8. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

A Case Study in Work Psychodynamics

INTRODUCTION

Based on a psychodynamic analysis of a leadership interview, the chapter discusses how public modernisation initiatives have put educational leaders on terms where they handle their leadership roles by drawing on special forms of defence. It is asked if the demands for ‘effectivity of leadership’ can trigger defensive patterns of interaction that are counterproductive rather than effective – at least if effectivity means the ability of the leader and the employee to handle the increasing complexity caused by modernisation.

In recent decades, Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries have been characterised by ever more frequent political and administrative initiatives taken in the public sector that are meant to improve efficiency. In the field of education, the measures range from actual educational reforms to initiatives on finding new ways to harness existing resources. A recurrent theme has been the issue of leaders and leadership, which has increasingly come to the fore – how do educational leaders run schools and how do they manage to implement initiatives effectively?

The context in which these leaders find themselves is marked by both decentralisation and recentralisation. On the one hand, leaders have had a greater influence on, and responsibility for, school finances and the recruitment of students in connection with parents’ (partial) right to choose schools freely. On the other hand, the relative autonomy and the teachers’ freedom to choose their own teaching methods have been challenged by standardised state-wide tests, and both national and municipal governments, parents, the press and competing schools have been allowed to monitor how schools perform by data from a Data Warehouse, where the Ministry keeps records of each school’s graduation grades, ability to balance social differences, student well-being and so on (Møller, Iversen, & Andersen, 2016). Both trends of de- and recentralisation may be regarded as an extension of New Public Management – the dominant management trend in welfare areas of recent years.

It is not hard to believe that this new situation engenders a complex kind of pressure, which forces leaders and employees to account for many different, but not necessarily convergent, considerations. It causes an increased pressure for learning for all in the staff. A number of studies have emerged over time, which investigated whether management actually functions properly and how leaders handle pressure

(Hansen & Boje, 2016; Møller, Iversen, & Andersen, 2016; Wiedemann 2016; Kaspersen & Knudsen 2016; Hjort, Qvortrup, & Raae, 2012), but studies on the subjective behaviour of leaders and how the leader facilitates necessary organisational learning are under-represented. This behaviour is the focus of this chapter.

Based on a case analysis, I describe an ambitious leader's attempt to deal with demands for greater efficiency. Rather than just an increased workload this demands for efficiency derived from increasing work intensity: While the leader is expected to meet a range of different expectations of various interests, pulling him in different directions, he must create a unifying focus for the staff.

Against this backdrop, I ask how the leader in question attempts to overcome the situation he is put in by his management work. Out of interest in psychodynamics, I go on to ask whether the leader's attempt to handle the contradictory circumstances of reality ends up exacerbating the contradictory nature of the situation. Is the leader, in his efforts to act as an effective leader, going to counteract the development of the reflexivity enabling the organisation to handle the new conditions?

The chapter thus relates to the tradition of studying leaders and organisations that are already established in the field of psychodynamic theory. References are often made in this regard to Kernberg and Kets de Vries. Kernberg describes how inadequate leadership can stem from certain personality traits or a lack of competence, which he believes can bring out paranoid traits in organisations that should otherwise perform well (Kernberg, 1980). Moreover, according to Kets de Vries, leadership personality has far-reaching consequences for an organisation's efficiency, as personality affects the fantasies of organisation members (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). Kets de Vries mentions that conversely, however, some situations can bring out certain personality traits in the leader (Kets de Vries, 1992).

I do not take my point of departure as the leader's personality, but instead address how the management-induced conditions might add to *certain work psychodynamics*, which are part of the particular patterns in the leader's interactions with others. Although the chapter's focus is on the leader's situation and leadership work psychodynamics, it also takes an interest in the dynamics of the interaction between the investigated and the researcher(s). This project called for special methodological requirements, which meant that the methodology section was afforded a relatively significant amount of space.

THEORY AND METHODS

My interest in the dynamics between leaders' particular work situations and their subjective behaviour meant that I applied a particular perspective to the psychoanalytic tradition. The leader's behaviour is not seen in the light of recollections of one's life story or traumatic experiences, as is common in classical psychoanalytic studies. Instead, the task is to understand a particular *form* of interaction between the individual and the world around them, while focusing on how the *employment*

situation in an interplay with the individual life history mobilises or actualises subjectivity in a particular way (Wolf-Ridgway, 2012).

