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The Risky Path to a Followership Identity From Abstract Concept to Situated Reality

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Abstract

Followership research has increased recently, but little attention has been paid to the complexities and challenges of creating a followership identity. Researchers typically portray followership as a safe alternative to leadership identity, but we challenge this assumption by using naturally occurring workplace interactions to identify active contributions as well as risks associated with a follower identity. In this study, we use conversation analysis to examine how people collaboratively construct identities, and how identity development shapes and organizes interactions between people. The findings reveal the risks of misidentifying the task at hand, of being too authoritative, and of claiming too much knowledge. Also, our analyses highlight that leader and follower roles remain abstract in workplace interactions and, instead, people focus more on negotiated, task-oriented, practical identities.

Keywords

followership, leadership, conversation analysis, interaction, interactional risks

Introduction

Increasingly, both contemporary organizations and the scholarly community seems to consider leadership to be a relational and interactional phenomenon (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). In a rapidly shifting work environment, with flexible and at times fluid roles and tasks, it is

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natural to focus on the situated and contextual nature of leadership processes. Accordingly, we witness a growing literature on shared (Pearce & Conger, 2003), plural (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012), and relational (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006) leadership, and most recently, leadership as practice (Raelin, 2016).

In line with this development, identity has emerged as a central aspect of the leadership process. Self-identification as a leader has been shown to influence the tendency to take on leadership (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007), and the mutual recognition of leader and follower identities have been posited as central to a well-functioning leadership relationship (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). While most studies rely on questionnaires and interviews, a small but growing body of research attempts to study interaction directly, including identity processes in interaction (Clifton, 2009; Schnurr, 2009; Nielsen, 2009; Larsson & Lundholm, 2013).

Despite the recognition of the relational nature of leadership identity processes, attention has been almost exclusively directed to the leader side of the process. This resonates with the general leader centeredness of the literature. A number of studies have focused on the fragile nature of the identification as a leader (Ford & Harding, 2007; Hay, 2014; Thomas & Linstead, 2002), as well as the need for courage to make interactional claims on leadership in the face of a range of risks (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

In contrast, the challenges of establishing a follower identity has received far less attention. The tacit assumption in much of the literature seems to be that this is the safe alternative to leadership. For instance, DeRue and Ashford (2010) suggest that if risks of claiming leadership are too large, it is followership that tends to be claimed.

In this article, we wish to challenge this assumption, exploring some of the interactional challenges and risks associated with attempting to establish a followership identity in interaction. Drawing on conversation analytic studies of workplace interaction, we pursue the following research question: How are the local meanings of leader and follower identities negotiated in interaction, and what interactional contributions and risks are managed in establishing a follower position?

Theory

As noted by Bligh (2011) and others, in the scholarly literature, followership lives in the shadow of leadership. However, the past few decades have seen an increase in attention to followers. Studies have developed the theoretical understanding of followership (Baker, 2007; Collinson, 2006) and have empirically explored various aspects of followership, including the role of schemas (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010) or implicit theories (Sy, 2010) of followership. A number of studies argue that in contrast to a more traditional view of followership as passive, which emanates from a romanticized leader-centric perspective (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007), the active role of followership in the leadership process should be taken seriously (Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Shamir, 2007). For instance, based on a review of existing studies, Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) argue for a *toxic triangle* of destructive leadership, including not only leaders but also active followers and conducive environments. In a recent review of the followership literature,

Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, and Carsten (2014) claim that “[i]t is now widely accepted that leadership cannot be fully understood without considering the role of followers in the leadership process” (p. 89).

However, there exist a variety of perspectives on what followership is. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) distinguish between the conception of followership as a formal hierarchical role and followership “in the context of the leadership process (e.g. following as a behavior that helps co-construct leadership)” (p. 84). From the perspective of followership as a role, Kelley (1988) argues that followers are important for organizational outcomes and sees followers as potentially acting on their own, being proactive and independent, and thinking critically. Followership in the context of the leadership process is instead more constructionist and relational, viewing “leadership as a mutual influence process among leaders and followers” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 87). As the present study focuses on the process of establishing followership in interaction, it aligns with and focuses on the second, constructionist, perspective.

In their review, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) identify four versions of constructionist followership theory. Drawing on leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), Shamir (2007) argues that followers and leaders jointly produce the leadership relationship (through which leadership outcomes are produced) and consider followers more active and consequential than in typical leader-centered approaches. Second, from a more poststructural perspective, Collinson (2006) builds on Foucault’s (1980) notion of power/knowledge regimes that shape and regulate individual selves, and he suggests three forms of follower selves that are actively established by followers: conformist selves (accepting prescribed subjectivities), resistant selves (opposing prescribed subjectivities), and dramaturgical selves (acting as if they accept the prescribed subjectivities). Third, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) suggest a discursive approach, where leaders and followers co-construct their positions in interaction. Finally, DeRue and Ashford (2010) take an identity perspective, suggesting that leader and follower identities are negotiated in interaction.

Of these four versions, we will engage most closely with DeRue and Ashford’s (2010) identity perspective, as it is the most elaborate, and return to the other three when appropriate.

