A COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP AS A COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE

Et kommunikativt perspektiv på ledelse – ledelse som en kommunikativ praksis

Master’s Thesis
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Resumé

I denne afhandling fremsætter vi et nyt perspektiv på ledelse – et kommunikativt perspektiv, hvor ledelse ses som en kommunikativ praksis. Vi baserer vores argumentation på en gen-
nemgang af eksisterende ledelseslitteratur, som vi mener i for høj grad fokuserer på lederen som individ, og hvor det primært handler om at kortlægge dennes karakteristika, adfærd og kompetencer. Vi har ikke til hensigt at negligere betydningen af den individuelle leder, men vi mener, at der er behov for at redefinere ledelse som en kommunikativ praksis.

Vi mener, at et kommunikativt perspektiv på ledelse gør det muligt at fremhæve, hvordan kommunikation konstituerer ledelse i organisationer. Vi mener, at dette studie af ledelse i højere grad giver indsigt i måden, hvormed ledelse praktiseres i organisationer, og ved at anlæg-
ge et kommunikativt perspektiv på ledelse vil vi bevise, at ledelse er et komplekst begreb, som fordanner mere end blot karakteristika, adfærd og kompetencer.

Ved at basere vores argumentation på CCO-perspektivet, som ser kommunikation som konstituerende for organisationer, og Foucaults begreb om diskurs finder vi det muligt at redefinere ledelse som en kommunikativ praksis samtidig med at tage højde dets disciplinerende ind-virkning på organisationer. I den forbindelse argumenterer vi for, at det er afgørende at tage højde for, hvordan ledelse materialiserer sig i organisationer, og i den sammenhæng finder vi det relevant at tage både menneskelige og ikke-menneskelige aktører i betragtning. Således argumenterer vi for, at den viden der er forbundet med og den viden som organisationsmed-
lemmer har om f.eks. bygninger, dokumenter og kontrakter ligeledes praktiserer ledelse, når disse gøres gældende i kommunikation.
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1. Introduction

In the preface to her book *Discursive Leadership*, Fairhurst (2007) claims leadership as the topic of the ages. As early as antiquity Plato initiated a discussion of leadership, and during the Renaissance, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* taught leaders how to maintain power over time despite resistance from enemies (Fairhurst 2007). Through the 21st century, scholars heightened their interest in leadership, conducting studies identifying traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership. Today we see an industry of consultants committed to describing and explaining leadership, and a stream of publications in scholarly journals that trace its development and prospects (Fairhurst 2007). A Google search for leadership reveals millions of hits, further emphasizing the expansion of the field. Consultants and industry experts are eager to offer their advice, and in times of organizational crisis they stand in line to blame it all on poor leadership. But what is it about leadership that sustains this interest?

Over the last six years as students at Copenhagen Business School we have been introduced to leadership in several ways. We have read a number of leadership studies and heard both teachers and business executives preach about the importance of good leadership. Not only has it awakened our interest in the field, but it has also fostered the feeling that everything can be said to be about leadership. And, our skepticism about leadership as an all-encompassing concept has only grown larger in recent years with media focusing heavily on organizational crises, blaming leaders for poor economic performance and customer dissatisfaction. Especially after the financial crisis where both national and international businesses were forced to restructure and downsize, we found that organizations plunged into mudslinging in an attempt to place the blame. This development has opened our eyes to how much emphasis media, scholars and professionals practicing leadership put on the individual assigned to a leadership position.

Despite differences across the field, leadership literature and scholarship have a tendency to focus on the personification of leadership by using metaphors to describe the role and qualities of different types of leaders (Spicer & Alvesson 2011). We argue that the main body of leadership literature and scholarship focus on leaders as individuals, primarily taking traits, behaviors, and competencies into account. These use a positivist theoretical framework,
which we find oversimplistic and reductionist (Western 2008). From this perspective, we find that leaders tend to be perceived as formally designated individuals, who act in an organizational context to influence organizational members in particular ways.

We agree that leadership is key to organizations – organizations can be dysfunctional with poor leadership, but without leadership one can argue that they will cease to function properly (Western 2008). However, when focusing on leaders as individuals and conceptualizing leadership as something that resides in particular individuals, we run the risk of neglecting leadership as an essential organizing feature of organizations. We do not find the individual leader the only one to be practicing leadership; instead leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes. Therefore, we argue for a rethinking of leadership that highlights communication as the essential modality of organizing and accounts for the many ways in which leadership is practiced in organizations.

Our argument is supported by scholarship within different fields of study. In order to demonstrate the relevance of a communicative perspective of leadership and to promote a more integrated understanding of the role that communication plays in creating the meanings and the very possibilities of organizational life, Cooren et al. (2011) argue that it is time for a constructive dialogue across communication and organizational literatures. Our reasoning will be based on a constitutive view of communication also referred to as the CCO perspective. The central contribution of the CCO perspective is that it enables a rethinking of ontological and epistemological positions of organizing (Cooren et al. 2011). Instead of viewing communication as merely the transfer of information, this perspective goes further and considers communication as the fundamental process that shapes organizational reality (Koschmann 2012).

Arguing that leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes, we find that much is to be gained by using the CCO perspective as it considers communication as capable of more than simply transferring information. Instead, considering communication as constitutive of organizations, this perspective enables us to question the complexities of practicing leadership in organizations, and hence, understand how leadership manifests itself in organizations. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to show how productive the CCO perspective can be, both theoretically and empirically, when it comes to better understanding
leadership as a communicative practice, and thus, demonstrate the value of a communicative approach to studying leadership.

However, when studying leadership we find it necessary to consider concepts such as power and discipline. We find these to be pervasive and essential features of leadership and closely tied to the ability of organizations to enable and constrain the daily practices initiated by organizational members (Mumby 2013). Despite its explanatory power within organization studies, the CCO perspective does not take these concepts adequately into account. We find that a Foucauldian perspective on discourse offers an explanation of organizational power and discipline that accounts for the ways organizations are constituted. We claim that communication is a broader construct that encompasses research residing outside of discourse studies, and as such, we do not claim that communication and discourse are synonymous (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). However, in order to respond to the shortcomings of the CCO perspective and support our argument, we find it relevant to use both concepts (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). Foucault (1969/1982, 1978/1991b) argues that power and discipline exist within discourse, and it is through discourse that individuals are disciplined. As such, we argue that, by taking Foucault’s (1969/1982, 1978/1991b) work on discourse, power, and discipline into consideration, we are capable of rethinking leadership as a communicative practice while also accounting for its disciplinary effects.

We argue that taking both communication and discourse into consideration poses a challenge to the focus on leaders as individuals. Throughout this thesis we aim to build an argument by using the CCO perspective and Foucault’s (1969/1982) notion of discourse to challenge traditional definitions of leadership. The following thesis statement will guide our argumentation:

*Leadership is a communicative practice, which means that leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes.*

We argue that our conceptualization of leadership poses a challenge to dominant approaches by rejecting the positivist tradition that favors general constructs such as traits, behaviors, and competencies as explanatory mechanisms of leadership. Instead we argue that applying a communicative perspective on leadership has implications for the ways in which leadership is
practiced in organizations. As such, we are not simply extending existing leadership theory; instead we are proposing a new perspective that claims communication the essential modality of leadership.

Blaming leadership literature and scholarship for their unilateral emphasis on leadership as residing in an individual, is not the same as saying that the individual leader is not important. We acknowledge that not all organizations can or should be led in the same way. However, we argue that identifying traits, behaviors, and competencies do not capture the complexities of practicing leadership. Instead we argue that perceiving leadership as continuously created and negotiated in communication enables us to unpack how leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes.

1.1 Building our argument
In the following we will explain our line of reasoning and explain how we aim to build an argument to support our thesis statement. We will base our rethinking of leadership on a critique of existing leadership literature and scholarship. We will review main perspectives and explain their inadequacies. Further, we will provide conceptual clarification by defining key concepts relevant to our thesis statement. Throughout this thesis we use the concepts of leadership and leader interchangeably, and therefore we will provide definitions of both concepts. Also, we will define organization, communication, and discourse and take a critical stance towards the interrelations between these, and explain the relevance of their combined use and their contributions to this study.

In order for us to use a communicative perspective on leadership and argue that leadership manifests in communication through discourse, we will then use the CCO perspective and Foucault’s (1969/1982) notion of discourse. First, we will explain how leadership manifests in communication and then move on to explain how leadership manifests through discourse. To unpack how leadership manifests in communication, we find it important to consider the organizing effects of leadership, but also how it materializes in organizations. As such, we will account for the materiality of the organization and explain why we find it relevant to ascribe agency to both human and non-human agents. Further, to account for power and discipline we will introduce Foucault’s (1969/1982) notion of discourse as we are then capable of rethink-
ing leadership as a communicative practice while accounting for the ways in which organizational members are disciplined, and thus, explain how leadership manifests through discourse.

Throughout this thesis we will support our argumentation by presenting hypothetical examples of how leadership manifests in communication through discourse. These examples are not bound to a specific organization, however, we argue that they provide validity for our claims, and further, relate our study to an organizational context.

2. Arguing for a rethinking of leadership

As mentioned, leadership development programs and the teaching and writing about leadership have turned into a growth industry, and leadership has become buzzword in organizations, business schools, and in social and political arenas. However, we argue that much of the mainstream leadership literature and scholarship is adapted and recycled theory – old news under a new headline. Whether we talk about behavioral, situational, or transformational perspectives on leadership, we argue that they are all concerned with determining traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership – thus, we find that they simply frame the trait-based perspective in new terms.

We argue that another problem when reading leadership literature is that of reductionist theorizing (Western 2008). We find that there are two main reasons for this. First of all, leadership literature and scholarship traditionally focus on positivistic approaches to leadership, focusing on determining general constructs such as traits, behaviors, and competencies as explanatory mechanisms of leadership (Western 2008). Second, we find that the huge industry of leadership literature causes a reductionist tendency, as simple solutions are easier to sell. A simple Google search reveals several approaches of how to become better leaders emphasizing the love of the easy answer and the quick fix solution. Thus, we argue that this reductionism has had a limiting impact on leadership thinking and the complexity of leadership is often reduced to the leader as a solo actor – the leader as an individual (Western 2008). Leadership, then, is considered as a possession or as something residing in particular individuals. As a result, the dominant focus of leadership literature and scholarship is the traits, behaviors, and competencies an individual must have in order to become a better or more successful leader.
Further, leadership is one of social science’s most examined phenomena (Day & Antonakis 2012). Nonetheless, leadership is a complex topic, and trying to make sense of leadership literature and scholarship can be an intimidating task. This is supported by the fact that although leadership is often easy to identify in practice, it is difficult to define (Day & Antonakis 2012). Further, there are about as many definitions of leadership as there are professionals practicing it, but we agree with Day & Antonakis (2012) that leadership can be determined in terms of an influencing process.

Following our thesis statement, our working definition of leadership will be the following:

*Leadership is a communicative practice, which means that leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes involving both human and non-human agents.*

Throughout this thesis we use the concepts of leadership and leader interchangeably. We find that the wording of leader is concerned with the role assigned to individuals, whereas leadership is the process through which organizations are led. As such, our definition of leader will be the following:

*A leader is an individual that holds a superior position in an organization and who is able to control and discipline organizational members.*

In the following, we will provide an overview of the main streams within leadership literature. We will highlight key shifts within leadership theorizing and argue why we find it crucial to rethink leadership as a communicative practice that manifests in communication through discourse.