The case works off of an interview, while therefore also incorporating the process that occurred in the interpretation of the interview, i.e. the initial interaction that took place between the interviewee and the interviewer, as well as later on between the case and the analysts. The actual interview which the case takes as its starting point is a qualitatively oriented, semi-structured research interview (Kvale, 1994), where the primary and immediate interest is generally in what knowledge the researcher can obtain about and via the interviewee in connection with a given phenomenon. The interview analysis is different in this case, however, because the methodology also aims to acquire knowledge of the further interaction between the interviewee and the interpreter(s) of the interview. The basic psychoanalytic-inspired assumption at play here, is that the interaction does not reproduce intentionally misleading patterns in the interviewee's behaviour towards his world and his professional life. For this part of the interpretation, I refer to the psychoanalytic-therapeutic discussion on transference and countertransference, and it should be noted that I did not subscribe to any therapeutic intent (Casement, 1985). I will elaborate on this later.

Communication and Interaction

The assumption is that the interviewee not only communicated intentionally and consciously on the facts of the case but also sought to organise his story in a way that influenced his listener to take on his version of reality. This is a well-established phenomenon in the field of narrative theory (Bruner, 1990), but it is also a matter that is discussed in psychoanalysis as a kind of quiet manipulation or an unconscious situation where the patient subtly tries to get the therapist to display a particular behaviour in order to relieve the patient's anxiety (Sandler, 1976). Freud terms the phenomenon '*transference*' – the process in therapy where unconscious desires and fantasies, which originate in other situations, are brought before the therapist. Freud found that transference also affects the analyst's fantasies of, and attitudes towards, the person being analysed, which he termed *countertransference* (Freud, 1992).

Projection is included as a mechanism in both transference and countertransference. Projection essentially stems from the desire to break down a threatening part of the self by projecting it on another person. The projection mechanism, however, rarely appears on its own. The concept of *projective identification* describes an extension of the concept. The mechanism is discussed by Ogden, among others, in a series of steps that begins with the subconscious fantasy of getting another person to have or bear certain feelings on behalf of oneself. The sender of the projection puts pressure on the other person in their interaction to get him or her to think, feel and act as an extension of the motive behind the projection. Provided the other person gives in to this pressure, the sender is then relieved of the projection once he or she is able to identify the threatening feelings in the other person (Ogden, 1982; Visholm, 1993). In the slightly longer term, however, the process entails limited interaction, as it

takes place on the special premise which is the reason for the projection: to create a *form* of interaction as a type of defence against certain threatening feelings.

Although the ensuing interaction can be traced back to the original projection, it is not a one-to-one relationship between the original projection and the result because the projection that is sent is enveloped in the receiver's feelings and fantasies, and thereby becomes a part of that person's countertransference. These dynamics are of key interest to the analysis conducted here.

Transference and countertransference have been the subject of further therapeutic-methodological discussions, which are of significance here. Freud considered countertransference mainly to be a disturbance to therapeutic work that ought to be eliminated, but later approaches to the issue relativised this and found that one must, in part, regard countertransference as an inevitable aspect of the overall communication between patient and therapist, and partly – and of key importance in this context – as information that provides deeper insight into the motives belying the process (Heimann, 1950; Casement, 1985; Igra, 1989).

From Interaction to Interpretation

The transference and countertransference phenomenon also occurs in the interview situation and must also, consequently, in a situation such as this be seen as a path to more deeply understanding what is at stake for both the sender and the recipient: in this case, the interviewee and interviewer (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Detecting these processes, however, requires distance for interpretation, which in turn imposes certain requirements for the methodology.