Building on Brewer and Gardner (1996), DeRue and Ashford (2010) suggest that interactional, not intrapersonal, identities are central to the establishment of leader and follower identities. In interaction, the iterative process of relational recognition, in the form of a mutual claiming and granting of leader and follower identities, takes place. Although they recognize the importance of individual and collective identities, they place the relational recognition at center stage:

[T]he relational recognition of the claim [on a leadership identity] through a reinforcing grant is essential to the identity construction process. For example, if a person claims leadership in a setting but others do not reinforce that claim with supportive grants, the three aspects of leadership identity construction are insufficient for a leader-follower relationship to emerge. The leadership identity will not be fully internalized by the individual, it will not be recognized in relational ties between individuals, and it will not be endorsed in the broader organization. (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, p. 632)

The importance that DeRue and Ashford (2010) ascribe to the process of relational recognition resonates well with studies of leadership in interaction (Larsson, 2017). In a classic paper, Gronn (1983) examines how a school principal negotiated control through talk-in-interaction. More recently, Schnurr (2009) shows claims on a leader identity through the use of teasing humor, and Clifton (2009) analyzes how leadership was established in a management team meeting through interactive storytelling. Svennevig (2012) and Van Praet (2009) both show an interactional leader identity being established through claiming control over the meeting agenda and topic progression. However, to date, no studies of leadership of followership in interaction have explicitly engaged with DeRue and Ashford's framework.

Particularly relevant for the present study are the risks associated with the claiming and granting of leader and follower identities. DeRue and Ashford (2010) recognize that claiming leadership is associated with instrumental (concerning material rewards and losses), interpersonal (such as losing face through unrecognized claims on leadership), and image (not being viewed positively by others) risks. Perception of such risks might lead individuals to claim follower, rather than leader, identities. In essence, the follower identity is thus presented as a risk-free option.

We see this presentation of the follower position as far too simplified. In contrast to DeRue and Ashford's (2010) proposition, we will argue that there are also substantial interactional risks associated with the follower position, which are important for a deeper understanding of the process of establishing a follower identity or position. Furthermore, it is unclear how these (and possibly other) risks are handled in actual interaction. The theory proposed by DeRue and Ashford seems to imply that risks are assessed prior to engaging in the identity negotiation process but not addressed as part of it. In contrast, studies of identity in interaction consistently demonstrate how interpersonal and other risks are constantly attended to and managed in interaction (Fraser, 1980, 1990; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). The ability to navigate, negotiate, and mitigate such risks would thus reasonably be as important for successful identity construction as the courage and willingness to engage in the process in the first place. However, the existence and management of such risks in the leadership process have to date received little empirical attention, and even fewer studies have focused on the followership position. This study therefore conducts an exploration of managing the risks of establishing an interactional follower position.

Furthermore, although the theories on the establishment of leader and follower identities go a long way toward outlining a detailed and complex process, the central concepts of leader and follower identities are still underdefined. DeRue and Ashford (2010), for instance, never define leadership; instead, they seem to imply that leader and follower identities are mutually defined in that the leader is relatively relationally superior to the follower, and the leader is considered leader by all parties, that is, himself or herself, the follower, and the larger collective. However, the label leader might be attributed a range of meanings, not always resonant with what individuals aspire to. Indeed, Kempster and Cope (2010) show that entrepreneurial leaders do not tend to think of themselves as *leaders* or aspire to be viewed as such. A central question for

the identity construction process can thus be formulated as follows: Is the leader identity a question of the involved parties using the label *leader* or a question of establishing relational super- and subordination?

Moreover, the concepts of leader and follower utilized in the theories of identity construction tend to be abstracted from actual work processes. This is particularly true for the cognitively oriented theories of followership schemas (Carsten et al., 2010), implicit leadership theories (Sy, 2010), and self-concept-oriented theories (Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), where the phenomena of interest are decontextualized from the organizational setting. Even in the relational focus of DeRue and Ashford's (2010) framework, the organizational context only enters in terms of the instrumental risks associated with claiming leadership. However, as observed by Fairhurst (2007), when studying interaction, the practical task and practical work processes are strikingly present, illuminating the often abstract character of the concepts of leader and follower. In essence, the relational recognition suggested by DeRue and Ashford (2010) as well as the notion of *working self-concept* suggested by Shamir et al. (1993) and Lord and Brown (2004) leaves the question of leader of what and follower in what unanswered. For the follower, this turns into the practical question of how to visibly demonstrate followership in an adequate fashion (recognizable by the leader as relevant claim to followership). To be able to further develop this question, we will utilize the perspective of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, to which we turn next.

Ethnomethodology and Identity as a Participant Concern

Within the research traditions of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, the basic interest is in how people produce a shared sense of what is going on and thus a shared social order (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984). More specifically, the focus is on the methods and mechanisms through which social order is interactively produced (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). While ethnomethodology generally studies a wide array of such mechanisms, conversation analysis, founded by Sacks (1992), focuses mainly on linguistic interactions that are recorded and analyzed in great detail. However, contemporary conversation analytic work increasingly include attention to nonlinguistic features such as bodily movements (Heath & Luff, 2013).

A central idea in this tradition is that individuals retrospectively make sense of what has already happened and base their next actions on this understanding. Interaction thus evolves as a chain of sensemaking of past contributions and the crafting of subsequent contributions, which are in turn made sense of and responded to by the other interactant(s). The interactants thus reflexively produce an ordered social world, where orderliness is actively produced along with the actions (Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Sacks, 1992).

In the ethnomethodological perspective, the continuous process of making sense of what is going on is a central practical concern for the interactants. To be able to craft a next contribution, each interactant needs to make sense of the previous one. Furthermore, this sensemaking is visible in the way each contribution treats, builds on, and aligns with previous actions.