### 2.1 Generations of leadership

Personal characteristics and context have for years formed the basis for the conception of leadership; however, the interpretations and approaches have changed over time and older theories still exist and compete for currency along with newer theories. Originally written 2,000 years ago, Plato (1993/1997) defended expertise as the basis for leadership and incorpo-
rated a critique of democracy as a method for selecting leaders. For Plato (1993/1997) it was self-evident that the leader was the only one to be trusted, because the leader was the one with the necessary knowledge. Thus, the initial theorizing of leadership was centered on the assumption that some people possessed skills that were desirable for an organization. By focusing on expertise as the basis for leadership, Plato (1993/1997) emphasized the importance of personal characteristics and made the leader an essential part of leadership. Plato (1993/1997) wrote against a background of war and conflict, and therefore it is crucial to remember that he did not write in a political vacuum (Grint 1997). Thus, his attempt to theorize leadership is not only relevant to understanding leadership under crisis conditions, but we find that it is still applicable today.

This is also the case for Machiavelli (1984/1997). In the 16th century, Machiavelli’s (1984/1997) aim was to turn attention towards what leaders do and how success was achieved and failure avoided. His plea to leadership was not to act immorally, but to consider the inefficacy of acting morally in an immoral world (Machiavelli 1984/1997). If a leader wanted to maintain his position, he had to learn how to use knowledge according to the specific situation. According to Machiavelli (1984/1997), the end does not justify the means, but one must consider the final result. However, his approach to leadership was not centered on the leader alone and he was keen to point out the role that appearance played in the development of a strong leader. For a leader to survive, he had to establish alliances with others in order for the nation to be considered as a corporate entity and gain goodwill of the people (Machiavelli 1984/1997, Grint 1997). As such, both Plato (1993/1997) and Machiavelli (1984/1997) exemplify how the focus for centuries has been on the individual leader. We argue that it is time for a rethinking.

2.1.1 Trait theories of leadership

From antiquity, to the Renaissance and through the 20th century, the number of perspectives on leadership increased exponentially. Most commonly, leadership was defined by analyzing individual leaders and their internal personality traits in order to determine what made them successful leaders (Day & Antonakis 2012). Historically, researchers have tried to define what traits make a good leader, and this focus on the innate personality of leaders originated with thoughts on great men, arguing that men would emerge as heroic figures and lead
through difficulties (Day & Antonakis 2012, Western 2008). In this line of reasoning, leadership is most commonly defined as the property of an individual actor. The basic premise is that leadership is a set of traits that an individual is born with. These traits can be defined as relatively coherent and integrated patterns of personal characteristics that reflect a range of individual differences that foster consistent leadership effectiveness (Zaccaro 2007). Some of the traits that have been found to have a connection with successful leadership include: General cognitive capacity and skills, integrity, emotional stability, self-assurance and confidence, interpersonal skills, physical attributes and adaptability (Zacarro 2007). This perspective suggests that certain characteristics differentiate leaders from non-leaders, and hence research focuses on identifying individual differences to be associated with effective leadership. From this point of view, finding individuals that share the same characteristics as existing successful leaders can identify future successful leaders (Zaccaro 2007).

Although research within the trait-based perspective is still heavily influential, we argue that it has too many limitations to provide an adequate explanation of effective leadership. The most common critique of the trait-based perspective is that it is a one-size-fits-all approach, where leadership is defined as a set of given traits that suggests a preferred leadership style, which all individuals must have in order to become a effective leader (Western 2008). Also, we question whether it is possible to identify a universal set of leadership characteristics that are relevant and can be applied regardless of the context. Further, we argue that putting this much emphasis on leadership characteristics, the trait-based perspective fails to take context into account. When listing the traits required by leaders, it is rather easy to come up with any number of characteristics, but it is usually impossible for anyone to name leaders who possess all these traits (Grint 1997). Therefore, we argue that selecting leaders on the premise of traits is counterproductive as it sets up a model of leadership that only a few can match. Leadership does not exist in a vacuum and conditions change quickly and pose new and complex requirements on leaders. We find that the trait-based perspective fails to account for these complexities associated with leading challenging and diverse workplaces (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007, Judge et al. 2009, Western 2008). What may seem adequate in one situation may be irrelevant when situations change (Judge et al. 2009).
2.1.2 Behavioral theories of leadership

In the 1940s and 1950s, as a result of the critical reviews on the trait-based perspective, leadership researchers began to focus on the behaviors of leaders. They focused their attention on what leaders actually do instead of focusing on leadership as an innate ability. Hence, the argument is that leaders to some extent can be trained to perform a certain leadership behavior in order to become more efficient (Western 2008).

Two of the most popular studies within behavioral theories of leadership are the studies from Ohio State University and the University of Michigan (Hersey et al. 2008). The Ohio State University studies were conducted in the 1940s with the purpose of identifying key dimensions of leader behavior (Hersey et al. 2008). The research was based on a questionnaire given to both leaders and organizational members. This questionnaire came to be known as Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) and was designed to measure different behavioral leadership dimensions and describe how leaders carry out their activities (Hersey et al. 2008). The Ohio State Studies led to the conclusion that there were primarily two dimensions of leader behavior: initiating structure and consideration. Initiating structure was concerned with the type of leader behavior that described the extent to which leaders were oriented towards directing organizational members in the fulfillment of tasks. In contrast, consideration referred to the type of leader behavior that described the extent to which a leader was sensitive to organizational members and established mutual trust (Hersey et al. 2008). At the same time, the leadership studies conducted at the University of Michigan located clusters of characteristics determining various indicators of effective leadership. The studies identified two main indicators: Employee-orientation and production-orientation (Hersey et al. 2008). Employee-oriented leaders were said to emphasize the relationship aspect of their job by paying attention to the needs of organizational members, whereas production-oriented leaders emphasized the technical aspects of their jobs seeing organizational members as tools to accomplish organizational goals (Hersey et al. 2008). These two studies developed actual methodologies for identifying leader behaviors. Despite measuring leader behavior on answers partly provided by organizational members, we find that these methodologies still focus too heavily on the individual leader and their inherited traits. We find that the studies simply pay too much attention to the tasks that leaders are expected to conduct leaving organizational members at the periphery.
Barnard (1948/1997) also focused on the relationship between leaders and organizational members. Thus, he perceived leadership to be a function of three complex variables: The individual leader, organizational members and the context (Barnard 1948/1997). Critical to his approach was the integration of the three variables, from which Barnard (1948/1997) argued that the tendency to define traits and characteristics of the individual leader was a mistake. Instead, he aimed to shift focus towards an empathetic understanding of organizational members (Barnard 1948/1997). Barnard (1948/1997) promoted the notion of a contingency approach to leadership emphasizing that leaders must know how to act in a particular situation. Furthermore, one must acknowledge that situations can vary from stable to extreme conditions, which requires different behavioral approaches (Barnard 1948/1997). His work concluded that there are five fundamental characteristics of leaders: Vitality and endurance, decisiveness, persuasiveness, responsibility and intellectual capacity (Barnard 1948/1997). Despite Barnard’s (1948/1997) aim to put more emphasis upon organizational members and the context, we find that he ends up supporting the common opinion of leadership as an inherited trait residing in individuals.

However, this search for personal characteristics as predictors for leadership success has been critiqued by scholars such as Stogdill (1950/1997). Stogdill (1950/1997) questioned the number of traits that was said to be related to leadership effectiveness, and ended up concluding that some traits appeared to be more related with effective leadership than others (Grint 1997). Variables such as age, height, and weight appeared of marginal interest, while role modeling and symmetry between leaders and organizational members were of greater importance (Grint 1997). Stogdill’s (1950/1997) work included the development of a scientific approach to leadership demonstrating the way leadership behavior could be contextually measured and explained (Stogdill 1950/1997). Contrary to Barnard (1948/1997), Stogdill (1950/1997) was not concerned with the importance of characteristics (Grint 1997). Stogdill (1950/1997) argued that leadership itself was not so much an attribute of individuals as an aspect of the organizational context – it appeared in organizations as an interactional process, whereby leadership also could be said to derive from those not assigned to formal positions (Stogdill 1950/1997). As mentioned, he determined some characteristics to be more related to leadership effectiveness, but despite an increased focus on the organizational context, we ar-
gue that Stogdill’s (1950/1997) approach to leadership puts just as much emphasis on leadership as residing in particular individuals as the perspectives focused on identifying traits.

2.1.3 Contingency or situational theories of leadership

As a response to the behavioral perspective on leadership and its ignorance of context, researchers began to investigate the situational factors surrounding leaders. This contingency or situational approach to leadership argued that a leadership style is dependent on the situation and that a leader needs a variety of leadership styles in order to be effective and successful across a range of situations (Western 2008). Thus, the contingency approach attempts to rescue leadership theory from the simplistic notion of the one-best-fit leader for all situations (Western 2008).

Fiedler (1976/1997) suggested that a leadership style had to be different according to the situation, and thus attempted to find an optimal match between leadership style and situation. Fiedler’s (1976/1997) contingency approach challenged the one-size-fits-all approach characteristic to the trait-based perspective, and focused on a two-factor model of relationship-centered and task-centered leaders, where the context of the organizational environment determines the kind of leadership behavior that the situation requires (Fiedler 1976/1997, Grint 1997). The model was based on two different forms of leadership behavior: relationship-motivated leadership and task-motivated leadership (Fiedler 1976/1997). Fiedler (1976/1997) argued that leadership styles could be determined through the least preferred co-worker (LPC), which was a model of contingent leadership. The LPC approach asked leaders to describe the person they would least like to work with (Fiedler 1976/1997). The answers formed the basis for a model, where the total score determined the leadership style. If the total score was high, one was likely to be a relationship-motivated leader. If the total score was low, then one was more likely to be a task-motivated leader (Fiedler 1976/1997). Task-motivated leaders performed best where the situation was one of either high or low control, whereas relationship-motivated leaders performed best when the control situation was moderate (Fiedler 1976/1997). Thus, leader effectiveness was determined by how favorable the situation was to the leader – what seemed an appropriate form of leadership today, could be inappropriate tomorrow (Grint 1997). Furthermore, the contingency approach argued that organizational performance could be improved by enabling the leader’s ability to diagnose and modify situ-
ational control in order to maintain an optimal match between leadership style and situation in a continuously changing environment (Fiedler 1976/1997, Grint 1997).

However, critics have argued that the LPC method rests on a measure of personality not on behavior (Grint 1997). Despite the contingency approach’s attempt to address the contexts in which leaders engage, we argue that the approach still offers an over-simplistic perspective due to the fact that it does not account for the complexity of understanding relationships, power, and leadership from multiple perspectives (Western 2008). In order to do so, much more research is required. First of all, attention needs to be paid to size as different leadership styles may be required depending on the size of the organization (Grint 1997). Secondly, one also has to consider that leadership skills differ hugely when working with groups of different size. Finally, different organizations have diverse organizational structures and cultures depending on the social, political, and environmental context in which they exist (Grint 1997). In addition, Grint (1997) argues that we may be able to measure leader’s preferences for organizational members, but can we measure the situation with any degree of accuracy? If not, then the contingency approach is based on unstable foundations. Also, if we take a situational perspective on leadership, does it mean that organizations only have to focus on leadership when the situation requires it? From this perspective, we argue that one can be led to consider leadership as something an organization pulls out in certain situations giving the impression that leadership is simply a matter of crisis management. In consequence, one might question the daily practices of leadership.

2.1.4 Modern approaches to leadership
In the beginning of the 1980s, modern approaches to leadership emerged. We find that these approaches are concerned with the active engagement of organizational members, but they also return to the innate characteristics of the leader found in the trait-based perspective.

This concern for organizational members is reflected in transactional leadership that involves an exchange between leaders and organizational members (Bass 1990). Leaders engage in a transaction with organizational members in which they explain what is required of them and what compensation they will receive if they fulfill these requirements (Bass 1990). As such, leaders get things done in organizations by fulfilling promises of recognition, pay increase,
and advancement if organizational members perform well. By contrast, organizational members who do not perform well are penalized, and it is this exchange – reward for good performance and discipline for poor performance – that according to Bass (1990) characterizes effective leadership. Thus, transactional leadership is centered on the notion of satisfying both the leader’s and the followers’ self-interest.

