established lines of control. However, despite its increased adoption, not much is known on the relationship between leadership behaviour and managing these structures.” (393f)

In our sample of articles, the main stream of research on project leadership deals with the relation between the project manager's leadership style and the situational requirements of specific types of projects. Most of this research draws upon the tradition that was started by the seminal work by Fiedler (1967), which became the foundation of the well-known situational/contingency approach to leadership. In short, this approach states that team effectiveness is dependent upon the leader's personality as related to the perceived environment. In very difficult or very simple situations, task-oriented leaders are preferable, while relationship-oriented leaders are better at handling situations with moderate degrees of complexity and urgency. Over the past years, this has been studied in Information Technology (IT) services projects (Thite, 2000; Lee-Kelley and Leong Loong, 2003), construction projects in Thailand (Ogunlana *et al.*, 2002), design consulting projects (Cheung *et al.*, 2001) and clinical research projects (Kangis and Lee-Kelley, 2000). In general, the research supports Fiedler's hypotheses and identifies certain leadership abilities and traits that are recommendable given the project situation at hand.

There are also related research (departing from other conceptual sources) generalising similar findings on all project managers from a certain national culture (Mäkilouko, 2004), project managers in relation to line managers (Keegan and den Hartog, 2004), project managers in the specific sector of construction (Toor and Ofori, 2008) and the relation between project managers and project types in general (Müller and Turner, 2007). Common for this research is the assumption that different individuals represent different leadership styles and they are consequently suitable for different project tasks, types or environments. In almost all cases, this was investigated by the quantitative analyses of survey data.

In addition, there are also some minor streams of research related to project leadership, again investigating individual leaders. El-Sabaa (2001) investigated the relation between the skill profiles and career paths of project managers, concluding that the continuous broadening of functional and technical skills was necessary for a project management career. Aitken and Crawford (2007) investigated the stress-coping strategies of project managers and Gällstedt (2003) made a qualitative study on the critical incidents in projects and their relation to the perceptions of motivation and stress. Based on a large survey, Dolfi and Andrews (2007) concluded that project leaders should be optimists to be able to handle the sometimes hard working conditions. However, none of these texts explicitly relate to the general body of leadership research. Kaulio's (2008)

suggestion to develop leadership theories within project management by departing from observations of the handling of critical incidents rather than from detailed theoretical constructs represents a widely held inductive predilection within project leadership studies.

A few articles explicitly used new conceptual developments in general leadership research. Toor and Ofori (2008) proposed the emerging concept of *authentic leadership* for the study of construction project management against the background of recent scientific debates within leadership research in general (cf. Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Authentic project leaders are presented as individuals with positive energy and moral integrity, motivated by the well-being of people around them and supporting their followers into taking responsibilities themselves. Wang *et al.* (2005) provided a most similar view on the general term *charismatic leadership* (cf. Conger, 1999), using a survey to conclude the positive effects of a charismatic leadership style on the performance of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation projects. Similar results were presented by Prabhakar (2005) in his international study relating *transformational leadership* practices to project success, while Neuhauser (2007) found that female project managers rather tend to employ transactional leadership behaviours. Müller and Turner (2007) and Turner and Müller (2005; 2006) related their studies to a proposed *competency school* of leadership – integrating several results from previous schools and presenting them as competencies that can be learnt and related to different project situations and types (see also Crawford, 2005).

### **3 Project leadership studies: a critique**

Given the brief review above, we will now turn to the issues that we see as problematic and in need of critical debate in the field of project leadership. We will also briefly relate these issues to the distributed leadership perspective developed in Section 4.

- *Individual focus* – Almost all empirical and theoretical studies of project leadership implicitly assume a perspective of leadership as synonymous with a single individual: a leader. There is a tradition in the project management field of viewing the project manager as an individual, a tradition strengthened by the current wave of individual project management certifications sweeping over the world. At the same time, current developments in leadership research emphasise teamwork and views of team leaders as facilitators, implying that important knowledge on leadership is to be found in the relation between team members rather than in the leader as an individual. Although the importance of teamwork is well recognised in the literature, the leadership debate is focused on the single project leader based on the (often) unsubstantiated assumption that the single project leader makes a distinct and significant contribution to the outcomes of a project. From a distributed leadership perspective, project leadership would instead be studied as activities emerging in the social interaction of the project team, acknowledging the leadership work also done by other team members.
- *Blurred notion of competencies* – If a project is led by one person and that person is of vital importance to the project's success, then it is of course most interesting to find out the individuals who are suited for such a task – or at least find out ways to find them out. Therefore, individuals are mostly treated as if they possess certain

traits and some of the newer research also explicitly use established psychometric tools to investigate traits in successful project managers (Turner and Müller, 2005). There are also several examples of ‘pseudo-traits’ – what good project managers should be able to do or even what good project managers are supposed to do (cf. Barber and Warn, 2005) – presented in the form of requirements for the individuals considered for project leadership assignments. The dangers of an unreflexive ‘pseudo-traits’ approach are, of course, that people are seen as bearers of a simplified set of unchangeable qualities rather than as active and developing actors and the use (or non-use) of project management tools becomes a part of these unchangeable qualities. If not based on clear theoretical constructs, there is always a risk that the empirical inquiry into project leaders’ behaviour results in a confusion of personality traits, competencies, actions and familiarity with the project management toolbox (cf. Zimmerer and Yasin, 1998; Thamhain, 2004; Strang, 2007). Such confusion may seem an attractive way to merge theoretical insights on a practical level, but it may still be problematic, as it combines incommensurable ontologies and epistemologies taken from different schools of leadership research. When developing our notion of distributed project leadership, we find it most important to base the perspective on a coherent set of basic scientific assumptions.