We can thereby make an important distinction between participants' sensemaking, based on the participants' concern for contributing to the interaction, and the potential observing researcher's sensemaking (Schegloff, 1997). The focus on participants' sensemaking of a social event is crucial for the analysis:

Because it is the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings, etc. of the participants in some sociocultural event on which the course of that event is predicated – and especially if it is constructed interactionally over time, it is those characterizations which are privileged in the constitution of socio-interactional reality, and therefore have a *prima facie* claim to being privileged in efforts to understand it. (Schegloff, 1997, pp. 166-167)

It is to be noted that these interpretations and understandings are considered *in situ* phenomena, not after-the-fact rationalizations that are produced, for instance, in later interviews. The idea of participants' concern directs attention to the ongoing sensemaking, as evidenced in the details of how contributions to the evolving interaction are crafted.

Furthermore, identities are here seen as constructed in interactions rather than pre-existing characteristics of the individuals. As forcefully argued by Weick (1995), situated identities are crucial for the ongoing process of sensemaking. Within conversation analysis, identities are understood as the interactional categorization of individuals and collectives (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Such categorizations are consequential because they tend to be associated (by the participants in the interaction) with certain characteristics, actions, relationships, and so forth (Hester & Eglin, 1997; Stokoe, 2010). For instance, categorizing a woman as a mother brings expectations that she is an adult, has a child, and displays caretaking of the child. Participants might further take on conversational identities through their engagement in sequentially organized activities: through the initiation of, or response to, an action, producing local identities such as “storyteller,” “reporter,” and “chair of a meeting” (Nielsen, 2009; Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007).

Interactional identities are thus considered a participant's concern and practical problem. This is helpful to further problematize the process of interactional identity construction, as proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010). An important practical problem for a potential follower is to make sense of a claim on leadership as being such a claim in order to be able to produce an appropriate next action. This is where the abstracted notions of leader and follower identities become problematic. It is not possible for the follower to produce a claim of followership in principle, but it needs to be sufficiently specific to display actual followership or, in other words, to relate to the practical task at hand in a way that displays adequate followership. At least two interactional risks can be identified for the follower. Although willing to follow in principle, the potential follower might misinterpret the project on which the leader is embarking; thus, the follower performs an action that fails to align with it and consequently fails to grant the particular version of the leader identity being claimed.

This would be a mismatch of practical projects (rather than of leadership schemas, as discussed by DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Second, the follower might fail to adequately

tune his or her response and thus risk being either too proactive (not sufficiently granting leadership) or too deferent (not sufficiently claiming followership, or essentially risking being perceived as passive rather than as following). This resonates with the risk of mismatch between leadership schemas but is more fine-tuned in that even with the same leadership schema, responses need to be adequately aligned. More important, though, is that we are arguing for the risk of misinterpreting the specific nature of the claim, that is, what precisely the leader is trying to accomplish with his or her actions and what specific identity is thus claimed, in terms of both content and process (pointing to what appropriate followership would amount to).

The ethnomethodological and conversation analytical framework offers a useful approach to engage with the theory of social construction of leader and follower identities, proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010). Some studies of leadership in interaction have taken a formal position as a proxy for leadership and analyzed the actions of a designated leader (Holmes, 2005; Svennevig, 2011; Van Praet, 2009; Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011). As noted earlier, other studies have focused more directly on how leadership is established in interaction (e.g., Clifton, 2014; Walker & Artiz, 2014).

More relevant to the discussion here are studies drawing on categorization analysis, where identities are based on membership in particular categories and established in interaction. With this approach, Nielsen (2009) and Larsson and Lundholm (2013) argue that a range of interactional identities are both offered and accepted (or claimed and granted) in interaction. However, none of these identities are leader or follower as such; rather, they are a range of different authority-related identities, such as “interpreter” (Nielsen, 2009) or “group manager” (Larsson & Lundholm, 2013). This might suggest that the previously discussed problem of the abstracted notions of leader and follower is a simplification of the actual process of relational recognition. Despite this attention to interaction, neither of the studies cited here focuses on the process of both claiming and granting an identity or on the establishment of a follower identity.

Building on these studies, the focus of the present study is to directly explore the interactional establishment of a follower identity, including the management of the risks inherent in it. The research questions driving our study are as follows: How are the local meanings of leader and follower identities negotiated—that is, claimed and granted—in interaction? What are the interactional risks associated with this interaction, and how are these risks managed within the interaction?

Method

Our study draws on a conversation analysis perspective, viewing identity as an interactional achievement (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Detailed analyses of data fragments will be used to explore leader and follower identity construction at the micro level in authentic talk-in-interaction.

For this article, a selection of stretches of talk-in-interaction from authentic business meetings is presented, demonstrating various aspects of the interactional identity negotiation process. These sequences are drawn from a larger corpus of audio- and video-recorded leadership meetings from team meetings and department meetings in

eight organizations that form the sample. The interaction sequences come from 52 business meetings comprising a total of approximately 61 hours. From this corpus, interactional sequences where identity negotiation is salient were chosen and subjected to closer analysis. Identification of these extracts were based first on our reading and preliminary impression that there was a negotiation of identities going on (thus drawing on our own *members' knowledge*; Sacks, 1992; cf. identification of troubles telling by Jefferson, 1988). Second, the extracts were subjected to closer conversation analytic analysis and identification of various kinds of identity negotiation challenges. Based on this closer analysis, the extracts presented here were chosen as being relatively illustrative and demonstrating some of the central dynamics of and variation in the identities that are negotiated. The logic is thus to engage with the theory of the interactional construction of leader and follower identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) rather than to represent the dominating characteristic of interactional dynamics in the corpus as a whole or in different organizations. We aim for a theoretical rather than a statistical generalization (Yin, 1994), based on inductive research logic (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013).