Transformational leadership emerged as a response to transactional leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on transforming and inspiring followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization (Bass 1990):

“Superior leadership performance – transformational leadership – occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the group.” (Bass 1990; 21)

Thus, transformational leaders prioritize the collective interests of the organization rather than their own self-interest. Being a transformational leader requires certain skills and personal qualities in order to identify the appropriate courses of action. Hence, transformational leadership occurs when leaders broaden the interests of organizational members, when they generate awareness of the organization’s mission, and when they stir organizational members to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the organization (Bass 1990).

Transformational leaders are characterized by charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass 1990). Charismatic leaders possess great power and influence, and organization members have a high degree of trust and confidence in them. Charismatic leaders also inspire organizational members with the idea that they may accomplish great things (Bass 1990). Further, intellectually stimulating leaders show organizational members new ways of looking at old problems, and teach them to see difficulties as problems to be solved emphasizing rational solutions (Bass 1990). Finally, leaders are individually considerate and thus pay close attention to differences among the organization members by acting as mentors (Bass 1990). As a result, transformational leaders provide vision and a sense of mission, communicate important purposes in simple ways, promote intelligence, rationality,
and careful problem solving as well as give personal attention and guide organizational members (Bass 1990). However, despite its focus on the exchange processes between leaders and organizational members, transformational leadership still focuses on determining the characteristics required of a leader when dealing with certain situations. Despite the contributions made by transformational leadership, we still question what determines transformational leadership, and why some leaders engage in transformational leadership behavior when others do not. Finally, in order to understand how and when transformational leadership is more effective than other leadership models, Avolio et al. (2009) argue that research exploring the boundary conditions for transformational leadership is needed.

Transformational leadership is also relevant when talking about women and leadership. Around the 1980s and 1990s, women began to move into leadership positions as the old industries in the West were gradually displaced by new industries that gave way to the patriarchal traditions often found in the manufacturing industry (Grint 1997). As such, the traditional hierarchical organization that favors authority is giving way to more feminine qualities such as caring and concern for the individual, sharing, and promoting collaboration across levels (Grint 1997, Bass & Avolio 1994/1997). In relation to Bass’s (1990) own work on the distinction between transactional leadership and transformational leadership, Bass and Avolio (1994/1997) identify differences in the way women and men lead. They argue that women tend to be more aligned with transformational leadership, which may be due to different socialization that aligns men and women with different role models or simply because men and women are different by nature. An explanation could also be that women have to perform better and work harder than their male colleagues in order to have the same position and get equal pay (Grint 1997). However, despite the fact that women represent a large proportion of the work force, we do not think that the glass ceiling will shatter in the near future. Women are still less represented in leadership positions than men, and therefore we argue that we need to think differently about leadership and move away from perceiving leadership as a matter of gender. This claim is supported by Rosener (1995/1997), who argues that the only women who succeed in leadership are those who ascribe to male values and command-and-control methods. Putting this much emphasis on gender reveals a continued focus on the ways leadership resides in particular individuals. Whether it is a man or a woman appointed to the leadership position, leadership is still tied to certain embodied characteristics.
Another approach that also pays attention to the active engagement of organizational members is democratic leadership. Gastil (1994/1997) argues that democratic leadership, is concerned with how organizational members take a participative role in decision-making processes and are encouraged to share their opinions (Gastil 1994/1997). Gastil (1994/1997) provides the following definition:

“[...] democratic leadership is behavior that influences people in a manner consistent with and/or conducive to basic democratic principles and processes such as self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation.” (Gastil 1994/1997; 158)

Also, Gastil (1994/1997) argues that democratic leaders must empower organizational members in order to ensure that every member has a level of competence within leadership so that the counterproductive effects of leadership can be avoided (Grint 1997). These counterproductive effects include negative attitudes among organizational members, lack of innovative thinking, and inefficiency. Further, democratic leaders facilitate the democratic process itself, which is done by keeping organizational members focused and ensuring that the norms of behavior are followed (Grint 1997). In this way, the process by which the decision is made becomes the leader’s primary focus (Grint 1997). In contrast to democratic leadership, Gastil (1994/1997) suggests that undemocratic leaders can generate apathetic followers, complicate decision-making processes, and undermine certain ethical ideals (Grint 1997).

The democratic approach to leadership differs from the more traditional perspectives by including organizational members as an important part of the decision-making process even though the leader still has the final say over decisions. Democratic leadership makes organizational members feel more involved and committed. Nonetheless, we argue that one of the downsides may be that organizational members do not have the required knowledge or expertise in order to be able to contribute to the decision-making process. Therefore, democratic leadership can result in an inefficient decision-making process with the risk of making decisions on the wrong basis.
2.1.5 New approaches to leadership

At the outset of the field of leadership, the primary focus is the individual leader (Avolio et. al 2009). Common to the perspectives presented above is that they all seek to identify certain qualifications and characteristics necessary for a leader to be successful. The first research on leadership has a rather conservative notion of leaders, organizational members, and how communication operates. From this perspective, leaders tend to be perceived as formally designated individuals, who act in an organizational context to influence organizational members in particular ways. In much of the first research, organizational members are not adequately accounted for in the leadership process itself, and the communication between leaders and organizational members is only conceived as the transmission of information from one part to another. Leadership scholarship needs to move away from this way of perceiving leadership and start considering leadership in its dynamic dimension. When looking at leadership as residing in particular individuals, we run the risk of missing out on important organizational aspects such as the active engagement of organizational members and other agents and their partaking in the constitution of leadership. Other new approaches to leadership are considering these aspects.

One of the new approaches to leadership is complexity leadership, where leadership is defined as:

“[...] a complex interactive dynamic from which adaptive outcomes e.g. learning, innovation, and adaptability emerge.” (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007; 298)

Based on the concept of complexity, leadership is seen not only as a position, but also as an emergent, interactive dynamic, where leadership becomes an emergent phenomenon (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Thus, complexity leadership implies that to achieve optimal performance, organizations cannot be designed with simple, rational structures that underestimate the complexity of the context in which the organization must function. Instead, organizations should be built by flexible structures with multiple, overlapping hierarchies (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Leadership is too complex to be described as only the act of an individual. Therefore, complexity leadership distinguishes between leaders and leadership. Leadership is an emergent, interactive process that leads to adaptive outcomes, whereas leaders are individuals who in-
fluence this process (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Despite placing leadership in the foreground of their reasoning and adding to leadership research a consideration of mechanisms and contexts, we argue that Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) still ascribe the individual leader a crucial role finding the influence of individuals, particularly those in positions of authority, to be the main focus of complexity leadership theorizing. Emphasizing that leaders are the only ones who can influence the practice of leadership places the participation of others in the background.

Servant leadership is also a new way of approaching leadership that puts serving others as its highest priority. Servant leadership emphasizes the importance of serving others, promoting a sense of community, and sharing power in decision-making processes (Greenleaf 2004). According to Greenleaf (2004), a servant leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve others. Furthermore, a servant leader primarily focuses on the growth and well-being of organizational members and their surroundings. In contrast to traditional leadership theories with the leader exercising power from the top of the organization, a servant leader shares power, puts other’s needs first, and helps organizational members develop and perform as much as possible (Greenleaf 2004). Greenleaf (2004) argues that the following characteristics are essential in order to develop servant leadership: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of and building community. Hence, servant leadership is based on intrinsically motivating organizational members to perform for the good of the organization and their own well-being.

However, focusing on the well-being of organizational members, we argue that it is important to bear in mind that organizational members are a means to an end, and therefore, we find that servant leadership cannot be applied to all organizational situations and contexts. We argue that not all situations enable leaders to focus primarily on the well-being of organizational members; organizations simply have to be profitable, and therefore some situations require the leader to put the organizations’ needs first and not the ones of organizational members.

We acknowledge that leaders should motivate and engage organizational members, but we agree with Andersen (2009) in arguing that servant leadership is not really distinct from other types of leadership – other approaches to leadership also focuses on motivating and engaging organizational members. Andersen (2009) argues that if servant leadership is to be different
from other perspectives, one should be able to observe specific characteristics or behaviors applicable to servant leaders. Despite finding Andersen’s (2009) critique relevant saying that servant leadership cannot really be distinguished from other leadership perspectives, we argue that his reasoning simply rely on the trait-based perspective. As such, when arguing that servant leaders should possess certain characteristics and behave in certain ways, he simply adapts elements from the trait-based perspective giving them a servant label. Andersen’s (2009) quest for determining when or if a leader is servant nurtures our critique of determining traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership. As mentioned, Greenleaf (2004) lists different characteristics essential to servant leadership, but in our opinion, these are simply recycled from other leadership perspectives that also emphasize the importance of characteristics and behavior.

Servant leadership is rather closely related to spiritual leadership, which is also one of the new approaches to leadership. Like servant leadership, spiritual leadership is centered on values, attitudes, and behaviors that intrinsically motivate one’s self and others (Fry 2003). Spiritual leadership is defined as:

“[…] comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership.” (Fry 2003; 711)

Thus, spiritual leadership is a dynamic process where people seek to discover their potential. It also entails establishing an organizational culture that is based on altruistic love and where leaders and organizational members have concern and appreciation for both self and others (Fry 2003). Fry (2003) proposes a holistic approach to leadership that integrates the four fundamental forces of human existence: Body, mind, heart, and spirit. Applying spiritual leadership in an organization, Fry (2003) argues that organizational members are motivated for high performance, are more committed to their job, and experience joy and peace. He also proposes that spiritual leadership takes the needs of both leader and organizational members into consideration (Fry 2003). Yet again, the individual leader is the center of attention with focus on how certain characteristics can lead to effective and successful leadership. When looking
at leadership from this perspective, one overlooks the role of other agents in the leadership process.

It is important to take into account that spiritual leadership is not related to anything religious, and according to Hicks (2002), spiritual leadership can be considered in relation to team spirit. As such, spiritual leadership is focused on the leader providing a vision to organizational members. Hence, we cannot ignore the fact that spiritual leadership is focused on leaders as having a set of spiritual characteristics that are motivating and can create a sense of calling among organizational members. However, as Hicks (2002) mentions in his article, leadership scholars state that spirituality is multifaceted. Further, he argues that it is difficult to provide a definition of what spirituality is, as it would be limiting to the term (Hicks 2002). Therefore, one should be careful not overlooking the complexity of the concept and the fact that spirituality can mean different things to different people, which can create disagreements and misunderstandings in the workplace. In the end, different and divergent views on spirituality can make it difficult for leaders and organizational members to work effectively together. Therefore, we agree with Hicks (2002) in that there is a need for a more careful development of spirituality that takes the complexity of the term into account in order to understand the role of spirituality in organizational contexts. When it comes to spirituality in relation to team spirit and organizational commitment, we do follow the reasoning in spiritual leadership. However, when it comes to creating a sense of calling among organizational members, we do not find the perspective reasonable. Instead, we find that organizations have to acknowledge that some organizational members simply go to work in order to earn a living, and might not be susceptible to perceiving ones job as a sense of calling.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the role of leadership across cultural contexts. This is partly due to globalization and the need for leaders to work from and across a diverse set of locations and in multicultural contexts (Avolio et al. 2009). Cross-cultural leadership can be defined as:

“[…] having a broad set of experiences and competencies that allow leaders to manage across cultures rather than focusing on a deep knowledge of one or two specific cultures.” (Avolio et al. 2009; 438)
One of the influential cross-cultural leadership studies is GLOBE (global leadership and organizational behavioral effectiveness) that is designed to develop an empirically based theory and to examine the beliefs that different cultures have about effective leaders (Guthey & Jackson 2011). The research concludes that even though leadership behavior varies by culture, certain leadership attributes such as charisma, transformational, and team-oriented behavior are rather universal (Guthey & Jackson 2011). Despite the fact that the goal of identifying leaders who are able to lead across a variety of cultures is the focus of the main literature on cross-cultural leadership, no substantial approach remains in how cross-cultural leadership is defined (Avolio et al. 2009). This is due to the existence of several approaches to cross-cultural leadership. One approach focuses on the importance of international experience emphasizing that leaders must have lived in different cultures in order to be a cross-cultural leader (Avolio et al. 2009). Another approach is centered on the competencies required by a leader in order to be an effective and successful leader (Avolio et al. 2009).