A methodological framework that supports this distance references Alfred Lorenzer's work and was developed by the International Research Group for Psychosocietal Analysis (Salling Olesen & Weber 2012; Hollway & Volmerg, 2010). The method is, for instance, put into practice in a model that works at three levels: *what is said*, i.e. the immediate content of the level of expression, *how is it said*, i.e. a level that focuses on the pragmatic level of the interview, and finally *why is it said that way?* At this third and final level, one looks for the unconscious strategy which directs the two previous levels – the depth-hermeneutic understanding of what is at stake in the interview. The method adds a significant element regarding the organisation of the process, in which the same empirical data is met by several individual reactions. Hence projective processes can be reproduced in the group setting and can be an object of renewed interpretation. For a further review of the method see Salling Olesen and Weber (2012).

INTERVIEW WITH AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER

To begin, one might ask what knowledge you can acquire about a leader's practices through an interview, or what story a leader tells about his or her practices. Here, one can argue that leadership today is, to a significant extent, communication. Linda

Smircich and Gareth Morgan discuss management as a social process in which the leader succeeds in defining reality for those being led in ways that seem trustworthy to them (Smircich & Morgan, 1982) – management of organisations is just specially institutionalised forms of this generally described process. The interest in so-called narrative leadership, or leading by telling stories of leadership motivations and intentions, can be read as an expression of the same (e.g., Boje, 2001; Downing, 1997; Charniawska, 1997).

The task of this case analysis is thus to shed light on another layer of communication, namely the unconscious, affective interaction that is part of communication and that has the intention of persuading the listener about a particular perspective on reality. The purpose is to examine whether there are special motives or intentions related to the communication which limit or restrict the receiver's learning, apart from what I mention with Smircich and Morgan. Here, the communication is between the interview and the analysts, that is to say, the analysis group and me, and the interest is not centred as much on the leader's perspective on reality as it is on the form of the interaction. Against this background, I assert that there is a significant relationship in the psychodynamics between subjectivity and work-related requirements for the interviewed educational leader. For the same reason, the analysis will focus on the ambivalent fantasies that the requirements arouse and the form of defence that the ego establishes against (anxiety about) failure and powerlessness in this connection.

The interviewee has been the leader of a medium-sized primary and lower secondary school for some years. Recently, however, his job has expanded to where he now has yet another school to manage. I have asked him to talk about the school and the development tasks he envisions.

What Is Said?

Below is a very brief description of the educational leader's response to my questions about school and his development tasks.

He notices that the increased workload forces him to work as a more generalised or strategic leader – to lead through leaders, he says emphatically. He talks about time constraints because the department heads at the 'new' school have to get to know him and learn how he thinks. For example, they need to know that he is very careful with the school's finances, to build up some room to manoeuvre – something that people at the 'new' school apparently are not used to. However, it is not just the school and its department heads that must adjust to him. He will have to get used to the fact that parents and students at the new school do not know him as well as those at his old school, and this – he stresses – requires that he consistently communicate much more and more extensively.

He describes the new school for which he is responsible as well-run – stresses that it is well-run! – but there have been some cases of protracted sick leave that he attributes to some 'strong teachers' having left the school and some – possibly more vulnerable – teachers having stayed behind. As a countermeasure, it is therefore

urgent to promote what he calls a robust environment. He explains that the school has struggled with bad figures (grade point average, statistics of student well-being and absences and socioeconomic reference¹) and attributes it to disadvantaged students that come from stressful environments in that part of the city. He adds that to be fair, they managed to improve some figures before he stepped in – and he emphasises that it is a school characterised by the kind of cooperation between teachers that goes beyond that normally seen. On the challenging side, it should be mentioned that student enrolment has been declining, and this development appeared at the same time as he was appointed, giving rise to speculations among teachers and parents of there being a secret plan to merge the school with his old school. Is it possible to keep the school and one of the parents' highly valued primary school departments? These reactions put him in a difficult position because his personal opinion is that the school, out of consideration for employee resources, would gain from a merger.

Whether an actual merger with his 'old school' will happen depends not least on local applications for enrolment. He is, in fact, in an odd situation. On the one side, he must work to build a reputation for his new school that can stabilise the in-flow of applications and save it. At the same time, he is met with suspicion among teachers and parents that his real interest is bringing the school under the old school he has led for a longer amount of time, with the financial and staff resource gains that could be an issue in the longer term!