The extracts are subjected to a close analysis of the interactional features. The analysis rests on the principle of relevance for participants (Schegloff, 1997), that is, we attempt to identify features of the interaction that are interactionally recognized by the participants themselves in their reflexive crafting of the evolving interaction, which is visible in their crafting of their next contributions. Identities and categories are thus expected to be evidenced in the interaction by the way that it evolves and is organized. While we recognize that no final truth can be reached about the participants' sense-making in an interactional episode, this focus on participants' own perspective attempts to provide a reasonable account of the actual organization of the interaction.

A participant's identity is considered his or her display of membership in a specific category, such as "leader," "teacher," "mother," or "criminal." At any moment, a number of such categories are available and might be made relevant in an interaction, for instance, through an explicit claim to membership. Categories are further associated with actions and characteristics (Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007). Descriptions of such characteristics might also work as an indirect way to categorize oneself and others (Stokoe, 2010).

The data were transcribed according to the notation system developed by Gail Jefferson (2004; see Table 1), with the intention to represent interactionally relevant details as much as possible.

The extracts are presented in the original language (Danish or Swedish) along with two lines of translations into English—first a word-by-word translation and then, on the next line, an idiomatic translation (if different from the word-by-word translation)—to allow the reader as much access to the material as possible.

Results

In this article, we utilize three excerpts from our corpus of interactions in organizations. These are chosen to illustrate some of the central dynamics surrounding the

Table 1. Transcript Symbols (Jefferson, 2004).

Symbol used in transcript	Explanation
(2.5)	Approximate length of pause in seconds
[but]	Overlapping utterances
↑	Rising intonation
:	Sound stretched
=	Latched utterances
<u>nurses</u>	Stressed word
()	Inaudible words or syllables
>well<	Spoken faster than the surrounding talk
°saying°	Spoken more softly than the surrounding talk
.hh	Audible inbreath

establishment of leadership and followership identities, with a specific focus on the existence and management of interpersonal risks associated with the followership identity. The three excerpts come from different organizations but are all recordings of business meetings, that is, scheduled occasions for addressing one or more issues of organizational relevance.

Excerpt 1

The first excerpt is from a management team meeting in a branch office of a major bank in Sweden. Present at the meeting are Charles, Peter, Kimberly, and Frederic (all pseudonyms). Charles is the branch manager, and Peter, Kimberly, and Frederic are group managers. At the meeting, the participants are talking about a merger between their bank and Omega Bank. The excerpt shows a routine activity in a leader group meeting: informing about and interpreting corporate news. In this sequence, the four managers discuss the merger of a subsidiary in the main bank and some of the consequences of this merger. The meeting is dominated by the branch manager sharing news about what happens in the bank, and the sequence we focus on here occurs after 29 minutes.

Ex 1: Telemarketing

- 1 Ch: Omega Bank in- integreras helt i banken
 Omega Bank in- integrated fully in the bank
 Omega Bank will be fully in- integrated in the bank
- 2 och där tittar man just nu på de här olika tjänsterna
 and there they are looking right now at these
 different services
- ((18 lines omitted))
- 21 vad det sen blir ut av det
 what then comes out of it

- 22 så ibland blir det ett stort plus
so in a way it becomes a big plus
- 23 och ibland bara kostnader
and in a way just costs
- 24 Fr: ↑dom har ↓väl kvar? sin ↓telemarketing,
↑they have PT/I guess still their ↓telemarketing,
↑they still have their ↓telemarketing,
25 (0.8)
- 26 funktion,
function,
27 (0.5)
- 28 Omega bank
Omega bank, don't they
- 29 Ch: ja:? det har dom nog va,
ye:s? that have they PT/I guess PT/right,
ye:s? I think they do,
30 men alltihopa [ska
but everything [is to
- 31 Fr: [ska det in i::]
[shall it in to::]
[is it to go into::]
- 32 Ch: detta ska alltihop
this will everything
all of it is going to
- 33 >>Omega bank kommer inte till att finnas kvar<<
>> Omega bank will not remain<<
- 34 Pe: men pratar man pengar,=
but talking they money,=
but are they talking money,=
- 35 Fr: =tar man bort det som varumärke också alltså,
=take they away it away as brand also PT/I mean,
=will they remove it as a brand as well then,
36 (.)
- 37 man skrotar det helt,
they dump it totally,
totally dismantled,
- 38 Ch: antagligen gör man det, ((sounds 'appreciative'))
probably do they that,
they'll probably do that,
- 39 Pe: du säger lägga >ut det på kontor<
you say place >out it on branches<
you say to delegate >it to the branches<
40 (.)
- 41 vad är det,
what is it,
what does that mean,
42 (1.1)
- 43 det är felräkningspengar,
it is miscalculation money,

- 44 eller det är,
or it is
- 45 (.)
- 46 stora °belopp som ska ut på° kontor=
big °amounts that is coming out to° branches=
°substantial amounts coming to° the branches=
- 47 =>jag vet inte vad dom< har tjänat Omega bank
=>I don't know what they< have earned Omega bank
=>I don't know how much profit< they've made Omega bank
- 48 Ch: *nä* det vet inte,
no don't know that,
- 49 (.)
- 50 ah:: vad tjänar dom,
we::ll what do they earn,
- 51 >hundra miljoner< (.) tjänar dom?
>hundred millions< (.) do they earn?
>hundred millions< (.) could they?
- 52 Fr: har jädra hög räntabilitet
have darned high rentability
got a darn high profitability
- 53 Pe: jo
yeah
- 54 Ch: dom tjäna:r
they e:arn
- 55 eh::
- 56 dom tjänar en del va
they earn a part/bit PT/right
they do earn quite some
(continues)

A quick glance at the exchange might suggest a simple enactment of roles (branch manager and as middle managers). However, a closer inspection reveals that these roles are established and maintained through interactional work by all participants. Indeed, the fact that we can get a feel for who is the superior and who is the subordinate can be considered a result of how we as readers utilize shared member knowledge (Sacks, 1992) to interpret the interaction. In the following, we will examine how this interpretation of who holds which position is actively produced and emerges in the interaction.