Requesting leaders to adapt to different cultural contexts, we argue that cross-cultural leadership can be seen as a subdiscipline to situational leadership. As argued in the aforementioned situational approaches to leadership, leaders must behave in accordance to various cultural contexts, and as such, he/she is expected to posses certain characteristics and competencies. First of all, leaders not only have to be open to the differences they meet when interacting with other cultures, they also have to show respect to cultures that might be very different from their own and be able to overcome their own cultural norms and values (Dickson et al. 2003). Thus, it is expected of cross-cultural leaders that they can engage in problem solving across cultures and build partnerships based on mutual trust, respect and obligation (Dickson et al. 2003). However, when describing cross-cultural leadership, one of the first things that come to our mind is the characteristics and behaviors that leaders must assert in order to lead in cross-cultural contexts. Despite an increased focus on context, we argue that cross-cultural leadership still focuses too heavily on the individual.

Shared leadership presents yet another way of approaching leadership. According to Pearce and Conger (2003), shared leadership is defined as:
“A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peers, or lateral influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence.” (Pearce & Conger 2003; 1).

From this definition it becomes clear that shared leadership is distributed throughout the organization rather than localized in any one individual (Pearce & Conger 2003). The perspective is heavily inspired by cross-functional teams that are not determined by position, but rather an individual’s ability to influence other team members (Pearce & Conger 2003). Thus, shared leadership becomes a property of the entire organization as opposed to the property of the individual. This perspective on leadership moves away from seeing leadership as a possession recognizing that leadership can reside in others than the formally appointed leader. Hence, shared leadership opens the door in order to investigate further how leadership manifests in organizations. Distributing the practice of leadership throughout the organization rather than localizing it in particular individuals, we find that this perspective correlates with the communicative perspective on leadership that we propose. Even though shared leadership provides an interesting perspective on leadership, we still find it inadequate, as it does not ascribe agency to others than individuals.

2.2 Moving beyond conceptualizing leadership as residing in particular individuals

From this overview it should be clear that much of the mainstream leadership literature and scholarship is adapted and recycled theory that simply rely on determining traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership. We certainly acknowledge that there has been a development in the way in which leadership has been conceptualized, however, the focus on the individual leader seems to permeate leadership literature and scholarship. From antiquity to recent studies of cross-cultural leadership, we argue that scholars have focused too heavily on determining traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership. We do not undermine the importance of the individual leader, and to put this in another way, we do not argue that there should be no leader. However, we argue that we have to rethink leadership as a communicative practice. As such, we must acknowledge that it is not only the individual leader who can be said to perform leadership, but also other organizational
elements must be ascribed agency. In the following, we will present a communicative perspective on leadership that takes these issues of agency into account.

3. The interrelations between organization, communication, and discourse
In order for us to suggest a communicative perspective on leadership and argue that leadership manifests in communication through discourse, we find it necessary to describe the relationship between organization, communication, and discourse. In the following, we will provide definitions of both organizational communication and organizational discourse.

3.1 Defining organizational communication
For the purpose of this thesis, we define organizational communication as:

“ [...] the process of creating and negotiating collective, coordinated systems of meaning through symbolic practices oriented toward the achievement of organizational goals.” (Mumby 2013; 15)

This perspective on organizational communication is shaped by the linguistic turn in social theory, which identifies language as a basic ontological condition as it is actively involved in the production rather than the reflection of social realities (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Further, it captures the dynamic relationship between organization and communication and shows how each produces, and is produced by, the other (Mumby 2013). As such, our definition of organizational communication proceeds upon the claim that communication does not merely express, but also create social realities.

However, over the years scholars have encountered different perspectives on organizational communication, where communication mainly has been seen as the different activities that take place in organizations such as sending emails, talking on the phone, having meetings, and writing reports (Koschmann 2012). This perspective sees the organization as a container and communication is what flows within, transferring information from one organizational member to another (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Jian et al. 2008, Eisenberg et al. 2007, Koschmann 2012). This conventional view on communication, also referred to as the information-transfer perspective, views communication as a metaphoric pipeline through which information flows
within the organization, and communication is seen as a tool that organizational members use to accomplish certain objectives (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Eisenberg et al. 2007). Thus, communication is shaped by the structure of the organization, and therefore organizations exist separately from communication (Eisenberg et al. 2007, Koschmann 2012). Critics of the information-transfer perspective argue that it is simplistic and incomplete, painting a picture of communication as a sequential process (Eisenberg et al. 2007). The model assumes that the receiver remains passive and is uninvolved in constructing the meaning of the information given (Eisenberg et al. 2007). Therefore, dissatisfaction with the information-transfer perspective has led to the development of the transactional-process model (Eisenberg et al. 2007). This model asserts that in actual communication, no clear distinctions are made between senders and receivers. The model highlights the importance of organizational members engaging in both sending and receiving information simultaneously (Eisenberg et al. 2007). As such, the transactional-process model differs from the information-transfer perspective in terms of the presumed location of the meaning of the information given. In the information-transfer perspective, the meaning of information resides with the sender, while the transactional-process model focuses on the person receiving the information and on how the receiver constructs meaning of the information (Eisenberg et al. 2007).

However, looking at organizational communication as something that happens within an organization makes sense because activities such as sending emails, talking on the phone, having meetings, and writing reports explain an important aspect of our dealings with other organizational members, and it is how the work of organizations gets done (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Koschmann 2012). Getting the right information to the right people is critical. If organizations do not communicate the right information to the right people in the right way, communication breakdowns may occur, directions not followed, customers left unsatisfied, and regulations disregarded (Koschmann 2012). And so, the information-transfer perspective and the transactional-process model are not wrong to perceive communication as a simple process of transferring information – we certainly need effective communication in order for organizations to manage its day-to-day operations (Koschmann 2012). However, we argue that the perspectives fail to account for the subtleties and complexities of organizational reality. Defining organizational communication as a complex process of continually creating and negotiating the meanings and interpretations that shape social reality contrasts with the before mentioned
perspectives, and it radically changes the understanding of human interaction in organizations meaning that we have to think differently about both organizations and communication (Koschmann 2012).

### 3.1.1 Communication as constitutive of organizations

Instead of viewing organizational communication as merely the transfer of information, viewing communication as constitutive of organizations enables us to consider communication as the fundamental process that shapes organizational reality (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Communication is not something that occurs within organizations; rather, we find that organizations come into being through communication processes (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Cooren et al. 2011). As such, communication creates and maintains organizations, and thus, we argue that communication becomes the medium where organizations are continually negotiated.

Defining organizational communication as a complex process of continually creating and negotiating the meanings and interpretations that shape organizational reality, communication cannot be considered to be simply one of many factors involved in organizing; rather it is the means by which organizations are constituted and sustained (Cooren et al. 2011). This reasoning is referred to as a constitutive view of communication, because communication literally constitutes organizations (Cooren et al. 2011, Ashcraft et al. 2009). The CCO perspective questions the very notion of organizations. Organizations are not neutral structures that exist apart from human activity – instead they are the visible manifestations of human activity (Cooren et al. 2011, Ashcraft et al. 2009, Koschmann 2012). An organization is an ongoing collection of interactions, decisions, messages, interpretations, symbols, negotiations, agreements, contracts etc. (Cooren et al. 2011, Ashcraft et al. 2009). Certainly, there are material and physical things such as buildings, technologies and documents that make up the organization, but these have no inherent meaning apart from human activity, and following Koschmann’s (2012) reasoning these material and physical things are given meaning as an organization only through communication. Contrary to viewing organizations as separate from communication, the CCO perspective assumes that organizations exist as communication.
We argue that a constitutive view of communication enables us to question and investigate key organizational realities. The perspective highlights how communication generates defining realities of organizational life, and so we can question the existence of the organization, its structure, its forms of power, its guiding assumptions, and its norms and operations (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Koschmann 2012). If these are not natural but rather come into existence through communication processes, such as implementing a large-scale organizational change or navigating the politics of an organization, then we can examine the implications of these processes and explore ways of organizing (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Koschmann 2012). Thus, the CCO perspective provides an explanatory framework from which to understand the complexities of organizational realities, and as such, it enables us to question how leadership manifests in organizations. Not only does the CCO perspective bring human activity to the core, but it also enables us to question how organizational materiality and physicality can be said to practice leadership when invoked in communication. Throughout this thesis we will explain how organizational materiality such as buildings, technologies, and written documents participate in the practice of leadership.

3.2 Defining organizational discourse
Despite its explanatory power within organization studies, the CCO perspective does not take the concepts of power and discipline adequately into consideration. In order to account for power and discipline, we rely on Foucault’s (1969/1982) notion of discourse, and as such, we define organizational discourse as:

_A constellation of ideas, logics, assumptions, and linguistic patterns that come to dominate a particular organizational context._

However, the increased focus on organizations as discursive constructions has led to an enormous diversity of what is labeled organizational discourse. Despite the multifarious meanings of organizational discourse, we find it possible to identify some distinctive takes on the term. Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) aim to reduce the confusion and facilitate more informed research into organizational discourse proceeds from different approaches to discourse:
“[...] the study of the social text (talk and written text in its social action contexts) and the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained (the shaping of social reality through language).” (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000; 1126)

Simply, discourse can be distinguished as discourse that refers to talk and text in social practices and Discourse, which includes general and enduring systems of thought. Studies that highlight the concept of discourse pay close attention to the formative role of everyday language use, and consider the processes in which organizational members construct various aspects of organizational reality, accomplish work tasks, and manage work relationships (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000, Jian et al. 2008). By contrast, studies that highlight the concept of Discourse are interested in showing how Discourse constitutes subjectivities, establishes and naturalizes managerial control, and disciplines the human body (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000, Jian et al. 2008).

In later writings Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) provide a more critical overview of the tendencies within the field of discourse arguing that the ways in which the concept is being used take the constitutive effects of discourse for granted. The main reason for this problem lies in the tendencies for reductionism, as scholars allow no space for anything other than discourse and often claim discourse as the explanation to any organizational phenomena. Also, defining discourse in broad terms overpacks the concept making it difficult to use, and creating problems of focus and coherence. The analytical value of discourse diminishes if it is defined in such ubiquitous terms. In order to overcome these problems, Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) propose a less colonizing approach that narrows the concept of discourse by relativizing its muscularity and allowing space for other approaches. Also, they argue that scholars should counterbalance the concept of discourse acknowledging that organizational phenomena can also be explained in other ways than through language use (Alvesson & Kärreman 2011). In other words, they suggest that scholars consider how to provide explanations without necessarily privileging discourse as the only way of conceptualizing the empirical field. Finally, Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) suggest disconnecting and addressing discourse and Discourse as two separate phenomena through a more disciplined discourse vocabulary. In order to do so, they suggest the concepts of text-focused studies and paradigm-type discourse studies to better indicate what scholars are addressing when talking about discourse. However, we
find that discourse and Discourse have always been treated as two separate concepts, and so we see no relevance in naming those in new ways.

To a certain extent, Mumby (2011) finds Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2011) concerns about overpacking and colonization reasonable. Mumby (2011) argues that scholars within the field of discourse have not always addressed the distinction between discourse and Discourse sufficiently, and thus, scholars have made claims using one perspective while also making these applicable to the other. Hardy and Grant (2012) not only question Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) distinction between discourse and Discourse arguing that the bounded categories give rise to an either/or dualism; they also argue that by disconnecting discourse and Discourse scholars run the risk of reinforcing boundaries further. And so, they ask scholars not to divide discourse into categories but instead to think about ways of collapsing, transgressing and erasing the boundaries constructed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, 2011).