How Is It Said?

The analysis in this section applies to the interview's pragmatic and meta-communicative level. This section is divided into three parts. The first is my initial analysis of the interview, the next section covers my response when re-listening to the interview, and the last is the analysis group's response.

I observe that the educational leader speaks energetically and emphatically. There are not many breaks in his speech, and I notice that I often have to interrupt him for clarification, because the information is apparently too succinct for me. Especially when I re-listen or re-read the interview I feel it is overloaded with information – much is said within a short span of time, and the educational leader often switches focus: between individuals, locations, tasks and conditions. He has just spoken of himself, and then he has moved on to the new school's department heads, and before you know it, he is talking about the vulnerable or strong teachers and then on to the parents. The same applies when making mention of the two different geographical locations where he acts as leader. He describes his work in several organisational fields, each with its own tasks, rapidly moving between these responsibilities. He briefly mentions the challenge of changing from the job's hands-on level to a more generalised, strategic level. He briefly talks about the different organisational conditions for the two schools and briefly about the special architectural conditions' practical importance for the teachers' cooperation. I notice that many current buzzwords from both national and local leadership discourse find their way into the

interview: from generic leadership discourse, commonly used expressions, such as *to lead through leaders*, to be *conscious of one's communication task*, the need for *close economic follow-up*, to *maintain some room for manoeuvres*, and to work for *organisational resilience*. However, the newer leadership or management discourse in the education field also leaves its mark here: *generating data*, *performing at student welfare*, a *keen focus on 'the school's figures'*. As something consistent, I observe that he clearly strives to be nuanced, so that the ratings appear to be the results of analyses of both the 'pros and cons' of situations or conditions: The school he now manages is a well-run school, *but* there are some cases of long-term sick leave. He acknowledges that there are a great many educational developments that have been started *but* some of the teachers may not be strong enough to follow up on the developments. The local department heads at the new school are already referred to as 'we', *but* to become a fully-fledged 'we', they must learn to understand the leader's thinking so that they can lead more independently. It is not only a school with poor figures. He acknowledges that the school has struggled with poor figures and disadvantaged students and, therefore, has learned much *but* on the other hand, it is still challenged if it is to survive as an independent entity.

His nuanced style gives one the impression of a leader with an analytical view who identifies an important task but also demonstrates having the surplus energy to acknowledge working with any weaknesses. Thus, with this style, he is portrayed as both a competent and significant person in the world in which he takes action: At the school where he has now been assigned, he can recognise it as a school that is making good progress *but*, on the other hand, one that needs to be better equipped for a world that has become more demanding. He must, therefore, challenge the new school in an appropriate manner so that it can meet these requirements, and he is clearly someone who has the ambition and insight into how to succeed in doing so. *Therefore*, he will teach the department heads better financial monitoring, *therefore* he will teach his management team and teachers that he has the strategic vision and role, and *therefore* he must enable them to handle the job that by and large he performed before: *He* must show the school and himself that people can lead and be led through communication. Thus, in each instance where doubts are expressed, such doubts are not disqualifying. On the contrary: the doubts make one notice his analytical thinking.

The many words and concepts drawn from both the current generic leadership discourse (economy, organisational structure and leadership), the current national educational management discourse (data, 'the school's figures') and the local, municipal school discourse (utilisation of resources, school mergers) portray him as well-informed on more recent leadership discourses, and his succinct flow of information gives the impression of efficiency.

All in all, the interview discourse fits nicely into the popular image of a competent, effective leader, cf. for example, the Agency for the Modernisation of Public Administration's brochure entitled *Good Employer Behaviour* (phrases as

clear strategy, efficient staff resources, focus on results, trust-based management; Moderniseringsstyrelsen, 2015).

My reaction when re-listening to the interview and the work using the transcript was significant. It struck me when re-listening to the interview that I evidently go out of my way to support the leader. My replies seem to be *very* obliging and supportive and not neutral or investigative: I make a point of emphasising that I understand (and even sometimes firmly), giving affirmation throughout and signalling complicity. I do, for example, interrupt by making an inside joke, referring to a matter in local politics. When I ask for clarification about a potentially critical matter, I apologetically stress my ignorance of his field. A third example is a sequence where the leader mentions some cases of long-term sick leave, where I almost apologetically on his behalf say that long-term sick leave is hardly a question of leadership. When re-listening to the interview, the question occurred to me: What was it that made me abandon a neutral, investigative role?