The extract starts with Charles volunteering information. That is, no one has asked him about Omega Bank; rather, he is acting on his own initiative, talking about something that he apparently knows. What he does is reasonably hearable as claiming a position of being knowledgeable about these matters, and in his telling others about them, he demonstrates that he assumes the others are not as knowledgeable (claiming high epistemic status; Heritage, 2012). He performs the act of reporting, drawing on knowledge to which he has privileged access, due to his role as branch manager. His actions work to categorize him as 'knowledgeable', as demonstrated by his sharing what he knows with someone who is 'less knowledgeable.' In this sense, his formal

role as branch manager is indexed by his reporting, and the others acknowledge this by letting him report for quite some time (23 lines).

In lines 24 to 28, Frederick contributes with a question, crafted in a way that accomplishes at least three things. First, it acknowledges and legitimizes Charles' reporting about Omega Bank, and it demonstrates that this information is relevant and interesting, at least to Frederick. Second, it prompts Charles to continue his reporting. Frederick thus enters the sequence as a coproducer of the action of reporting and of Charles' interactional identity as 'knowledgeable.' Third, the phrasing of the question, and the tag "don't they" in line 28 (in Swedish represented by the "väl" in line 24), indicates that Frederick has some substantial knowledge about the matter. In essence, he asks for confirmation rather than for information.

In answering, Charles' 'I guess' and 'I think' (lines 29-30) is hearable as displays of uncertainty, in that the information he provides comes from his own thinking rather than an external source of knowledge. In fact, he seems not to know more about this particular issue than Frederick does. However, despite their seemingly equal epistemic status on this matter, their interactional positions are very different. Frederick asks a question, and Charles provides an answer. It would have been possible for Charles to respond differently, abandoning the activity of reporting and asking Frederick or the others what they know about the topic. However, aligning with the interactional roles established through the previous lines—that is, the local interaction order (Goffman, 1983)—Frederick, as 'less knowledgeable', is offered and takes up the role of asking questions, and Charles, as 'knowledgeable', provides information and answers.

Aligning with, and thereby coproducing, the distribution of the roles of information giver and information recipient, Peter, Kimberly, and Frederic do not ask *each other* questions. They do demonstrate considerable relevant knowledge by contributing facts and hypotheses (lines 24-28, 35-37, 39-47). However, they do not orient toward each other as knowledgeable; rather, they orient toward Charles as the sole provider of information and a 'knowledgeable' provider by asking him questions. His responds with what appear to be answers, even though the knowledge content might be weak (as in lines 48-51).

The interactional identities at play here, understood as the membership categories the participants produce and enact, are 'knowledgeable' and 'less knowledgeable', or what might be glossed as 'expert' and 'non-expert', indicating a superior-subordinate relationship. The 'expert' has access to superior knowledge and has the capacity to inform others, whereas the 'non-expert' does not have access to this knowledge but has an interest in it. It is to be noted that these interactional identities are primarily produced by the simple mechanism of question and answers, but these two different actions are unevenly distributed across participants.

However, the participants simultaneously manage their respective knowledge claims in a certain way so as to uphold and not disturb these identities of 'expert' and 'non-expert.' Despite Charles' displays of uncertainty and somewhat low epistemic status—for instance, in line 29 (where 'I think' indicates the speculative nature of the claim), Line 38 ('probably' again indexes speculation), and lines 48 to 51 (with an

explicit statement that he does not know)—the dominating use of a question format maintains his interactional position as the informer, categorizing him as an ‘expert.’ This is not to imply that his display of uncertainty diminish his standing in his role as a manager, but rather to point to the fact that despite him being (probably reasonably) less knowledgeable about some details, the other participants continue to treat him as expert also on these particular details.

Furthermore, in line 47, Peter explicitly downplays his own knowledge by claiming that he does not know, although there are ample indications that he actually knows a lot about the matter. Since his questions are already fully formulated by the end of line 46, the utterance in line 47 can be understood to address the interactional framework rather than the topic of the conversation, and it does so through an explicit claim to the category of ‘non-expert’ (within the local context of this topic), implying, along with the question format directed to Charles, that Charles is incumbent of the category ‘expert.’ The work that this utterance does indicates that there is a felt need to secure these identities. In other words, this utterance seems to be oriented toward a perceived risk of claiming too much knowledge and an ‘expert’ identity, already granted to Charles. By emphasizing lack of knowledge, line 47 effectively works to subtly display Peter’s deference in regard to the ‘expert’ Charles.

The exchange can be viewed as a claiming and granting of a particular local version of leader and follower identities. In the context of the shared task of information sharing and reporting, the authoritative identity becomes that of an ‘expert’ and the subordinate identity a ‘non-expert.’ We can observe how the participants collaborate to construct and maintain these identities through the way they use the question-answer-format and direct questions uniquely to the identified ‘expert.’ The extract also demonstrates an awareness among the participants of the subtleties in claiming a follower identity in this context. Such a claim involves downplaying one’s own knowledge to be able to grant the ‘expert’ identity to the leader. In essence, an interactional risk that the participants seem to orient themselves toward here is that of displaying too much knowledge and thus failing to grant the ‘expert’ identity to Charles. This, of course, becomes even more problematic since Charles himself displays uncertainty and thereby a weak claim on the expert identity.