We agree with Hardy and Grant (2012); by establishing boundaries we might end up narrowing down the explanatory power of discourse. However, we also find it important to take Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2011) concerns of reductionism, overpacking, and colonization into consideration. In order to avoid making everything explainable through the use of discourse we use the concept of discourse as a methodological device to cast light on the practices of leadership. We do not use it as a main analytical concept, but as a way of looking at how leadership manifests in organizations.

Drawing on Foucault’s (1969/1982) notions of discourse, we aim to conceptualize how human and non-human agents practice leadership and discipline organizational members. When defining discourse, Foucault (1969/1982) takes into account how ideas and practices condition our ways of relating to and acting upon particular phenomena. Following this reasoning, it is important to consider how discourse constitutes knowledge, social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations (Foucault 1969/1982). According to Foucault (1969/1982) discourse refers to a group of statements; statements identified as belonging to a single discursive formation, through which the individual’s behavior is controlled. We will use the term discursive formation to capture how discourse conditions our way of relating to and acting upon particular phenomena and how claims of meaning are generated (Foucault 1969/1982).
As such, we argue that discourse is embedded in the practices that constitute leadership as a key organizational reality, and further it enables us to conceptualize power and discipline as essential and defining features of leadership. From this perspective, leadership becomes a system of subjection in which leaders are made into speaking subjects (Fairhurst 2007). As such, discourse establishes different subject-positions into which the individual leader can enter. We find this perception of leadership an interesting counterweight to leadership as something that resides in particular individuals. We argue that conceptualizing leadership as a system of subjection implies that ideas and logics come to dominate making certain leadership practices feasible. Thus, leadership is not something that resides in particular individuals; instead it is something that is prescribed to the individual practicing leadership.

What Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) refer to as Discourse is often related to Foucault’s (1969/1982) notion of discourse (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004, Fairhurst 2007, Jian et al. 2008). However in their 2011 article, Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) argue that studies using a Foucauldian perspective on discourse are too eager to grant discourse the power to construct disciplinary mechanisms and forms of subjectivity that materialize in the workplace. Further, by claiming such disciplinary effects of discourse scholars have been said to ignore the dynamics of human agency and materiality in the workplace (Mumby 2011). However, we will argue that a Foucauldian perspective neither disallows human agency nor denies materiality. Instead, we will argue that Foucault’s (1969/1982) work on discourse provides us with a conceptual framework that proves fruitful for our study of leadership.

We find that a Foucauldian perspective on discourse enables us to reframe leadership as a communicative practice that constrains and disciplines the daily practices in organizations, and further, it guides us in conceptualizing the manifestation of power and discipline in organizations. As mentioned, leadership can be seen as a system of subjection where leaders are made into speaking subjects, and as such, a Foucauldian perspective enables us to question what leadership practices are made possible in an organization and thus what interests are being mobilized. Furthermore, we argue that a Foucauldian notion of discourse provides us with a typology for questioning leadership practices as they manifest in organizations without ignoring materiality. In this thesis, we will show how a Foucauldian perspective on discourse enables us to investigate not only how leaders are discursively constituted as speaking sub-
jects, but also how leadership manifests in organizational materiality such as written documents, office spaces, and performance management programs.

3.2.1 Discourse as constitutive of organizations

Leadership manifests within organizations through the discourse-organization dialectic. As mentioned, Mumby (2011) claims that there is a tendency to take for granted the constitutive power of discourse without appropriately problematizing the discourse-organization dialectic. Just as the CCO perspective uses communication as a constitutive element of organizing, we argue that organizations can be framed as discursive formations. More specifically Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) describe three strategies for framing organizations discursively: Organizations as the object, as becoming, and grounded in action. The object orientation casts the organization as an already formed object that exists prior to discourse, and thus, discourse is considered an artifact located inside or outside of the organization (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). This perspective is reminiscent of the container metaphor used to describe how transactional communication is contained within organizations. In contrast, the becoming orientation highlights the dynamic processes by which language and interaction (discourse) produce organizing. In doing so, like the object orientation, discourse pre-exists organizations. Discourse is not only defined as language-in-use, but it is also considered to be constitutive of organizational forms and the contexts in which these forms emerge (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). Finally, the grounded in action orientation treats action and structure as mutually constitutive contending that structure is organized from within action (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). As Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) state:

“[...] the organization never assumes the form of an identifiable entity because it is anchored at the level of social practices and discursive forms.” (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; 16)

All three orientations provide insights into the discourse-organization dialectic. We agree with Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) that this cross-theoretical thinking is capable of extending the explanatory power of discourse and develop explanations of organizational concepts. Despite arguing that discourse is constitutive of organizations we do not disregard the object orientation as we find that maintaining a tension between an organization as an entity and a non-
entity provides new ways of capturing what an organization is (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). Further, despite arguing that leadership is a communicative practice we do not seek to undermine the importance of organizational materiality, and instead we argue that organizational elements such as buildings and written documents also have communicative power and practice leadership. However, considering discourse an artifact, the object orientation downplays and ignores the constitutive powers of discourse, and further, it portrays the organization as detached from the actions of its members leaving agency untheorized (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004).

The issue of agency is addressed in the becoming orientation as it rejects the role of discourse as an artifact in favor of privileging the processes of organizing and the way that discourse creates, sustains, and transforms these processes (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). Drawing on Foucault’s (1969/1982) notions of discourse, we simply cannot ignore the constitutive implications of the becoming orientation. Foucault’s (1969/1982) concern with the constitutive effects of discourse requires us to look beyond the organization as an already formed object and instead uncover how organizations get organized. In order for us to reframe leadership as a communicative practice, we therefore find it necessary to account for agency. However, when emphasizing agency over structure, we run the risk of marginalizing the concept of organization as the organizing potential of discourse simply substitutes the organization (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). When attention shifts from perceiving the organization in its static condition to perceiving it as a dynamic process, scholars emphasize agency over structure. This is not the aim of this thesis.

Contrary to the object and becoming orientations, the grounded in action orientation conceives of both organizing and organization. This reasoning may indicate that the grounded in action orientation simply combines the object and becoming orientations. However, as Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) argue, the grounded in action orientation is a separate approach that conceives action and structure as mutually constitutive, but at the same time it provides a framework for discussing how the three orientations interrelate. Stating the relevance of the three orientations, we argue that each of them is necessary and should operate simultaneously to reveal the complexities of the discourse-organization dialectic. Also, if we revisit the discussion of Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) distinction between discourse and Discourse
mentioned above, the necessity of taking all three orientations into account becomes clear. As argued by Hardy and Grant (2012), the distinction between discourse and Discourse gives rise to an either/or dualism. If we only address one of the three orientations we might end up reinforcing this dualism, and by engaging in the interplay between the three orientations we are able to transgress the boundaries between discourse and Discourse.

4. A communicative perspective of leadership

Arguing for a communicative perspective on leadership we seek to highlight how leadership comes into existence through complex communication processes. In order to do so, we will use communication and discourse, as we find both concepts helpful in understanding leadership as a communicative practice.

4.1 Engaging communication and leadership

We find that a constitutive view of communication enables us to question the complexities of organizing and communicating, and hence understand leadership as a communicative practice. Leadership is a defining feature of organizational life. Unlike more traditional definitions, the CCO perspective defines leadership as a communicative phenomenon. Practicing leadership in an organization is not the mere simple exchange of information. Instead a communicative definition of leadership relates organizational elements such as hierarchy, organizational charts, and policy manuals to the role of leadership. For example policy manuals are given communicative power as they commit organizational members to behave in certain ways and hold those members accountable to organizational principles. In short, leadership is a communicative practice, negotiated in the everyday communication as well as in communicative artifacts such as hierarchical charts and workplace policies, and not an inherited trait or quality that resides within particular individuals. As communication (re)produces and changes current realities, we perceive leadership as communicated into being, and therefore, it is not mere talk or transmission (Ashcraft et al. 2009). As such, communication is capable of more than simply informing, and therefore, we find that communication plays an active role in the manifestation of leadership.

The CCO perspective can be described by six premises that we find sharpen its explanatory power (Cooren et al. 2011). The premises are the following: CCO scholarship studies com-
municational events, CCO scholarship should be as inclusive as possible about what we mean by (organizational) communication, CCO scholarship acknowledges the co-constructed or co-oriented nature of (organizational) communication, CCO scholarship holds that who or what is acting always is an open question, CCO scholarship never leaves the realm of communicational events, and CCO scholarship favors neither organizing nor organization. Each premise shows how productive the CCO perspective can be, both theoretically and empirically, when it comes to better understanding how organizations function (Cooren et al. 2011). However, we argue that these premises not only explain the main contributions of the CCO perspective, but they also function as a platform for explaining how leadership manifests in communication. In order to understand leadership in relation to the CCO perspective, we will unpack the six premises and state their relevance to leadership.

**CCO scholarship studies communicational events.** This premise pays attention to the interactional events that constitute the building blocks of organizational realities (Cooren et al. 2011). Leadership is a fundamental part of organizational reality, which is why we argue that one needs to focus on the interactional aspects of leadership. As such, leadership is generative, productive, relational, and exercised in ongoing practices. Importantly, interaction is not only limited to organizational members talking with each other. Indeed, all aspects of interaction, discourse, organizational artifacts, architectural elements, historical texts, and narratives should be considered for its constitutive character (Cooren et al. 2011). Further, a communicative event is not an isolated episode of interaction, but rather part of an ongoing and situated stream of communication. In order to perceive leadership as a communicative practice, we argue that one should study how leadership is communicatively constituted. As such, one should pay attention to how policies, strategies, operations, values, relations, and structures are given communicative power (Cooren et al. 2011).

Extending the first premise, the second premise – **CCO scholarship should be as inclusive as possible about what we mean by (organizational) communication** – highlights the ways in which organizational values, knowledges, and ideologies are conveyed and constituted not only through what people say and write, but also through their behavior, what they wear, and how they look (Cooren et al. 2011). Again, similar to the first premise, values, knowledges, and ideologies are not just created and communicated by human agents, but they are commu-
nicated by non-human agents as well. As such, when perceiving leadership as communicatively constituted, we argue that it is mistaken to perceive leadership as an inherited trait that resides within individuals. Leadership should not only be seen as performed by human agents, but also elements such as hierarchy and organizational charts are given communicative power. If we look at hierarchy and organizational charts, the organizational structure itself determines how organizational members are positioned in the organization clarifying who has the right to discipline the organization. As such, leadership is not only invoked in everyday communication, but also hierarchy and organizational charts should be seen as communicative artifacts that affect how leadership is practiced in an organization. Therefore, we cannot simply rely on communication as simply talk and transmission, instead defining leadership as a communicative practice relates these artifacts to the role of leadership.

_CCO scholarship acknowledges the co-constructed and co-oriented nature of (organizational) communication._ When focusing on the performative character of organizational communication, one should not neglect that any performance is the product of both the agent that/who is performing and those organizational members who interpret and respond to the performance (Cooren et al. 2011). As such, any leadership practice cannot be seen as a product of the leader and his/her character alone. Instead, a constitutive view takes into account how meaning is negotiated, translated and/or debated, which means that any leadership practice will never be reducible to the way it was intended by its producer (Cooren et al. 2011). For instance, job descriptions and annual employee evaluations are both ways of performing leadership. They both set up expectations that organizational members are expected to follow and they function as a way of holding organizational members accountable. However, acknowledging the co-constructed nature of organizational communication, it is important to bear in mind that the meanings that emerge in the communication processes around both job descriptions and annual employee evaluations are always negotiable. What job descriptions and annual employee evaluations mean and the actions they cause organizational members to perform is something that the organization certainly try to control, however, a constitutive view of communication entails us to take into consideration how these meanings and actions are always up for negotiation. Organizational members can simply construct meanings that are different from the organization’s and act in other ways than prescribed. Thus, leadership will always be surrounded by ambiguity, and taking the negotiable nature of leadership into
account implies that leadership must be seen as temporally situated accomplishments (Cooren et al. 2011).