- *Focus on competencies rather than practices* – A problem related to the interest in individual project managers and their personalities is the absence of practice-oriented studies, *i.e.*, research on what actually happens at project sites and how leadership is practiced in everyday interactions. Project leadership is studied in terms of the characteristics that individual leaders bring into these interactions, not in terms of how these interactions unfold and how they are interpreted by the interactors. By not studying leadership practices, project leadership research fails to theorise upon interaction patterns, the everyday activities that constitute leadership, the relational and emotional aspects of project work, how project management tools are actually put to use, the perceived importance and contradictions in leadership discourses and so forth. It also implies the risk of neglecting the mundane, collective and ambiguous aspects of leadership, instead becoming preoccupied with heroic actions and the linear relationships between intentions, interventions and performance. This is indeed not a problem of project leadership only – the focus on competencies rather than practices is currently the subject of debate within general leadership research (cf. Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Carroll *et al.*, 2008) – but it should nevertheless be addressed in project leadership research (Nilsson, 2008). A distributed leadership perspective explicitly presupposes a practice orientation, as it views leadership as constructed in social interaction rather than being exercised by single individuals.
- *Project focus* – While one of the most important trends in the project management field is the moving of focus from single projects to multiproject management and project portfolio management (Engwall, 2003), project leadership research mostly remains focused on single projects as if that was still the most important unit to lead. Today, both project managers and project team members often work in several projects in parallel, implying that single projects are no longer the only relevant level of analysis (Söderlund, 2004; Zika-Viktorsson *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, an increasing amount of leadership work is instead taking place in project management offices or among project sponsors. The continued focus on single projects may also have dysfunctional consequences, such as conserving old autonomous ideas about project

leadership that are not suited to modern portfolio thinking, maintaining the traditional group dynamics' view of a project team as working together face-to-face throughout the project duration (in spite of the increased use of short-term specialists and virtual teams; cf. Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999) or overemphasising the importance and impact of the individual project leader. A distributed leadership perspective – with its focus on actual interactions – will naturally incorporate leadership activities also over project boundaries.

To conclude this discussion, there is a need for more practice-oriented empirical studies on project leadership based on thorough and well-founded theoretical reasoning. The range of theoretical schools within leadership research that can be applied to project leadership is also far wider than the current preoccupation with various aspects of contingency theory, leadership styles and competencies. Moreover, a widened view and explicit discussions on the foundations of project leadership research can also contribute to a reformulation of the heroic project leadership ideals that fill the literature today, ideals that rather serve to remasculinise work life than promote new ways to work and live (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006).

Our proposed alternative is the emerging distributed leadership perspective, a perspective based on explicit scientific assumptions on social constructionism and alternative leadership values (Crevani *et al.*, 2007b). It is also a critical agenda in that the construction of power relations, resistance, contradictions and gender is of interest (cf. Collinson, 2005; Koivunen, 2007).

#### **4 A distributed leadership perspective**

As mentioned in the Introduction, there has been an emerging debate on what has been called distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Parry and Bryman, 2006). Metaphorically, the perspective emphasises collaboration and the relational processes of co-construction as the bases of leadership, pointing at the relational, collectivist and non-authoritarian nature of leadership practices in contemporary organisations (Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Thereby, it seeks to challenge the individualist focus inherent in leadership research, a focus that has actually – and paradoxically – been strengthened in the contemporary leadership literature (Parry and Bryman, 2006). We will discuss the conceptual roots of this perspective and investigate both the practical and theoretical consequences for project research.

##### *4.1 Distributed leadership: the conceptual antecedents*

In general leadership research, the distributed leadership perspective has been advanced in several ways in recent years. Parry and Bryman (2006) identified five strands in the recent literature that they summarised under the heading 'distributed leadership':

- the notion of superleadership, *i.e.*, leading others to lead themselves (Sims and Lorenzi, 1992)
- the notion that leaders can develop leadership capacities in others (Kouzes and Posner, 1998)
- the perspective of leadership as an activity of organising (Hosking, 1988; 1991)

- the discursive differences between dispersed and traditional leadership ideals (Gordon, 2002)
- dispersed leadership as a technological necessity based on e-commerce and virtual teamwork (Brown and Gioia, 2002).