The analysis group's immediate reaction was just as significant but appeared at first to be quite different. My notes show that the group evidently found it difficult to follow the content of the interview. A few of the group members broke the rules of method – that I should remain silent – by trying to have me elaborate on the logistical and organisational patterns at the school (even though they appeared in the preface to the transcript). The person who played the role of interviewer during the reading audibly sighed several times while reading his part. At one point, the group began to respond in an openly critical manner, even hostile, towards the interviewee. One of the group participants wondered continually – even almost indulgently mused – over the exchange of words about sick leave, which, as I mentioned above, it is, of course, a matter for management to address cases of long-term sick leave! Another participant reacted critically to the leader's idea that the department heads must learn to think like he does so that they can lead independently (!) on the basis of his ideas – apparently without him explaining what he specifically wants?

It was relatively clear that these were emotionally charged reactions, but the verbalisations point in many directions and the group found it difficult to conclude the phase 'what is said'. Nonetheless, the phase ended abruptly with a remark from one of the group members, who pointed out that a less negative and more empathetic approach to the analysis work, where one empathises more with the interviewed leader's problem, *was indeed also* an option!

Why Is It Said That Way?

The interview and subsequent responses to it pose a series of questions about how the interview played out: How can we understand the form of interaction that occurs in the group? Like any other observation, one can view the interview as an example of attempts at impression management (Goffman, 1959). Here, however, the impression management seems to have an ambiguous effect on the surroundings.

I have described how the interviewed leader envisions himself facing a new and challenging task. You can understand if the task is met with ambivalent feelings – on the one hand, a fear of helplessness, powerlessness and total or partial failure, and on the other hand, the desire to overcome the challenge, a fantasy of omnipotence. Ambivalent feelings are well documented reactions when confronted with the duties in one's role – Zaleznik describes them as fundamental to a leader's experience of reality, not least because the expectation from his followers is that he exudes an ability to overcome the challenges (Zaleznik, 1966). In Goffman's words, one might imagine that the pressure on a leader about facework is considerable (see also Wolf-Ridgway, 2012).

In an extension of this argument, it makes sense to examine the interaction using the concepts of transference and countertransference and the psychoanalytic-inspired perspective on unconscious influence via projective identification.

The Ambiguous Response

I previously mentioned that each recipient's response to the same projection differs since the projection is enveloped in each recipient's fantasies. It is still crucial that responses can be traced analytically back to the same projection. The following sets out to examine the interviewer's and the analysis group's responses, respectively, in this light.

The interaction established *between the interview and the interviewer* can readily be described as a reaction against the backdrop of one of my perceived fears of potential helplessness and failure. In this way, my supportive manner is understandable, where I 'help' the leader, so to speak, not to feel powerless by almost putting words in his mouth ('that's not a matter for management, though', see above). I withdrew from my neutral investigative role since a more or less unconscious interaction was being established, a collusion where I try to compensate for a threatening sense of helplessness (Willi, 1975; Jakobsen & Visholm, 1988). Thus, the collusive relationship results in a kind of mutual seduction – it shields the leader from experiencing a threatening reality but at the same time dislocates the interviewer's neutral investigative role.

In relation to the interpretation group, a different pattern appeared. Their response can be described in three sequences. First, there was some prevailing confusion. Questions such as 'we need to know some more about the logistical patterns, some more about the organisation' were raised. This may be quite a rational reaction, but the many attempts to break the rules – which the group was familiar with, regarding the framework for analysis – would seem to indicate that there was something more at stake: One could see the group's response as an unconscious guard against a feeling of powerlessness, which an immediate sympathy for the leader could evoke. Next was a phase where the group's irritation with the leader (or possibly with the leader's and my collusive relationship) became apparent. The next instance of aggressive irritation could be seen in response to the educational leader's way of dealing with