*CCO scholarship holds that who or what is acting always is an open question,* and in connection with the last two premises, a constitutive view should be as inclusive as possible regarding what or who is taking part in the constitution of organizational processes (Cooren et al. 2011). As such, we argue that organizations are constituted as a hybrid of human and non-human agency. When defining leadership principles and expecting leaders to act in accordance to these, we find that leadership simply cannot be seen as residing in the leader himself/herself. If we look at the following hypothetical example of a leadership principle, we argue that the way in which it is formulated, dictates the leader to act in a certain way: *A leader must actively enable and support collaboration across organizational levels in order to achieve overall organizational goals.* As such, it can be questioned who or what is performing leadership. Is it the leader or is it the leadership principle? We argue that questioning who or what is performing leadership marks the potential of non-human agents. Speaking in the name of leadership principles not only amounts to positioning these as participating directly in defining leadership as a communicative practice, but it also emphasizes the communicative power that must be associated with these.

Considering how non-human agents such as buildings, strategies, statuses, and written documents engage in the co-constructing of organizations, *CCO scholarship never leaves the realm of communicational events.* It is in communication that these organizational elements make a difference through what they do. For example, a building participates in the co-construction of an organization as it accommodates operations, channels activities, and communicates values and norms. Following this reasoning, we argue that the same applies to leadership. As such, it is only when invoked in communication that organizational elements such as leadership principles make a difference through what they prescribe leaders to do. As mentioned, when questioning how leadership is practiced in organizations we must acknowledge the presence of both power and discipline; however, this should not force us to leave the realm of communication. Instead we find it important to identify all elements participating in the co-construction of leadership (Cooren et al. 2011). For instance, invoking organizational elements such as job titles in a discussion can potentially influence the outcome of it. How-
ever, such mobilization of power does not imply that organizational elements can be neglected saying that they have no relevance. Instead, a constitutive view of communication broadens our explanatory reach to consider how organizational elements are co-implicated in the constitution of leadership.

**CCO scholarship favors neither organizing nor organization.** The CCO perspective refuses to choose between studying how organizational members get organized and how organizations come to be reenacted and reproduced through organizational activities (Cooren et al. 2011). The CCO perspective does not hesitate to speak of both organizing and organization to emphasize both the processual and entity-like dimension (Schoeneborn et al. 2014). Organizing is associated with the transactional dimension of communication, while organization, more generally, materializes in anything or anyone that can be said to represent it, whether it is a building, a product or an organizational member (Schoeneborn et al. 2014). Through the communicative power ascribed to organizational elements, we argue that when put into circulation in organizations these have essential organizing features that structure the practices of leadership. As such, when accounting for the ways in which leadership materializes in organizations, we favor neither organizing nor organization.

Stating the relevance of these six premises and their implications to leadership, it becomes evident how leadership manifests in communication. We argue that leadership should not only be seen as performed by human agents, instead we suggest that leadership manifests in communication as a hybrid of human and non-human agents. However, to say that non-human agents practice leadership does not imply that human contributions should be neglected — we are not suggesting that there should be no leader. However, we find it important to consider not only the organizing effects of leadership, but also how it materializes in organizational elements, and how these can be said to be involved in the practice of leadership.

**4.1.1 Confronting materiality**

In order to explain how leadership manifests in communication, we argue that it is necessary to account for the materiality of the organization. As such, organizations not only exist when their members invoke them in communication, they also exist in buildings, documents, and the conduct of tasks performed by organizational members (Ashcraft et al. 2009). By simply
reducing the constitution of organizations to communication, we argue that scholars run the risk of naïve constructivism, which is why we are concerned with transcending the dualisms between materialism and idealism (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Proponents of materialism argue that it is technical, economical, institutional, and physical factors that drive the constitution of organizations, while on the contrary, idealists prioritize factors such as language, cognition, images, and metaphors (Ashcraft et al. 2009). An idealistic perspective does not exclude materialism, but claims that mental factors are essential in order to understand the constitution of organizations. Following this reasoning, we argue that it is crucial to transcend the dualisms between materialism and idealism in order for us to claim that organizations are much more than what we say they are and that communication does not lack ontological status (Ashcraft et al. 2009).

Taking the materiality of organizations into account we rely on Ashcraft et al.’s (2009) proposing of three material elements: Objects, sites, and bodies. Following their argument, objects are composed of both material and ideational elements, as they are developed through human-object interaction. Further, organizational objects can be said to act, because their existence guides interaction, but also encapsulate past interactions (Ashcraft et al. 2009). This implies that agency is not solely human property, but that several organizational agencies must be taken into account. As such, contracts, policies, and other organizational documents capture and carry collective norms and directives. Relying on this typology, we argue that leadership not only manifests in organizations, when invoked in communication processes involving organizational members; it also manifests in the communication processes surrounding tangible organizational elements such as contracts and policies (Ashcraft et al. 2009).

Further, Ashcraft et al. (2009) argue that sites are important anchors for social practices supplying the organization with an infrastructure for communication and interaction. Communication influences organizational sites, but these also influence the resources available for interaction and, thus, condition agency (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Following their argument, we argue that buildings and organizational structure function as artifacts around which organizational members can communicate and negotiate their positions and contributions. As such, we find that the wording of the managing director’s office and its physical structure alone exerts
leadership as the individual occupying it communicates its position through the use of it. Thus, organizational sites explain how human and non-human agents generate possibilities and keep shaping one another. Therefore, when questioning leadership, we find it imperative to pay attention to the building environments.

Communication is also touchable in the human body in two primary senses: Firstly, communication is an embodied act, and secondly, human bodies take shape partly through communication (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Thus, the body becomes the key site for the interpenetration of materialism and idealism (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Therefore, we find that a leader’s physical appearance can potentially influence the organization through the way he/she is perceived by organizational members, and it is through this process that leadership materializes in organizations. We are well aware that organizational members constantly assess the physical appearance of others, both leaders and other organizational members. However, we argue that the signaling effect of a leader looking tired, being poorly dressed or simply appearing untidy is more profound than if another organizational member appears in the same way. This is supported by research investigating the role of the attribution process in which appearance cues are taken as indicative in leader emergence (Cherulnik et al. 1990). Cherulnik et al. (1990) conducted a study where photos of male and female leaders and non-leaders were found to elicit different and appropriate attributions of leadership status.

4.1.2 The importance of textual agency

What should be clear from our review of the six premises describing the CCO perspective and our consideration of organizational materiality is the importance of both human and non-human agency. In the following, we will unfold this further by taking textual agency proposed by scholars within the Montreal School (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Cooren et al. 2011, Taylor & Van Every 2000, Cooren 2004) into account.

Common to CCO scholarship is that all agree that communication is constitutive of organizations, however, scholars differ in their understanding of its organizing properties. The Montreal School confronts the organizing role of communication by critiquing structuration theory for its narrow conception of communication. Structuration theory attempts to move beyond social theories that focus on either deterministic structures on a macro level or the agency of
individual actors on a micro level (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Giddens (1981) bases his work on a critique of the dualism of structure and agency. Giddens (1981) suggests replacing this dualism with duality of structure, where structure and agency exist simultaneously in all social practices and cannot be separated (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Richter 2000). According to Giddens (1981), structure is both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute social systems (Baber 1991). Structure, then, is simultaneously produced and reproduced by human agency and becomes both constraining and enabling at the same time (Baber 1991). On the other hand, agency is a continuous flow of acts, which means that each act contributes to the production and reproduction of structure, but that an act also has the ability to change the structure (Giddens 1981, Baber 1991). Giddens (1981) also notes that agents are reflexive and considerate of their actions, which means that they could have chosen to act in a different way. In general, communication plays an important role in Giddens’ (1981) work, but in relation to his structuration theory, we find that he downplays the role of communication by perceiving it as simply one of the dimensions through which organizing occurs with norms and power being the other two dimensions (Richter 2000). Arguing for a communicative perspective of leadership, we find that Giddens’ (1981) structure-agency dialectic is too narrow to account for the constitutive effects of communication.

As a response to the structure-agency dialectic, the Montreal School calls attention to the organizing role of communication (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Instead of looking at communication as one modality among others through which organizing occurs, the Montreal School states communication as the essential modality for organizing. This means that communication is not only one dimension among others such as norms and power, but that communication is also constitutive of these. As such, we reject the notion of a structure-agency dialectic. We do not see structure and agency as opposites with structure being the constraining element and agency being the acting. We claim that organizing occurs in the partnership between both human and non-human agents. Thus, we follow the Montreal School’s emphasis on the formative influence of communication on the processes and structuring of organizations (Brumanns et al. 2014, Ashcraft et al. 2009).

Following the Montreal School (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Cooren et al. 2011), we argue that communication is the medium where organizing occurs, and where agency is generated.
Communication can be seen as having two manifestations, a textual dimension and a conversational dimension (Ashcraft et al. 2009). The textual dimension corresponds with the recurring and fairly stable side of communication, while the conversational dimension refers to the evolving and co-constructing side of communication (Taylor & Van Every 2000). From this perspective, organizations are accomplished and experienced in conversation, but identified and described through texts (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Thus, the role of conversation is to make sense of organizing processes in which organizational members find themselves, and to transform those members from a collection of individuals into a collective actor (Ashcraft et al. 2009). An organization depends on conversation in order to maintain activity and stability and thus conversation becomes the site of an organization. In other words, conversation is the doing of organizational discourse. As such, the daily conversations in the canteen, small talk at the water cooler, job interviews, and decision-making at board meetings reflect how organizations are experienced and talked into being through the daily conversations initiated by organizational members.

On the other hand, texts are discursively based interpretations that define organizations. As such, texts are the done or the material representation of organizational discourse (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004). However, when defining text within the CCO perspective, it is important to note that text should not only be considered in its written form. Texts also function as a medium, as they enable and constrain conversation through a repertoire of knowledge that organizational members draw upon when interpreting each conversational act and selecting an appropriate response. As such, texts frame conversations and reflect sense-making practices when organizational members deal with the immediate materiality of an organization (Ashcraft et al. 2009, Taylor 2011). In this manner, texts become the product of conversation (Fairhurst & Putnam 1999, Ashcraft et al. 2009). In other words, organizations are incarnated in texts such as written documents and spokespersons that speak in its name and through the conversations where these texts are reproduced through the continued use of them (Ashcraft et al. 2009). For instance, an organization exists in texts that define its stance for example when an organization denounces certain actions taken by an organizational member, or gives an assessment of a political decision that may affect its operations. Through this textual modality, organizations take on the status of an active agent (Ashcraft et al. 2009). Thus, texts are the product of conversational processes, but they are also its raw material, and therefore,
conversation and text form a self-organizing loop (Cooren et al. 2011). Organizations are, therefore, accomplished and experienced in conversations, and identified and described through texts (Ashcraft et al. 2009).

Arguing that leadership manifests in communication requires us to take a closer look at texts and their functioning in accordance to leadership. A communicative definition of leadership relates organizational elements to the role of leadership, and when talking about texts, we find it relevant to consider the active contribution of these; namely to what extent texts can be said to engage in the practice of leadership. We agree with Cooren’s (2004) thoughts on textual agency arguing that texts can display a form of agency when it comes to leadership. Thus, it is not only a matter of how leaders practice leadership in an organization, but also how texts produced by the organization make a difference and perform leadership.