While noting several differences related to both the view of leadership and basic scientific assumptions, Parry and Bryman (2006) were still able to:

“see an alternative perspective that emphasizes the importance of recognizing the need for leadership to be viewed as a widely dispersed activity which is not necessarily lodged in formally designated leaders, especially the heroic leader who is a feature of much New Leadership writing.” (p.455)

In this article, we depart from a perspective of leadership as co-constructed by several persons, one that is closely related to the third perspective stated above. This perspective has advanced in recent years through the introduction of new conceptualisations of leadership intended to capture a distributed view of the phenomenon. For example, there is a growing literature focusing on *shared leadership*, i.e., empirical cases wherein people actually share leadership duties and responsibilities rather than allocate them to a single person (Bradford and Cohen, 1998; Lambert, 2002; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Sally, 2002; Wilhelmson, 2006). *Collaborative leadership* (Collinson, 2007) is a similar conceptualisation, focusing on collaboration rather than competition. Moreover, the taken-for-granted idea of unitary command has been questioned (Crevani *et al.*, 2007a–b) and the dissolution of the leader-follower dichotomy has been suggested (Küpers, 2007; Reicher *et al.*, 2005; Vanderslice, 1988). Gronn (2002) explicitly referred to *distributed leadership* in his plea for leadership studies that focus on collective interaction processes rather than on single leaders (cf. also Spillane, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Naturally, the question is on how this can be of relevance to project leadership studies.

#### 4.2 *Practical relevance: distributed leadership as a source of project leadership norms*

One way to apply a distributed leadership perspective to the study of project work is to use it prescriptively, as a source of new and better leadership practices where people share leadership tasks in projects. Some assumed examples of such prescriptions are summarised in Table 1, where we derive project-related aspects from the general literature on distributed leadership. The special leadership problems inherent in modern decentralised ways of organising – through high-performing teams rather than bureaucratic command structures – are most visible in project work (Lambert, 2002; Pearce, 2004) and the observation that an increasingly complex world requires competence profiles that are broader than what can possibly be expected to be found in one single person also needs to be acknowledged in project-based work (O’Toole *et al.*, 2003; Waldersee and Eagleson, 2002; Pearce, 2004). By referring to established theories on group composition and role complementarity, it is also usual to describe managerial tasks as requiring several different individual roles at one and the same time (Denis *et al.*, 2001).

**Table 1** The possible prescriptive arguments for distributed leadership practices in project work

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Project-related arguments</i>	<i>References (examples) from the general leadership literature</i>
Individual perspective (distributed leadership practices as a way to enhance the lives of those who work in project leadership positions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solo leadership consumes people and there is a risk for high level of stress and anxiety.</li> <li>• Enhanced balance of work requirements and personal responsibilities/private life.</li> <li>• Better sense of security and stability in decision making and implementation.</li> <li>• Enhanced possibility to learn, having the co-leader as a role model and provider of feedback.</li> <li>• More enjoyable work.</li> </ul>	Fletcher (2004); Sally (2002); Wilhelmsen (2006); Crevani <i>et al.</i> (2007b)
Co-worker perspective (distributed leadership ideals as a source of enhancing the correspondence between employee expectations and actual project leadership practices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people are used to working in teams with some degree of shared leadership. When they rise to higher organisational levels, they are more likely to want to continue sharing leadership and resist traditional solo command.</li> <li>• Expectation for co-leadership created by the experience of living in modern (at least western) family models where both parents participate in decision making, reinforced by experiences of working in teams.</li> <li>• Young employees expect more democratic leadership in modern organisations.</li> </ul>	Bradford and Cohen (1998); Lambert (2002); Pearce (2004); Sally (2002)

**Table 1** The possible prescriptive arguments for distributed leadership practices in project work (continued)

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Project-related arguments</i>	<i>References (examples) from the general leadership literature</i>
Organisational perspective (distributed leadership as a way to enhance project effectiveness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-person leadership cannot reflect and handle the environmental complexity facing many projects. Several different competences, skills and roles are required.</li> <li>• Cross-functional communication can be enhanced through shared leadership, as several departments, functions and stakeholders can be represented at the same time at a managerial level. One consequence can be the facilitation of change processes.</li> <li>• Both control and improvisation can be represented by a dual leadership, thereby facilitating organisational change.</li> <li>• There is a lower risk of suboptimal solutions if the leadership of an organisation is truly shared by the management team.</li> <li>• There is less vulnerability in case the project leader is absent or resigns.</li> <li>• Co-leaders can have a larger span of control together and more time for their coworkers and for reflecting on the strategy and basic values for their unit.</li> <li>• Organisations can avoid losing project leadership talent because of the stress associated with leadership posts.</li> <li>• Projects can benefit from the cognitive and behavioural capabilities of a larger number of individuals.</li> </ul>	Bradford and Cohen (1998); Denis <i>et al.</i> (2001); Miles and Watkins (2007); O'Toole <i>et al.</i> (2003); Pearce (2004); Pearce and Conger (2003); Pearce and Sims (2002); Sally (2002); Waldersee and Eagleton (2002); Wilhelmson (2006); Yang and Shao (1996)
Societal perspective (distributed leadership ideals as a way to maintain and increase the legitimacy of leadership and management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When power is too concentrated, it may result in immoral and/or illegal actions taken by individual leaders struck by hubris.</li> <li>• Shared leadership increases the possibility to include minorities in managerial positions, thereby increasing the legitimacy of leadership.</li> </ul>	Lambert-Olsson (2004)

*Sources:* Adapted from Crevani *et al.* (2007a–b)

The distributed leadership perspective may also be used to acknowledge and discuss the often inhumane workload of individual project leaders and the need to enable him/her to live a balanced life (Sally, 2002; Pearce and Manz, 2005). Distributed leadership can also be related to the general legitimacy of project leadership, such that organisational and societal change processes may be facilitated by having several different perspectives and/or stakeholders represented in the managerial function at the same time (Denis *et al.*, 2001; Sally, 2002; Ensley *et al.*, 2003).