the threatening reality, as he sought to protect his ambivalence by trying to appear all the more competent. One could notice the group's preoccupation with the sequence on long-term sick leave not being a problem for management: According to my notes, the wonder that was expressed was almost marked by indignation, directed just as much at me as it was at the leader. In this sequence, the group did not appear to serve as a neutral investigative interpretation group either but instead was characterised by what Bion calls a basic assumption group, where individuality is reduced according to a common, unconscious collective agreement (here a fight-flight group; Bion, 1961). The third sequence of the group's response contrasted markedly with this. It occurred as a group member went against the distinctly expressed emotion by urging participants to look at the leader's reaction as a response to a difficult task that could have been expected. Here, the interpretation group sought to restore a more distanced and neutral investigative stance.

Following Rosenbaum (2002), Sandor Ferenczi, who at an early stage in the development of psychoanalytic therapy was involved with countertransference, explains that countertransference often proceeds in the three phases described here. In the first phase, the analyst has some control over his emotions, but reacts with confusion to the material for transference; the second phase is often characterised by the analyst's loss of perspective, which leads to his dismissive and hostile responses to the patient. The third phase takes place when the analyst recognises his response precisely as countertransference.

Conclusion: Where, in his countertransference, the interviewer evidently immediately reacts in a helpful and supportive way and thereby reflects the pole of helplessness in the interviewee's ambivalence, the interpreting group responds in its shared transference as immediately hostile to the interviewer's pole of omnipotence (and the latent violence within an omnipotent feeling's intention of control and triumph). Here, the response is directed towards the power and dominance that are at stake. Through the concepts of transference and countertransference, one can see the widely varying manifestations of responses to the same basic feeling of (fear of) helplessness.

Manic Defence as Unconscious Action

It is important to emphasise that we are dealing with a person whose actions at first seem to meet the expectations of efficiency that others have of him. *At the same time*, the analysts' response suggests that interwoven with the verbal content of the level of expression, more about the leader's ambivalent relationship with his task is communicated than what can be observed in a simple content analysis. It is recorded by both myself and the interpretation group, and it appears as initially opposite responses. In understanding this conflict, I will introduce the concept of *manic defence*.

Manic defence refers to the Kleinian psychoanalytic tradition. From a psychogenic perspective, the manic defence is regarded as a defence against the

sorrow that follows the individual's general maturation, a maturation that means we have to live with the risk of even the certainty of losing security. Manic defence is described in contrast to (constructive) resignation over one's limited abilities to restore (fantasised) security. Using the defence mechanism, one seeks to put off or banish sorrow and associated feelings of powerlessness – of course, with the risk that the defence mechanism will at some point break down. Klein specifies that manic defence fundamentally consists of ideations of omnipotence, denial and idealisation – omnipotence with a view to controlling and ruling over objects, but without caring for them on a deeper level, denial about wiping the mind clean of dependence on others and the idealisation of holding on to everything good in the world and oneself by refusing awareness of anything threatening (Klein, 1992; Akhtar, 2001). Segal, Jaques and Winnicott characterise the basic feelings of manic defence as control, triumph and contempt (Segal, 1973; Jaques, 1965; Khan, 1975). Jaques sees manic defence appear in situations where the realisation of one's own vulnerability asserts itself (and therefore describes it as often occurring in midlife crises). Control, triumph and devaluation of others become a special (albeit frail) way of confirming that one is alive.

I find Winnicott's warning against understanding manic defence based on generalised symptoms to be of particular importance. Instead, he argues that manic defence must be understood as a particular 'economy' or dynamic, a certain unconscious way of handling the outside world: Can one understand a particular way of dealing with the outside world as an attempt at keeping the experience of defeat, failure and chaos at bay (Winnicott in Khan, 1975)?

In my use of the term, I will not emphasise manic defence as pathology but view it as an extension of Winnicott's suggestion: as a particular way of dealing with the reality that occurs as a universal form of psychological emergency management, and which particular circumstances in a stressful world can induce. Put another way, the term can be defined as *a universal, subjective disposition that can be awakened in certain situations and which means that the individual is engaged in a particular form of interaction with his/her surroundings*.