Extending the dialectic between conversation and text, Cooren (2004) conceptualizes textual agency suggesting that what constitutes an organization is a hybrid of human and non-human contributions. Non-human agents such as reports, contracts, memos, and signs demonstrate a form of agency by enabling and constraining human agency. If we relate this to leadership, an employment contract can be said to perform leadership as it frames and regularizes work procedures and commits organizational members to perform in accordance to these. As Cooren (2004) argues, human agents are acted upon as well as acting through the texts that they produce. As such, the concept of textual agency decenters the focus on agency by casting texts as a mode of organizing (Cooren 2004). Therefore, we argue that it is possible to ascribe to texts the capacity of performing something, and by adopting such performative view of organizations our overreliance on face-to-face interaction can be questioned (Cooren 2004). However, to say that non-human agents perform something does not mean that contributions by human agents should be ignored. Accounting for non-human agency does not reduce human agency to an empirical artifact. On the contrary, we find that it recognizes a hybrid of agency in the way that both human and non-human agents contribute to the constitution of organizations.

The concept of textual agency enables us to rethink leadership as a more distributed phenomenon due to a wider distribution of the acts of organizing. Thus, we claim that focus should no longer be centered on leadership as something that solely resides in an individual,
as both human and non-human agents should be seen as performing leadership (Fairhurst 2007). As such, when texts are produced and put into circulation in organizations, we argue that they have essential organizing features that structure the practices of leadership.

To clarify further what we mean when we argue that texts produced by the organization perform leadership, we will explain how texts such as leadership principles, leadership positions, non-disclosure agreements, and employment contracts also participate in the practice of leadership. We argue that leadership principles can be seen as texts that demonstrate a form of agency by enabling and constraining leadership practices in an organization. When defining leadership principles, we argue that the organization requests leaders to practice leadership in a certain way. As such, leadership principles can be said to perform leadership themselves as they direct, remind, and confirm to leaders how they are expected to carry out daily leadership practices (Cooren 2004). As mentioned earlier, this performative character of leadership principles makes us question who or what is performing leadership. However, by ascribing agency to leadership principles we do not say that they can be separated from those who define them. On the contrary, textual agency functions to the extent that texts are recognized as being purposely produced for a specific accomplishment (Cooren 2004). As such, ascribing agency to leadership principles does not mean that the functioning of the leader is devaluated. After all, they are the ones to carry out leadership as it is intended by the organization. Also, it is important to consider the fact that leaders can be replaced, and we do not believe that an organization changes its leadership principles whenever a new leader is set in place.

Let us look at another example. Leadership positions such as executive director, site manager or sales director can also be seen as demonstrating textual agency. As such, appointing an individual to a leadership position binds him/her to perform specific actions. We are well aware that the wording of leadership position cannot really commit itself to perform leadership on its own; however, it can commit the individual assigned the leadership position to do so. Thus, the agency of a leadership position exists when it commits an individual to a particular action (Cooren 2004). Saying that a leadership position commits an individual to specific actions is consistent with saying that the individual acts through the leadership position. Thus, we argue that leadership positions display a form of agency as they determine what an individual is authorized to do.
If we instead look at documents such as non-disclosure agreements and employment contracts, we are well aware that these cannot be said to be directly involved in the daily practices of leadership, as they do not ascribe leaders to perform certain leadership practices. However, these documents can be said to practice leadership as they demonstrate textual agency by committing their signatories to act in certain ways (Cooren 2004). As with individuals appointed to specific leadership positions, organizational members that sign these documents commit themselves to act in accordance to the terms and requirements stated in these. Thus, organizational members can be said to act through these documents.

These three examples suggest that both leaders and the texts produced by the organization participate in the daily practices of leadership. As such, leadership manifests in communication as a hybrid of agency in the way that both human and non-human agents contribute to its manifestation. Textual agency clarifies how leadership is not solely a matter of the individual practicing leadership, but the concept shows how the texts produced by an organization and the communicative power associated with these play a crucial role in manifesting leadership as a communicative practice.

4.2 Engaging discourse and leadership
Critiquing leadership theory for its narrow conception of how leadership manifests in organizations, we suggest a different approach to studying leadership. We argue that leadership cannot be seen as a possession or as residing in particular individuals; and instead we utilize a communicative perspective of leadership that enables us to question the complexities of organizing and communication, and hence understand how leadership manifests in communication. Organizations should be seen as constituted by the collective and coordinated communication processes of both human and non-human agents, and looking at leadership through a CCO lens enables us to explain how both human and non-human agents can be said to perform or practice leadership. As such, leadership should not only be considered an activity that only involves human agents, but also buildings, documents, contracts, positions, and leadership principles perform leadership. By ascribing agency to both human and non-human agents we perceive leadership as a more distributed phenomenon, and as such, leadership manifests in communication as a hybrid of agency.
Despite articulating a different approach to studying leadership that takes into account the communicative aspects of performing leadership, this approach does not account for power and discipline. We argue that CCO theorizing has a tendency to ignore the processes of manifesting power and discipline in organizational contexts, and as Putnam et al. (2008) also recognize, few CCO studies have succeeded in unraveling the types of dynamic processes that intertwine communication and organization in a CCO relationship. We argue that this can be due to a lack of specificity regarding the processes that constitute organizations. In the following, we will address these challenges by focusing on the various processes that appear in the stream of organizing, in particular, the discourses produced by organizational members have implications in terms of power and discipline. As such, we propose an alternative CCO framework that relies on the thinking of Foucault (1969/1982, 1968/1991a, 1978/1991b). We will focus primarily on Foucault’s (1969/1982) concepts of discourse, power, and discipline, and show how these are reflected in regimes of practices (Dean 2010). We argue that a Foucauldian perspective enables us to show how the communicative practices that constitute leadership can be considered regimes of practices and discipline that act as powerful constraints on organizational members. We find this conception of power and discipline particularly insightful for the CCO perspective. We aim to show that by reframing leadership as a communicative practice that constrains and enables everyday life in organizations, this theoretical lens offers a better understanding of the CCO argument making it possible to respond to its shortcomings, and thus account for the disciplinary aspects of leadership.

4.2.1 The disciplinary effects of discourse

Foucault’s (1969/1982) work often appears in communication studies in order to examine the effect of dominant discourses (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). In his early writings, Foucault (1969/1982) focuses on discourse to examine how social realities are shaped through discursive practices (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). Thus, a Foucauldian perspective brings discourse, knowledge, power, and discipline into focus and articulates dynamic processes that combine material and ideational elements into the constitution of organizations (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). Therefore, we argue that this approach provides us with a framework for questioning the linkages between discourse and organization.
Further, we find it important to consider how discourse produces the objects about which it speaks, and so, objects do not have an existence outside of discourse (Fairhurst 2007). While it is through discourse that individuals are treated as objects, they are also constituted as subjects through modes of objectification (Fairhurst 2007). If we apply this to an organizational context, leaders are made into objects as the organization articulates how the organization is intended to be led, and as the organization puts forward certain leadership principles and norms, it sets up a space for action. As such, objectifying leaders also constitute them as subjects. To explain this further, let us look at two hypothetical examples of leadership principles:

*The leader must in both word and action convey the organization’s norms and values to its members.*

*The leader must create results by translating strategic objectives into specific targets and actions.*

We find that these two leadership principles function as different discursive formations that capture the meaning of leadership and condition how leadership is supposed to be carried out in the organization. By issuing these two leadership principles, the organization objectifies leadership as an act concerning the explication of organizational norms and values and the clarification of organizational targets. While objectifying leadership, the principles also constitute the leader as a subject, as they set up a space for action (Fairhurst 2007). As such, we argue that the leadership principles not only lay out how leadership is defined in the organization, but as mentioned before, they also explain how the organization is intended to be led. If we consider these two examples, this means that the leader must clarify how organizational members are expected to behave and also act in accordance to these expectations himself/herself. Also, the leader must define key organizational targets and ensure that these are met. Thus, we argue that these two leadership principles objectifies leadership by making the organization’s take on leadership explicit, and at the same time they establish different subject-positions into which the individual leader can enter.
According to Foucault (1983) the modes of objectification can also be seen as a categorization of the individual. Following this reasoning and stating its relevance to our study of leadership, we argue that discourse marks out a leader by attaching him/her an identity and imposing a reality on him/her, which he/she must recognize and others have to recognize in him/her (Fairhurst 2007). Another mode of objectification involves how leaders turn themselves into subjects. Here, discourse serves as the linguistic resource that positions the individual leader and initiates action (Fairhurst 2007). As such, we argue that leadership manifests in organizations through processes of subjectification meaning that leaders turn themselves into subjects through discursive practices. This subjectification occurs when the individual leader positions himself/herself in relation to the produced objects of one or more discourses (Fairhurst 2007). As such, a leader is likely to subject himself/herself to the demands required by the organization. If we return to our critique of existing leadership theorizing that we find focus too heavily on determining traits, behaviors, and competencies associated with effective leadership, we find that the processes of subjectification offer another explanation. By taking subjectification into consideration we argue that behavior cannot simply be seen as an innate characteristic, instead the individual leader must also subject himself/herself to certain principles in order to act in accordance with what is required by the organization.

Thus, a Foucauldian perspective favors the notion of a decentered self and emphasizes the social practices displayed in the play between discourses and the space they clear in order for subjects to emerge (Fairhurst 2007). Relating this to our study of leadership, this reasoning implicates that we shall look less at the leader as a crucial agent and more at the structural field of discourses and their power to discipline. To clarify what we mean by this, let us return to the two leadership principles. As mentioned, these two principles function as discursive formations that capture the meaning of leadership and condition how leadership is supposed to be carried out in the organization. The leadership principles not only lay out the organization’s take on leadership, they also tie and commit the individual leader to act in a certain way through the communicative power associated with these, and as such, we argue that the leadership principles facilitate and even perform leadership. Therefore, discourse can be seen as the medium where leadership exists.
Foucault (1975/1977) introduces a genealogical approach to explain how power and discipline are inscribed in discourse. In order to perceive discourse as the medium where leadership exists, we therefore argue that it is crucial to take Foucault’s (1978/1991b) conception of power and discipline into consideration. As such, discourse should be perceived as not only mirroring social reality, but as constitutive of the ways of exercising power (Foucault 1975/1977). Further, power is omnipresent and can be found in all social interactions. Therefore, power is exercised by individuals in the form of self-government. In other words, the government of individuals encompasses not only how we exercise power over others, or how we govern abstract entities such as states and populations, but also how we govern ourselves (Dean 2010).

According to Foucault (1978/1991b), a plurality of forms of government can be found, and the multiplicity and immanence of these government activities distinguishes them radically from the singularity of the state. His line of reasoning departs from the arguments presented in Machiavelli’s (1984/1997) The Prince, where the prince stands in a relation of singularity to his principality acquired by either inheritance or conquest (Foucault 1978/1991b). Questioning the state as a center of repressive control, we argue that this line of reasoning presents a distinctive perspective on power – a perspective in which power is considered to be relational and productive, and where it is performed in order to shape and discipline the behavior of the individual (Dean 2010). Consistent with rethinking leadership as a communicative practice, it makes sense to perceive power as relational, and as something that reveals itself in its application in communication. As with leadership, power does not reside in an individual. Thus, it is no longer a question of who has power, but how the effects of power are produced in different practices.

Applying this notion of power and discipline to an organizational context and the practices of leadership, we argue that specific power relations form among organizational members in order to discipline the entire organization and correct behavior. The well-known metaphor of the panopticon represents the development of such disciplinary power, characterized by invisible surveillance, depersonalization of power, and coercive mechanisms (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). The panopticon is seen as a prison model in which the prisoner can always be observed. However, as the prisoner is never sure of precisely when observation
occurs, he disciplines himself and becomes his own guard (Fairhurst 2007). Also, because the guards who do the observing are themselves subject to administrative control, they too are exposed to disciplinary power. Therefore, such forms of disciplinary power govern and also constitute certain forms of subjectivity (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). As such, due to different levels of observation, both the prisoner and the guard are made subjects to the disciplinary mechanisms inherent in the panopticon.