#### *4.3 Theoretical relevance: distributed leadership as a source of a new research agenda*

One problem of the practical aspects of distributed leadership is that it views distributed leadership as an exception to 'usual' leadership, an exception to be practiced in extraordinary situations or organisational arrangements (Pearce, 2004). Thus, our suggestion is not only to view distributed leadership as a source of practical solutions to leadership problems, but also to apply a basic perspective of leadership as something that individuals construct together in social interaction (Gronn, 2002; Collinson, 2005).

In the general leadership literature, we found a number of theoretical ingredients of such a perspective. Gronn (2002) discussed this in terms of the level of analysis, *i.e.*, that the level of analysis should be the exercised leadership rather than the single individual leader. Meindl (1995) and Reicher *et al.* (2005) claimed that traditional leadership models contribute to the institutionalisation of a dualism of identity between the leaders and followers in society – a dualism that may be challenged through studies of leadership identity construction and empirical work on practices rather than competencies. Following Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003), Carroll *et al.* (2008, 372f) held that leadership "has more power as a discourse and identity, giving practitioners enhanced self-esteem, significance and 'positive cultural valence' [...], rather than a specific or distinctive set of practices or interventions in organizational life." Thus, a distributed leadership perspective on project work shall not only focus on observable interactive practices, but also on how competing and conflicting discourses on project work and leadership appear in project settings, including the importance of 'project leadership' as a basis for identity work among project professionals (Hodgson, 2005; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007).

Fletcher (2004) took this line of reasoning one step further in her discussion of distributed leadership in terms of collective and interactive learning processes. She did think that such a theoretical development will run into difficulties that may be understood better from a gender perspective. She stated that the traditional heroic images of leadership are strongly masculinised and the femininisation that is inherent in alternative stances will challenge several deeply rooted notions of leadership (cf. Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). Among these, Fletcher found the taken-for-granted individualisation of society (reinforcing unitary command as the only viable solution) and the contemporary idea that gender inequality problems are finally being solved (implying that any basic redefinition of leadership would be unnecessary, since we have already found the most suitable forms) (cf. Vecchio, 2002). A social constructionist research agenda wherein project leadership, project leader identities and masculinisation/femininisation as constantly constructed and reconstructed in project work should be central to advance both project leadership theory and project leadership practices in the direction of distributed leadership (cf. Carroll *et al.*, 2008).

In a distributed leadership approach, leading and following will thus be seen as “two sides of the same set of relational skills that everyone in an organisation needs in order to work in a context of interdependence” (Fletcher, 2004, p.648). This means that even if formal positions remain unaltered, project leadership roles depend on the situation and individuals are required to move fluidly between the two roles.

Following this reasoning, the main assumptions of a distributed leadership approach to project studies are stated in Table 2.

**Table 2** The basic assumptions of a distributed leadership approach to project leadership research

Ontology/ Epistemology/ Axiology	Projects and leadership as socially constructed phenomena. Project leadership theory as based on the understanding of leadership practices. Projects and leadership as potentially both good and evil, moral and immoral.
Aim of research	Create understandings of leadership processes in project settings in terms of activities, themes, discourses, identity work and teamwork practices.  The normative claims of competence-focused leadership research and the consequences of labelling activities as projects and/or leadership are problematised.
Level of analysis	Leadership activities, <i>i.e.</i> , social interaction around issues related to governance, coordination, policy making and change in projects. Also, focus on the identity construction and discourses of the involved interactors.
Theoretical foundation	Constructionist and relational leadership approaches ( <i>e.g.</i> , shared, dispersed, collaborative and distributed leadership). The leader-follower dichotomy is dissolved. Focus on organisational practices.  Project leadership theory is seen as a performative input into the life worlds of practitioners.  Dominating leadership norms contribute to a reconstruction of the traditional masculinities in work life and society.
Project leadership	Processes of social interaction where people interact around issues related to governance, coordination, policy making and change in projects.  Project leadership is not a higher moral function reserved for leaders. Team members do not necessarily need a leader to be worthy. Project leadership research has a moral duty to question and pave the way for emancipation from traditional conceptions.
Project leader	Project leadership exists outside the individual leader. Formal leaders are (powerful) co-constructors of leadership activities in everyday interactions and seen as relating subjects.  Everybody has the potential to be part of the construction of project leadership activities. Rejection of heroic images of project leadership as being about loneliness, hard work, being tough and rational, making sacrifices and doing the right thing despite the consequences.
Empirical settings	Projects, project portfolios, project management offices, project-based organisations (labelled as such by interactors).
Research methodology	Participative observation, in-depth interviews, stories, ethnographies, narrative analysis, deconstruction, discourse analysis.

*Sources:* Based on Carroll *et al.*, 2008; Crevani *et al.*, 2007a–b; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006; 2007; 2009)

There are several important research implications from the distributed leadership perspective. First, new research questions may be stated when we shift focus from individual competencies to socially constructed practices. One such issue may be the actual leadership ideals, as they are constructed in contemporary project-based organisations, *i.e.*, what project leadership is and what it is not and what constitutes good leadership, bad leadership and the absence of leadership. Another important question concerns the emergence of power structures in leadership and projects. It could be especially interesting to see how informal power structures emerge in highly structured project-based settings when one has a planned schedule for a task.