Excerpt 2

The following excerpt is from a department meeting in a communication department in an international company founded in Denmark. At the meeting, the participants are talking about pending tasks and obligations. Present at the meeting are Hans, Jonna, Louise, Jón, Eric, Klaus, and Karen-Inger (all pseudonyms). In the excerpt, only Hans (chair of the department) and Jonna (his secretary) are participating. We will use this sequence to look at how a follower identity is negotiated for Hans, Jonna’s department manager. Jonna is in the middle of listing vacations and travel plans in the near future for all employees in the department, when this exchange takes place 2 minutes and 8 seconds into the recording:

Ex 2 Hans and Jonna on travels and vacation

- 1 Jo: kommer tilbage den attende (.)
comes back the eighteenth (.)
- 2 hvor hun har ↑fødselsdag
where she has ↑birthday
where it is her ↑birthday
- 3 (1.7)
- 4 Ø::hm::,
U::hm::,
5 (0.5)
- 6 er der ↑andre der har rejser og ferie her,
are there ↑others who have travels and vacation here,
7 (1.0)
- 8 planlagt
planned
9 (0.7)
- 10 nuværende ↑tidspunkt,
present ↑time,
at this point,
11 (0.5)
- 12 Ha: næst' uge
nex' week
13 (0.3)
- 14 næst' uge kommer der jo: (.) kvartalsmeddel'se
nex' week comes there y'know (.) quarterly
financial statement
next week there is (.) quarterly financial statement
y' know
15 (0.5)
- 16 Jo: den tolvte=
the twelvth=
17 =men ↑det kommer ↓her,
=but ↑that comes ↓here,
- 18 Ha: °mhm°
19 (0.3)
- 20 Jo: ↑det var rejser og ↓ferier,
↑this was travel and va↓cations,
21 (2.5)
- 22 vi ↑starter med a:tøh (.) [navn] han er i London
((fortsætter))
we be↑gin with tha:eh (.) [name] he is in London
((continues))
we be↑gin with e:h (.) [name] he is in London
((continues))

In this extract, we will focus on the negotiation of a follower identity for Hans, Jonna's supervising manager.

In the beginning of the excerpt, Jonna shares some details about upcoming travel and vacations (lines 1-2) and subsequently invites others to contribute with more information about this topic (lines 6-10). In doing so, she effectively claims the identity of 'chair' of the meeting (Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007) as the one orchestrating the conversation and managing the agenda. The identity as 'chair' works as the local version of authority and leadership within the context of the task at hand. In effect, then, Jonna is here claiming the identity of leader and granting her own supervising manager, Hans, a follower identity. Taking a role perspective of the situation, Jonna can be viewed as performing followership by being a subordinate to Hans, while from a process perspective, she is claiming a local leadership identity and granting him a follower identity.

Jonna is allowed by the others to act as chair, as the pauses at lines 7 and 9 are not utilized to change the topic or grant her a different identity. However, despite Jonna's question about other relevant information, none is provided by the other participants in Lines 7 to 11, despite a total of 2.2 seconds of pauses. Then, in lines 12-14 Hans contributes a piece of information. He starts out in line 12 with 'next week', answering Jonna's request to discuss planned and upcoming events. The pause in line 13 and the restart in line 14 can be heard as an orientation toward having his claim to the floor acknowledged by Jonna, the chair. His contribution can thus be understood as an attempt to grant Jonna the identity as chair, and to claim an 'orderly meeting participant' identity for himself, by producing the type of information Jonna asked for. He is possibly orienting toward the lack of input in lines 7 to 11 and is attempting to assist Jonna by acknowledging her claim to the identity of chair of the meeting. His contribution further demonstrates an understanding that the topic is about upcoming and planned events and that the task is to share information on this matter.

In line 16, Jonna acknowledges this contribution by voluntarily adding a piece of information, thus temporarily shifting her identity claim from leader to follower. This temporary shift in identity and acknowledgment of the information that Hans brings forward works to mitigate the correction made in the next line. Furthermore, the 'but' signals an upcoming disagreement, thereby mitigating the interpersonal tension it might produce (Caffi, 1999; Fraser, 1980). It turns out that the disagreement is not with the topic as such but with the placement of it in the agenda. The current topic is not upcoming events in general but planned travel and vacations specifically; the upcoming quarterly financial statement to stockholders is next on the meeting agenda.

Hans' muted acknowledgment token in line 18 displays alignment with Jonna's explanation of the structure of the agenda, signaling a claim on a follower identity in relation to her. After another short pause, Jonna closes the agenda item in line 20 and turns to the next item in line 22.

What we observe here is thus how Hans attempts to grant Jonna a local version of a leader identity but fails to identify the relevant task and instead produces irrelevant information. He seems to produce a piece of available information, possibly in an attempt to help Jonna and acknowledge her work as a chair; however, he appears to misidentify the relevance of the information he has to offer. It is relevant in the sense that it is about upcoming and planned events, but it is irrelevant as it does not concern

travel and vacations. In essence, his attempt to claim a follower identity fails, not because of different leadership schemas or implicit theories (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) but because he misidentifies the task at hand and the relevance structure of this task, at least as understood by Jonna. By correcting him, Jonna treats his contribution as irrelevant and thereby his attempt to claim a follower identity (at this particular point in the interaction) as slightly missing the mark.