In light of this understanding, the leader keeps the challenging and immanent threat of defeat and failure in his surrounding environment at bay by identifying with a particular leadership discourse and its expectations for leaders and management. Striving to that end, he orchestrates the world around him – he does it unconsciously to those involved with this project, whether it is to the party that helps and supports him or to the party that confirms his view that the world must be actively controlled. In this is the projective identification process. A psychodynamic is established, which is understood here as a subjective response to specific and distressing conditions. How this particular response is a natural form of interaction for management to seize upon 'under modernised circumstances' is the subject of the following section.

EXPERIENCING MODERNISED CONDITIONS: THE HEROIC LEADER?

Peter Gronn speaks in the same vein of the complexity that New Public Management-inspired modernisations generate, of particularly ‘greedy’ management work, and against the background of a particular character expected of the leader, which he describes as ‘the heroic leader’ – the person who must be able to overcome the greedy aspect of work. According to Gronn, schools, hospitals, local authorities etc. are facing a growing number of tasks, not least in relation to resource cuts (Gronn, 2003, p. 147 et seq.). Here, I will add an issue that accompanies the generally peaked political interest in education and the ever-increasing frequency of reforms, which is the result: In addition to work intensification resulting from cutbacks, frequently modified procedures and routines constitute a burden, but there is also the fact that the public organisation, for better or for worse, is open to voiced concerns from different groups that can demand to be heard. Partial free choice of school means, for example, that parents’ comments are given new importance for the educational leader and the strategic management of the school. The same applies to ‘the school’s figures’. The school’s figures will be a platform for monitoring for both state and municipal governments and groups of parents. The heightened interest in national and local political profiling means greater pressure on, and speed of, implementation, which may also call upon teachers to speak up. However, the interests that the voiced concerns represent may very well point in different directions and have different ideas of efficiency. Does efficiency mean complying with budgets, bringing up the school’s grades or improving well-being? Not all of these voiced concerns will be new but the legitimacy, which the New Public Management-inspired decentralisation and recentralisation entails, means that their conflicting content will be intensified and fragmenting impact will be greater. Adding a new level of expectations for the educational leader. The educational leader must not only be able to create sufficient cognitive coherence for himself in this tangle of interests but must increasingly communicate such coherence. He must increasingly be able to *convince others that this coherence is a reality which is valid above all other possibilities*.

A consequence of this new level of expectations is pressure on the leader’s subjectivity. One can imagine that it entails an aggravation of what, as a universally human phenomenon, Goffman terms facework and impression management – preoccupation with controlling the impression the individual leaves on others (Goffman, 1959). The different voiced concerns and the legitimacy with which they demand attention from the leader of the public organisation mean that the pressure on the leader’s ability to be able to engage in interaction with them is greater. *The leader must increasingly be able to convince others that the coherence that the leader has formulated is that which is valid above all other possibilities* (see my previous citation from Smircich and Morgan). One must imagine that manic defence is a subjective response to this pressure – as a particular ‘subjective economy’ meant to keep the threat of failure at bay but, at the same time, designs the relation between leader and staff member in a particular way, a way that can even be seen as

counterproductive from the point of view of the leader whose aim is to enhance an efficient approach to the new, surrounding conditions.

Probably, new voices, close to the core processes of the school, have gained legitimacy with the New Public Management-inspired modernisation. These voices call upon increased professional and organisational reflexivity. The emphasis on *developing organisational capacity, vigorousness and distribution of leadership* (also mentioned in the interview with the leader) is a sign of this: capacity, vigorousness and distribution of leadership refer to or presuppose organisational and professional competence, an ability to decode continuously and reconfigure demands that are often discordant, but these voices propose, so they appear as manageable tasks.

However, the manic defence seems to counteract this learning process. Though the projective identification the interaction actively defines the employees as actors who position themselves in unreflected pro and con attitudes. Ironically this goes against the learning process that seems more and more necessary as an answer to the complexity of modernisation.

NOTE

- ¹ *Socioeconomic reference* is an indicator for comparing a student's performance with statistic calculated expected performance referring to gender, age, ancestry and parents' education and income (Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality, 2016).

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