The established ways of doing empirical fieldwork will also have to be adapted to alternative scientific assumptions. Instead of focusing on individuals, it will be more suitable to follow teams, meetings and other forms of interaction between people in project-based settings (Nilsson, 2008). If we study how project leadership processes unfold, we will focus on what happens between people instead on formal leaders' individual behaviour. Therefore, we will prefer qualitative field studies and research methods inspired by anthropology and ethnography – methodologies that have been almost absent within project leadership research.

## **5 Conclusion**

In this paper, we started by arguing that the current developments within general leadership theory have not had enough impact on the existing research on project leadership. Moreover, project leadership has only been a marginal stream within project management research. Based on these points of departure, the aim of this paper was threefold. First, we reviewed the existing research on project leadership. Second, the problems and insufficiencies of the current research were summarised and discussed. Third, we made some notes towards a new research agenda built on the current debate in leadership studies on distributed leadership.

Based on our review, we find that project leadership should be a most promising field of research in the future – both in terms of intrafield knowledge development and providing general leadership theory with new empirical settings. Project leadership certainly deserves much more scholarly attention (both in terms of theory development and applied work), as it is an increasingly important and widespread phenomenon in the global economy. As this paper has mainly focused on theory development, we find that the current project leadership theory is far from making full use of the current developments in the general leadership field. Our proposed distributed leadership perspective is just one of the recent theoretical constructs with the potential to contribute to project leadership theory and practice. In this future development, it should be of special interest to challenge the current dominating focus on project leadership competencies – which has close links to the ongoing professionalisation and 'PMBOK-ification' of project management, as it is used to support certification programmes for individual project managers.

As stated in the beginning of this paper, our main aim with the distributed leadership perspective is not to propose a new model of how to do project leadership (even though the perspective may be a source of new project leadership practices and ideals, as suggested above), but mainly a new perspective on the inquiry into existing project leadership practices. When putting the assumptions outlined in Table 2 into empirical

work, we will be able to analyse project leadership activities in terms of the ambiguous construction processes where the contents and boundaries of organisations, projects, responsibilities, issues, identities and leadership as a (performative) concept is constantly articulated, discussed and changed. Theoretically, this indicates possibilities for new theoretical developments within project leadership studies concerning how project leadership can be understood as practices and social interaction.

One such development could be a more detailed understanding of the practices by which masculinities and femininities in project-based settings are constructed and reconstructed. The performativity of traditional patriarchal norms is strong enough to be present even in a flat decentralised project team. Leadership interactions are not taking place in a vacuum as most projects are embedded in organisational settings, which means that teams can hardly avoid bringing the surrounding managerial culture into projects. When studying how project leadership is done in interactions, it is therefore important not to forget the interactions crossing project and organisational boundaries.

Another related theoretical development is the notion of the complex processes of power in project organisations. If focus is only on the formal single project leader, it usually implies simplified notions of power relations, which either overstates or understates the importance of the leader and either dichotomises leaders from followers or treats them as a harmonic collective. Instead, we need to take perspective that leadership – and thus, also power relations – are constructed in social interaction and embedded in enduring, institutionalised norm systems conveying taken-for-granted views of what is desirable and what is not.

Studying project leadership from a distributed perspective does not necessarily mean studying a more democratic form of leadership (as might be the case in some studies of shared or distributed leadership; cf. Fletcher, 2004). Organisational settings characterised by such leadership ideals are suitable for empirical inquiry, as the consequences of applying new perspectives may become more welcome and manifest. What is important is to study what is going on ‘in between’ people and to ‘degrandiosise’ leadership (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) by describing how it is done in everyday interactions at work including more people than a single formal or informal leader. Studying interactions rather than individual leaders also means taking seriously the complexity of what is going on in organisations. Rather than reduce leadership to leaders influencing others, to a quite unidimensional phenomenon, we want to study multidimensional interactions where boundary, responsibility and identity work are central elements to be critically analysed and where the dichotomisation between leaders and followers can be left behind. As noted by Gunter (2001), dichotomies and binaries tend to separate what should be integrated and marginalise what should actually be recognised.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors acknowledge the valuable comments of the anonymous reviewers and the participants at the 19th Nordic Academy of Management (NFF) Conference and the 8th International Research Network on Organizing by Projects (IRNOP) Conference. The research reported here could not have been possible without the financial support of Handelsbankens Forskningsstiftelser and Vinnova, which is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