We find that the metaphor of the panopticon also lends itself to modern organizations and the practice of leadership; take for example an open office space. Anybody can walk by at any time making observation both constant and unpredictable. Also, sitting in the same office space as your superior, maybe even having him/her at the table right next to you, may induce discipline to an even higher degree. We find that the presence of a superior may create a feeling of being looked over ones shoulder which potentially makes organizational members work harder. As such, making observation constant, organizational members internalize and conform to the norms established and control their behaviors in accordance to these. The modes of disciplinary power can also be found in well-known performance management programs such as 360-degree evaluations (Fairhurst 2007). This particular type of evaluation extends the organizational hierarchy by distributing the evaluation of a leader to peers, colleagues, and supervisors. Initiating these modes of government distributes leadership throughout the organization. Also, the structure of the organization and the ways in which the entire organization takes part in the evaluation of a leader structure the field of action and display the interplay between structure and agency (Fairhurst 2007). As such, we argue that the practices of leadership are not only determined by the structure of the organization – setting up an organizational hierarchy by formally appointing an individual to a leadership position does not fully cover the practices of leadership. As organizational members conform to the norms established in an open office space they discipline themselves, and these modes of self-government distributes leadership throughout the organization. Therefore, organizational members can be seen as crucial agents in the daily practices of leadership as they manage themselves through their own self-government. And by allowing the entire organization to evaluate a leader, gaps between official and nonofficial discourses on leadership can emerge, which establishes a complex body of multiple takes on leadership (Fairhurst 2007). As such,
the metaphor of the panopticon is highly relevant to our study of leadership as it clarifies the importance of taking both human and non-human agents into account.

The concept of disciplinary power makes the panopticon a generalizable model symbolizing power relations as they appear in organizational settings. We find that it describes the functioning of organizations marked by disciplinary practices where various forces try to shape and control organizational members, generalize discipline, and regulate behavior (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). Therefore, a genealogical approach aids us in understanding the constitution of leadership through its various communicative practices.

Arguing that leadership is a communicative practice, we find that organizational members communicatively construct and mobilize the conditions of leadership making certain actions feasible while constraining others. Looking at the daily practices in an organization, we argue that the ways in which organizational members act are conditioned by the practices of power and discipline that regulate the organization. Through the use of discourse, organizational members construct possibilities and constraints for the practices of leadership. As such leadership cannot be said to reside in an individual as a possession, rather, leadership is embedded in the complex interplay of communicative practices in organizations.

Also, according to Foucault (1978/1991b), discourses and disciplinary practices give birth to the term governmentality defined as an ensemble of procedures and practices that allow the exercise of power and discipline. It focuses on facilitating forms of power that operate with organizations and individuals as active agents in their own self-government (Foucault 1978/1991b, Dean 2010). Applying Foucault’s (1978/1991b) concept of governmentality may seem as if we simply recycle the well-known phrase self-management to fit our argument. However, this is not the case. We are not considering self-government and self-management as synonyms. When proposing a new perspective that ascribe agency to both human and non-human agents, we find it relevant to apply governmentality to the study of leadership as it enables us to look at how non-human agents direct organizational members in their own self-government, and as such, how leadership can be achieved at a distance (Fairhurst 2007).
If we look at employment contracts, incentive plans, and bonus or merit pay, we argue that they all perform leadership at a distance. For example, organizational members do not review their contracts every day in order for them to act in accordance with what is stated, however the knowledge associated with it translates into leadership (Fairhurst 2007). It is not the contract itself, but the practices and power relations that surround it together with the knowledge and the behavior it encourages organizational members to that establishes practices of leadership in organizations. Also, incentive plans and bonus and merit pay put organizational members something in store if they act as expected (Fairhurst 2007). Knowing that there is something in store, organizational members are expected to perform at their best. Thus, employment contracts, incentive plans, and bonus or merit pay implicitly set up a space for action in which organizational members are directed and encouraged to act in accordance with what is required by the organization.

These examples provide insights into how non-human agents such as employment contracts, incentive plans, and bonus or merit pay work collectively to produce power-knowledge relations (Fairhurst 2007, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). Through the produced knowledge, we argue that non-human agents constitute organizations as regimes of power and discipline. Furthermore, they act as powerful constraints as they continuously subject organizational members to what is required by the organization. As such, we argue that leadership as a communicative practice is established through the power-knowledge relationships constituted in complex communication processes involving both human and non-human agents. It is in these communication processes that the knowledge associated with non-human agents translates into conditions of possibility and constraints prescribing organizational members to act in certain ways (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011).

4.3 Rethinking leadership as a communicative practice

Throughout this thesis we argue that leadership cannot be seen as an inherited trait that resides in particular individuals, but if we cannot simply rely on determining individual characteristics, behaviors, and competencies, what is leadership then?

We argue that leadership is a communicative practice. However, highlighting communication as the essential modality of leadership is not the same as saying that leadership is mere talk
and transmission. We argue that communication is the fundamental process that shapes the practice of leadership, and further, that it is through complex communication processes involving both human and non-human agents that leadership is constituted in organizations. We argue that by using a communicative perspective on leadership we not only shift focus from the individual leader, instead we emphasize the complexities of practicing leadership in organizations. Leadership simply happens in communication, and therefore, when defining leadership, we argue that a broader and more in depth approach must be taken.

We argue that leadership does not solely reside in the individual leader, but in as much, leadership materializes in organizations as a hybrid of agency. But what does this mean? In order to make this argument more accessible let us again look at a few examples. We argue that leadership principles direct leaders to practice leadership in certain ways. The exact wording of a leadership principle articulates the organization’s take on leadership, and so, the leadership principle sets up a space for action, in which the leader can practice leadership. Thus, we argue that leadership principles objectify leadership by making the organization’s take on leadership explicit, while at the same time establishing different subject-positions through which the individual leader can practice leadership. Further, if we look at the structure of the organization, we argue that an open office space induces leadership in organizations. By making observation both constant and unpredictable, we argue that organizational members internalize and conform to the norms established and control their behaviors in accordance to these. Also, when looking at an employment contract, we argue that it can be said to be directly involved in the practice of leadership. An employment contract not only specifies wages, working hours, and pension, but it also regularizes work procedures and commits organizational members to act in accordance to the terms and requirements stated in it.

As such, prescribing agency to leadership principles, open offices spaces, and employment contracts shifts focus from the individual leader by casting non-human agents as participating in the practice of leadership. Therefore, when we propose that leadership manifests in communication as a hybrid of agency, what we mean is that both human and non-human agents participate in constituting leadership in organizations. Further, all three examples show that it is in complex communication processes that the knowledge associated with these non-human agents that translates into leadership. We argue that organizational members do not simply act
in accordance to the directions given by the individual leader, but they also draw on the knowledge associated with open office spaces and employment contracts when conducting daily work procedures.

When accounting for the ways in which leadership materializes in organizations, one can be led to believe that organizations simply do not need individual leaders to practice leadership. However, this is not what we are suggesting. Suggesting a communicative perspective on leadership is not the same as suggesting that there should be no leader. We find that organizations are dependent on leaders in order for them to make decisions. Decision making processes will simply lead to no decision if there is not someone to make the final say, and we do not find non-human agents capable of this. Leadership principles, open office spaces, and employment contracts cannot sign business agreements or chair meetings. Therefore, accounting for non-human agency does not reduce human agency to an empirical artifact.

Suggesting a communicative perspective of leadership highlights the constitutive effects of communication and proves leadership to be a much more complex concept that cannot simply be associated with the practices of the individual leader. Instead, leadership is invoked in complex communication processes that involve a continuous negotiation and interpretation of the meanings associated with leadership.

5. Conclusion
In this thesis we propose a new perspective on leadership – a communicative perspective where leadership is seen as a communicative practice. We began our critique with a review of the main bodies of leadership literature, arguing that we tend to focus too heavily on leaders as individuals, primarily taking traits, behaviors, and competencies into primary account. We do not undermine the importance of the individual leader, however, we argue that we have to rethink leadership as a communicative practice. We find that communication offers a more sophisticated view on leadership highlighting how communication generates the practice of leadership. Thus, we argue that a communicative perspective on leadership provides an explanatory framework from which to understand the complexities of practicing leadership in organizations.
A constitutive view of communication requires us to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to defining leadership as a communicative practice, and throughout this thesis we argue that leadership is invoked in complex communication processes involving both human and non-human agents. Building our argument on this notion, we seek to move beyond conceptualizing leadership as an inherited trait residing in particular individuals. Instead we argue that it is crucial to account for the ways in which leadership materializes in organizations. We are not suggesting that organizational materiality such as buildings, written documents, and employment contracts perform leadership on their own, instead we argue that it is the knowledge associated with these that translates into leadership. As such, when organizational materiality is invoked in communication it acts as a powerful constraint on organizational members subjecting those members to what is required of the organization. In other words, it is communication that generates leadership as it disciplines and directs organizational members in their own self-government.

We find that this study offers important insights into the practice of leadership, and we expect it to challenge future leadership theorizing. Highlighting how communication generates leadership in organizations we prove leadership to be a much more complex concept. Leadership cannot simply be associated with the practices initiated by the individual leader. It is much more than that. Leadership is a communicative practice.

**5.1 Further implications**

To increase the explanatory power of a communicative perspective of leadership and claim its validity, we acknowledge that further research is needed. We argue that our theoretical assumptions have practical implications for the ways we conduct research studies, and collect and analyze data. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that applying a constitutive view on communication to an organizational context does not require us to consider it an actual tool that can be applied to certain situations in order to solve these, however, it should be considered a lens through which we can explain how organizations function. As such, applying a communicative perspective on leadership does not provide us with actual leadership tools; instead it provides an explanation of how leadership is practiced in organizations.
To put our conceptualization of leadership as a communicative practice to the test we find it relevant to apply it to an empirical context. Throughout this thesis we have supported our argumentation by presenting several hypothetical examples, and to validate our argumentation further, we find it reasonable to explore how and if buildings, office spaces, leadership principles, and job descriptions actually perform leadership when invoked in communication. For example by engaging in the field through observation, we can generate understanding and knowledge by observing how organizational members act and behave in an open office space. How do organizational members internalize and conform to the norms established? And how are the modes of self-government reflected in the daily practices in organizations? In order for us to validate our claims further, we find it relevant to investigate and provide answers for these questions. By further conducting interviews organizational members can provide explanation and elucidate lived experiences by answering questions such as: Do you feel constrained when sitting in an open office space? Do you feel obliged to work harder when sitting in the same office space as your superior? Or simply: What do you associate with leadership? However, when conducting either observation or interviews, we find it important that we bear in mind that applying a communicative perspective on leadership fosters that both humans and non-humans can be said to engage in the practice of leadership and therefore we must be aware not to look for the obvious. As argued, leadership literature tends to perceive leadership as equivalent to the individual leader, and therefore we can easily be trapped in limiting our field of study to the individual leader alone. As our thesis shows, it is of great importance to study leadership as a communicative practice, and not as something that resides in an individual.

We argue that using a communicative perspective on leadership adds to the empirical field an understanding of how leadership is perceived in organizations, and further, we find that it has implications in terms of how leadership is practiced in organizations. Again, we are not suggesting that a communicative perspective on leadership provides organizations with quick fix solutions; however, we find that perceiving leadership as a communicative practice fosters organizations to carefully consider leadership as invoked in complex communication processes, and not as something to be possessed by an individual or an organization. We are not suggesting that organizations shall ignore the importance of having individuals assigned to leadership positions. However, organizations must acknowledge that the ways in which they
structure and organize themselves have implications in terms of leadership, and that something as tangible as an employment contract has implications in terms of the associated knowledge that our study has proven translates into leadership when invoked in communication.
6. References