The extract illustrates the risk of misidentifying not only the local version of leadership but also the task at hand and what might be relevant to it. Despite attempting to grant Jonna a leader identity (as chair), Hans produces a disruption, as his understanding of the task is not aligned with Jonna's.

Excerpt 3

The last excerpt is from a project group meeting in a nongovernmental organization (NGO). It is the first meeting in a series of meetings on a new project. (The focus of the project is to kick start a new value process in the organization in order to have the employees co-create a rebranding of the NGO.) Present at the meeting are Robert, Anna, Klara, and Linda. In the excerpt, only Robert (CEO of the NGO) and Anna (project leader) are talking. He has just finished talking about really looking forward to the weekend after having worked all day on another project when this exchange takes place. The excerpt is taken from 50 seconds into the recording. We will focus here on how Anna is mobilized as “meetings opener” and finally acts as a project leader, which works as local versions of a leader identities.

Ex 3 Robert and Anna: You are project leader

61 ((Robert straightens himself up on an inbreath and
leans over the table))

62 ??: t(h)eh
((Anna smiles towards Linda and Darla))

63 Ro: så:, >lad os gentag' succesen<
so:, >let's repeat the success<
((Robert sits back in the chair and moves his hands
up towards his face, Anna turns head towards
Robert))

65 ((clonck))

66 (0.7)
((Robert hides his face in his hands, Anna looks at
Robert and away again))

67 Ro: ↑o↓kay,
68 (1.9)
((Robert moves hands away slowly and looks towards
Anna, Anna has a 'serious' facial expression, Anna
straightens herself up a little and reaches out
towards her papers, Anna adjusts her stack of

- papers, Anna leans further over the table and adjusts the top edge of papers))
- 69 Ro: Anna >du egen'lig projektleder
Anna >you're (in fact/actually) project leader
(Robert looks at Anna, Anna stops touching paper and pulls hand back)
- 70 på det [her< mæ]:=
of this [here< with]:=
(Robert looks at Anna, Anna in movement towards Robert))
- 71 An: [↑jar,]
 [↑yes,]
(Robert looks at Anna)
(Anna sits back in chair))
- 72 ((rattling of paper))
- 73 (.)
(Anna turns head towards Robert))
- 74 Ro: ka' du ikk' li::ge,
could you not ju::st,
couldn't you ju::st,
(Robert looks at Anna, Anna looks at Robert))
- 75 ((rattling))
- 76 (0.4)
- 77 Ro: >det jo nok mig der ska' placér det<
>it is (y'know) (probably) me that must place it<
>it'll probably me that'll have to explain it<
- 78 men) ø:h li øh
but) e:h just eh
(Robert looks at Anna, Anna looks at Robert and turns head to the right, away from Robert))
- 79 An: ↓ja.
↓yeah. ((firm tone))
- 80 (1.6) ((Anna looks at her papers and Robert looks down at table))
- 81 An: °vi har° ↑indkaldt til det her ↓mød',
°we have° ↑summoned to this here ↓meeting,
°we have° ↑called this ↓meeting,
(Anna gazes across the table at Linda and Darla))
- 82 fordi(h)
becau(h)se
- 83 ↑Rabart han zynz',
↑Rabart he zinks,
- 84 d(h)e he he
it(h) he he
(Robert smiles))
- 85 Li: eh he (he) he he
- 86 Da: °↑at ↓vi sku' gør' det°

- °↑that ↓we should do it°
 87 (.)
 88 An: .h *ne:j >vi ska'<
 .h *no: >we must<
 89 vi ska' ha sat
 we must have set
 90 (0.3)
 91 en vær↑di og en vi↓sionsproces i ↓gang,
 a ↑value and a ↓vision process in ↓motion,
 a ↑value and a ↓vision process to ↓work,
 92 (.)
 93 og-
 and
 94 (0.4)

In this excerpt, we will focus on how Anna is mobilized and finally acts as a project leader, which works as a local version of a leader identity. The identity of a 'project manager' is explicitly offered to Anna by her supervising manager, Robert, in line 69. By offering her membership in the category of 'project leader' and emphasizing 'you' in doing so, he excludes himself from the same category. It remains unclear whether this approach means that he himself is to be treated as member of the 'non-leading project member' or 'non-member of the project' categories. He then requests that she do something (line 74) but does not precisely explain what she is to do. His utterance thus seems more to remind or prompt her to do something that is already known to both of them. In line 77, he accounts for this prompt by saying that he is the one to explain the project, but to be able to do that, he first needs her to do something, probably to chair the meeting and to provide him with a legitimate turn so that he can provide his explanation. The actions of opening and chairing the meeting have thus been suggested as activities bound to the category of project leader.

However, even before asking Anna to chair the meeting, Robert makes several multimodal (bodily as well as linguistic) moves to open the meeting (cf. Greenbaum and Rosenfeld, 1980; Kidwell, 2005; Schiffrin, 1977) and catch Anna's attention (Lines 63, 67-69). She immediately monitors him (lines 63, 66, 68) as if expecting a *go ahead* from him (Heath, 1986; Mondada, 2009a; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014).

The situation as well as Robert's moves are complex. Verbalizing a request reflects an entitlement (Curl & Drew, 2008) in a position of authority. Reasonably mobilizing his formal position, Robert claims the right and authority to tell Anna to take up another position of authority, as project leader, where he himself, temporarily, will become her subordinate. However, the unfinished sentences reflect a soft version of his entitlement, indexing shared knowledge rather than a new authoritative demand. The situation is thus clearly interpersonally and interactionally challenging for Anna. She is expected to claim some form of leadership in relation to her own supervising manager and thus risks coming across as insensitive and potentially power hungry.