## References

- Aitken, A. and Crawford, L. (2007) 'Coping with stress: dispositional coping strategies of project managers', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 25, No. 7, pp.666–673.
- Alvesson, M. and Sveningsson, H. (2003) 'Managers doing leadership: the extra-ordinarization of the mundane', *Human Relations*, Vol. 56, No. 12, pp.1435–1459.
- Avolio, B.J. and Gardner, W.L. (2005) 'Authentic leadership development: getting to the root of positive forms of leadership', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp.315–338.
- Avots, I. (1969) 'Why does project management fail?', *California Management Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.77–82.
- Barber, E. and Warn, J. (2005) 'Leadership in project management: from firefighter to firelighter', *Management Decision*, Vol. 43, pp.1032–1039.
- Barczak, G. and Wilemon, D.L. (1989) 'Leadership differences in new product development teams', *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, Vol. 6, No 4, pp.259–267.
- Barker, J., Tjosvold, D. and Andrews, I.R. (1988) 'Conflict approaches of effective and ineffective project managers: a field study in a matrix organization', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp.167–178.
- Bass, B.M. (1990) 'From transactional to transformational leadership: learning to share the vision', *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.19–31.
- Bolden, R. and Gosling, J. (2006) 'Leadership competencies: time to change the tune?', *Leadership*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.147–163.
- Bradford, D.L. and Cohen, A.R. (1998) *Power Up: Transforming Organizations Through Shared Leadership*, New York: Wiley.
- Brown, M.E. and Gioia, D.A. (2002) 'Making things click: distributed leadership in an online division of an offline organization', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.397–419.
- Bryman, A., Bresnen, M., Ford, J., Beardsworth, A. and Keil, T. (1987) 'Leader orientation and organizational transience: an investigation using Fiedler's LPC scale', *Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 60, No. 1, pp.13–19.
- Butler, A.G. (1973) 'Project management: a study in organizational conflict', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp.84–101.
- Carroll, B., Levy, L. and Richmond, D. (2008) 'Leadership as practice: challenging the competency paradigm', *Leadership*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp.363–379.
- Cheung, S.O., Ng, T.S., Lam, K.C. and Yue, W.M. (2001) 'A satisfying leadership behaviour model for design consultants', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 19, pp.421–429.
- Cicmil, S. and Hodgson, D. (2006) 'Introduction', in D.E. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (Eds.) *Making Projects Critical*, London: Palgrave.
- Cicmil, S. and Hodgson, D. (2007) 'The politics of standards in modern management: making "the project" a reality', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 44, pp.431–450.
- Cicmil, S., Hodgson, D., Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2009) 'Project management behind the facade', *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp.78–92.
- Collinson, D. (2005) 'Dialectics of leadership', *Human Relations*, Vol. 58, pp.1419–1442.
- Collinson, D. (2007) 'Collaborative leadership', in D. Collinson (Ed.) *Collaborative Leadership*, Centre for Excellence in Leadership, Lancaster.
- Conger, J.A. (1999) 'Charismatic and transformational leadership in organizations: an insider's perspective on these developing streams of research', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp.145–169.
- Crawford, L. (2005) 'Senior management perceptions of project management competence', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 23, pp.7–16.

- Crevani, L., Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2007a) 'Leadership virtues and management knowledge: questioning the unitary command perspective in leadership research', in M-L. Djelic and R. Vranceanu (Eds.) *Moral Foundations of Management Knowledge*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Crevani, L., Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2007b) 'Shared leadership: a post-heroic perspective on leadership as a collective construction', *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.40–67.
- Denis, J-L., Lamothé, L. and Langley, A. (2001) 'The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp.809–837.
- Dodgson, M., Gann, D. and Salter, A. (2005) *Think, Play, Do: Technology, Innovation and Organization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dolfi, J. and Andrews, E.J. (2007) 'The subliminal characteristics of project managers: an exploratory study of optimism overcoming challenge in the project management work environment', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 25, No. 7, pp.674–682.
- Dulewicz, V. and Higgs, M. (2000) 'Emotional intelligence: a review and evaluation study', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp.341–372.
- Eicher, J.P. (1997) 'Post-heroic leadership: managing the virtual organization', *Performance Improvement*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp.5–10.
- El-Sabaa, S. (2001) 'The skills and career path of an effective project manager', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 19, pp.1–7.
- Engwall, M. (2003) 'No project is an island: linking projects to history and context', *Research Policy*, Vol. 32, No. 5, pp.798–808.
- Ensley, M.D., Pearson, A. and Pearce, C.L. (2003) 'Top management team process, shared leadership, and new venture performance', *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 13, pp.329–346.
- Fabi, B. and Pettersen, N. (1992) 'Human resource management practices in project management', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp.81–88.
- Fiedler, F.E. (1967) *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fletcher, J.K. (2004) 'The paradox of postheroic leadership: an essay on gender, power, and transformational change', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 15, pp.647–661.
- Gaddis, P.O. (1959) 'The project manager', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp.89–97.
- Gällstedt, M. (2003) 'Working conditions in projects: perception of stress and motivation among project team members and project managers', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 21, pp.449–455.
- Gehring, D.R. (2007) 'Applying traits theory of leadership to project management', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp.44–54.
- Goodman, R.A. (1981) *Temporary Systems: Professional Development, Manpower Utilization, Task Effectiveness, and Innovation*, New York: Praeger.
- Goodman, R.A. and Goodman, L.P. (1976) 'Some management issues in temporary systems: a study of professional development and manpower – the theater case', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp.494–501.
- Gordon, R. (2002) 'Viewing the dispersion of leadership through a power lens', in K.W Parry and J. Meindl (Eds.) *Grounding Leadership Theory and Research: Issues, Perspectives, and Methods*, Connecticut: Information Age Publ.
- Gronn, P. (2002) 'Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13, pp.423–451.
- Gullett, C.R. (1972) 'Personnel management in the project organization', *Public Personnel Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp.17–22.
- Gunter, H. (2001) 'Critical approaches to leadership in education', *Journal of Educational Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.94–108.

- Hill, R.E. (1977) 'Managing interpersonal conflict in project teams', *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 18, pp.45–61.
- Hodgetts, R.M. (1968) 'Leadership techniques in the project organization', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.211–219.
- Hodgson, D. (2005) 'Putting on a professional performance: performativity, subversion and project management', *Organization*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.51–68.
- Hosking, D.M. (1988) 'Organizing, leadership and skilful process', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 25, pp.147–166.
- Hosking, D.M. (1991) 'Chief executives, organizing processes, and skill', *European Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 41, pp.95–103.
- Jabri, M.M., Payne, R.L. and Pearson, A.W. (1986) 'Development and use of organisational climate mapping in research and development teams', in M.C. Grool, C. Visser, W.J. Vriethoff and G. Wijnen (Eds.) *Project Management in Progress: Tools and Strategies for the 90's*, Amsterdam: Elsevier Science.
- Jarvenpaa, S.L. and Leidner, D.E. (1999) 'Communication and trust in global virtual teams', *Organization Science*, Vol. 10, No. 6, pp.791–815.
- Jessen, S.A. (1992) *The Nature of Project Leadership*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Jonason, P. (1971) 'Project management, Swedish style', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 47, No. 6, pp.104–109.
- Kangis, P. and Lee-Kelley, L. (2000) 'Project leadership in clinical research organizations', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 18, pp.393–401.
- Katz, R. and Tushman, M. (1981) 'An investigation into the managerial roles and career paths of gatekeepers and project supervisors in a major R&D facility', *R&D Management*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp.103–110.
- Kaulio, M.A. (2008) 'Project leadership in multi-project settings: findings from a critical incident study', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 26, pp.338–347.
- Keegan, A.E. and den Hartog, D.N. (2004) 'Transformational leadership in a project-based environment: a comparative study of the leadership styles of project managers and line managers', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 22, pp.609–617.
- Koivunen, N. (2007) 'The processual nature of leadership discourses', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 23, pp.285–305.
- Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. (1998) *Encouraging the Heart*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Küpers, W. (2007) 'Perspectives on integrating leadership and followership', *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp.194–221.
- Lambert, L. (2002) 'A framework for shared leadership', *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 59, No. 8, pp.37–40.
- Lambert-Olsson, H. (2004) *Delat ledarskap – om äkta och oäkta dubbelkommandon*, Stockholm: Svenska Förlaget.
- Lee-Kelley, L. and Leong Loong, K. (2003) 'Turner's five functions of project-based management and situational leadership in IT services projects', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 21, pp.583–591.
- Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2006) 'What's new in new forms of organizing? On the construction of gender in project-based work', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp.841–866.
- Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2007) 'Performing arts and the art of performing – on co-construction of project work and professional identities in theatres', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 25, pp.354–364.
- Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2009) 'Social constructionism and entrepreneurship: basic assumptions and consequences for theory and research', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.25–47.

- Mäkilouko, M. (2004) 'Coping with multicultural projects: the leadership styles of Finnish project managers', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 22, pp.387–396.
- Meindl, J.R. (1995) 'The romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp.329–341.
- Middleton, C.J. (1967) 'How to set up a project organization', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp.73–82.
- Miles, M.B. (1964) 'On temporary systems', in M.B. Miles (Ed.) *Innovation in Education*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Miles, S.A. and Watkins, M.D. (2007) 'The leadership team: complementary strengths or conflicting agendas?', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, pp.90–98.
- Müller, R. and Turner, J.R. (2007) 'Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 25, pp.21–32.
- Neuhauser, C. (2007) 'Project manager leadership behaviors and frequency of use by female project managers', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp.21–31.
- Nilsson, A. (2008) *Projektledning i praktiken: Observationer av arbete i korta projekt (Project Leadership in Practice: Observations on Work in Short Projects)*, Umeå: Umeå School of Business.
- Ogunlana, S., Siddiqui, Z., Yisa, S. and Olomolaiye P. (2002) 'Factors and procedures used in matching project managers to construction projects in Bangkok', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 20, pp.385–400.
- Olsson, N.O.E. (2008) 'External and internal flexibility – aligning projects with the business strategy and executing projects efficiently', *Int. J. Project Organisation and Management*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.47–64.
- O'Toole, J., Galbraith, J. and Lawler, E.E., III (2003) 'The promise and pitfalls of shared leadership: when two (or more) heads are better than one', in C.L. Pearce and J.A. Conger (Eds.) *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, London: Sage.
- Owens, S.D. and Martin, M.D. (1986) 'Project management and behavioral research in an international context', in M.C. Groot, C. Visser, W.J. Vriethoff and G. Wijnen (Eds.) *Project Management in Progress: Tools and Strategies for the 90's*, Amsterdam: Elsevier Science.
- Packendorff, J. (1995) 'Inquiring into the temporary organization: new directions for project management research', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp.319–333.
- Parry, K.W. and Bryman, A. (2006) 'Leadership in organizations', in S.R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T.B. Lawrence and W.R. Nord (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*, 2nd ed., London: Sage.
- Pearce, C.L. (2004) 'The future of leadership: combining vertical and shared leadership to transform knowledge work', *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.47–57.
- Pearce, C.L. and Conger, J.A. (2003) 'All those years ago: the historical underpinnings of shared leadership', in C.L. Pearce and J.A. Conger (Eds.) *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, London: Sage.
- Pearce, C.L. and Manz, C.C. (2005) 'The new silver bullets of leadership', *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp.130–140.
- Pearce, C.L. and Sims, H.P., Jr. (2002) 'Vertical versus shared leadership as predictors of the effectiveness of change management teams', *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp.172–197.
- Pinto, J.K. and Prescott, J.E. (1988) 'Variations in critical success factors over the stages in the project life cycle', *Journal of Management*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp.5–18.
- Prabhakar, G.P. (2005) 'Switch leadership in projects: an empirical study reflecting the importance of transformational leadership on project success across twenty-eight nations', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp.53–60.
- Reeser, C. (1969) 'Some potential human problems of the project form of organization', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 12, pp.459–467.

- Reicher, S., Haslam, S.A. and Hopkins, N. (2005) 'Social identity and the dynamics of leadership: leaders and followers as collaborative agents in the transformation of social reality', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 16, pp.547–568.
- Roberts, E.B. and Fusfeld, A.R. (1981) 'Staffing the innovative technology-based organization', *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp.19–34.
- Roman, D.D. (1986) *Managing Projects: A Systems Approach*, New York: Elsevier Science.
- Sally, D. (2002) 'Co-leadership: lessons from republican Rome', *California Management Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp.84–99.
- Silverman, M. (1987) *The Art of Managing Technical Projects*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Sims, H.P. and Lorenzi, P. (1992) *The New Leadership Paradigm*, Newbury Park: Sage.
- Slevin, D.P. (1983) 'Motivation and the project manager', in D.I. Cleland and W.R. King (Eds.) *Project Management Handbook*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Smircich, L. and Morgan, G. (1982) 'Leadership: the management of meaning', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.257–273.
- Söderlund, J. (2004) 'On the broadening scope of the research on projects: a review and a model for analysis', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 22, pp.655–667.
- Sotirlou, D. and Wittmer, D. (2001) 'Influence methods of project managers: perceptions of team members and project managers', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp.12–20.
- Spencer, L.M.J. and Spencer, S.M. (1993) *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, New York: Wiley.
- Spillane, J.P. (2006) *Distributed Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Strang, K.D. (2007) 'Examining effective technology project leadership traits and behaviours', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp.424–462.
- Thamhain, H.J. (1987) 'The new project management software and its impact on management style', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.50–54.
- Thamhain, H.J. (2004) 'Team leadership effectiveness in technology-based project environments', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp.35–46.
- Thamhain, H.J. and Gemmill, G.R. (1974) 'Influence styles of project managers: some project performance correlates', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.216–224.
- Thamhain, H.J. and Wilemon, D.L. (1975) 'Conflict management in project life cycles', *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp.31–50.
- Thite, M. (2000) 'Leadership styles in information technology projects', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 18, pp.235–241.
- Toor, S-u-R. and Ofori, G. (2008) 'Leadership for future construction industry: agenda for authentic leadership', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 26, pp.620–630.
- Turner, J.R. and Müller, R. (2005) 'The project manager's leadership style as a success factor on projects: a literature review', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp.49–61.
- Turner, J.R. and Müller, R. (2006) *Choosing Appropriate Project Managers: Matching Their Leadership Style to the Type of Project*, Newtown Square: Project Management Institute.
- Tushman, M.E. (1978) 'Technical communication in R&D laboratories: the impact of project work characteristics', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp.624–645.
- Uhl-Bien, M. (2006) 'Relational leadership theory: exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17, pp.654–676.
- Vanderslice, V.J. (1988) 'Separating leadership from leaders: an assessment of the effect of leader and follower roles in organizations', *Human Relations*, Vol. 41, pp.677–696.
- Vecchio, R.P. (2002) 'Leadership and gender advantage', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13, pp.643–671.

- Walderssee, R. and Eagleson, G. (2002) 'Shared leadership in the implementation of re-orientations', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 7, pp.400–407.
- Wang, E., Chou, H-W. and Jiang, J. (2005) 'The impacts of charismatic leadership style on team cohesiveness and overall performance during ERP implementation', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 23, pp.173–180.
- Wilhelmson, L. (2006) 'Transformative learning in joint leadership', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 18, pp.495–507.
- Woodward, S.N. (1982) 'Performance in planning a large project', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp.183–198.
- Yang, O. and Shao, Y.E. (1996) 'Shared leadership in self-managed teams: a competing values approach', *Total Quality Management*, Vol. 7, No. 5, pp.521–534.
- Zika-Viktorsson, A., Sundström, P. and Engwall, M. (2006) 'Project overload: an exploratory study of work and management in multi-project settings', *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 24, pp.385–394.
- Zimmerer, T.W. and Yasin, M.M. (1998) 'A leadership profile of American project managers', *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp.31–38.

## Note

- 1 The article search was made in November 2008. Using 'leadership' as a keyword in a search at the *International Journal of Project Management* homepage in ScienceDirect, we obtained a total of 48 articles during the journal's lifetime. Of these, 25 explicitly dealt with aspects of leadership that could be related to leadership theory. Approximately 18 articles were published after 1999, indicating a growing interest in project leadership research. Given that the journal has published about 1300 articles since its start, it seems to us that the leadership aspect is underresearched. A similar conclusion can be made where the *Project Management Journal* is concerned; our search yielded a total of 22 articles from 1998 onwards, of which 13 were research articles explicitly built on general leadership theories.