The fact that Anna experiences this interpersonal challenge is evidenced by her delayed response, including the long pause (line 80) following the explicit request to

chair the meeting, reasonably heard as hesitation. This pause is owned by Anna since she is the addressee; it is her turn to talk, so a lack of talk is her responsibility. Anna then begins by presenting some of the rationale behind the project (lines 81-84), addressing (by means of gaze direction, cf. Goodwin 1979) and designing (by means of describing the project from the beginning as if to a newcomer) this report as something to share with Linda and Darla rather than the whole group, including Robert.

Anna's initial opening is designed as a mock of a formal opening of a meeting (line 81), using mock intonation of formality, "°we have° called this ↓meeting". This is reasonably heard as Anna producing a laughable and thereby distancing herself from the formal chair role, before getting support from Robert, Linda, and Anna (lines 84-86). This distancing functions to mitigate the interpersonal challenge of now chairing a meeting where her own supervising manager is a participant and of following him by taking charge over him. She further accomplishes this by addressing Linda and Darla rather than Robert.

The "no" in line 88 works as a boundary marker between joking about a matter and talking seriously about it (Schegloff, 2001), and it thereby signals that Anna now more seriously claims membership in the category of 'project leader' by acting as chair in the local context of this meeting. She has made herself an animator of Robert's authorship (by using a distancing tone of voice in "we have called this meeting") but then afterward turns herself into a coauthor by aligning with her own turn. In other words, the interpersonal challenges seem now to have been sufficiently managed for her to more fully embrace the identity of project leader in the presence of her own supervising manager.

Linda aligns with Anna (line 85, by laughing at her laugh), and so does Darla (line 86, by collaborating in completing her turn to talk); they thereby enact a claim of membership in the category of 'project members', addressed by the project leader. Collaborating in getting the meeting going, they effectively grant Anna the identity of chair and project leader.

The excerpt illustrates the complexities of claiming a local version of leader identity, as project leader, in relation to someone who is formally a superior manager and who has delegated this role. Taking on the delegated role is not simply a matter of cognitively understanding the task; it is also a matter of interactively managing the multiple layers of authority simultaneously present in the room and the associated interpersonal sensitivities and risks. A major risk in such a situation would be to embrace the project leader identity too forcefully and thereby not sufficiently manage the granting of a superior managerial identity to Robert. Anna's hesitation accomplishes the important interactional work of simultaneously granting Robert his leader identity (by being hesitant) and embracing the task given to her (by acting on it rather than being passive).

Discussion

The aim of this article is to explore the interactional construction of follower and leader identities, with a specific focus on the existence and management of interactional risks in this process. The analysis has shown that the participants seem to orient

toward local and task-oriented versions of leader and follower identities and that the process of negotiating a workable interactional identity contains a range of challenges and risks. In this section, we will discuss each of these results.

The analysis presented here shows a considerable amount of claiming and granting of identities, in line with the suggestions by DeRue and Ashford (2010), as well as the importance of various cognitive resources (information, knowledge, existing ways to understand roles and the relevance of information, etc.), in line with the more cognitively oriented suggestions of Shamir et al. (1993) and Lord and Brown (2004). In line with Gronn's (1983) argument that establishment of authority and control "must be worked at linguistically and worked at never-endingly as an ongoing everyday activity" (p. 20), the analysis shows the establishment of alignment in working on a specific task to demand attention and continuous interactional work. And as a central aspect of this continuous interactional sensemaking process, we find construction of identities (Weick, 1995).

The first main theme in the analysis concerns the risks and challenges of establishing a follower position. As previously observed, while DeRue and Ashford (2010) discuss a range of risks for claiming a leader identity, they do not associate any such risks with the follower identity. This is also true for the wide majority of discussions and studies of followership (Carsten et al., 2010; Collinson, 2006; Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir et al., 1993). In contrast to this portrayal of the follower identity as problem free, the analysis in this article identifies a range of challenges and risks that the potential follower faces.

One of the first challenges identified, connected to the previous point, concerns identifying the relevant identities to grant and to claim. As perhaps most clearly illustrated in Excerpt 2, attempts to be a follower might fail when the task at hand is misidentified. Other challenges concern properly identifying the local version of leader identity at play and creating an appropriate follower identity, such as not coming across as too knowledgeable or too authoritative. The rather long hesitation by Anna in Extract 3 to act in the project leader role, as well as her mocking tone in enacting the role, can be considered ways to simultaneously embrace and distance herself from the position of authority. Her hesitancy can be heard as a reaction to the risk of being seen as too authoritative, thus competing with the formal leader or overworking her own authority. Similarly, the mocking tone simultaneously accomplishes acknowledging and embracing the role of project leader as well as demonstrating that it is not to be seen as a serious challenge of the formal leader's authority. The way she crafts her actions thereby demonstrates awareness of the risk of being too forceful and authoritative. She manages to preserve the authority of both the formal leader and of her own role.

This risk of being too authoritative contrasts with the value placed in the literature on active and proactive followership (Carsten et al., 2010), even to the point of seeing follower activity as a key organizational success factor (Kelley, 1988). While proactivity and forcefulness might be valuable, our study complements this perspective with attention to the risks associated with proactivity. Effective followership might depend on a certain interactional downplaying of competency and forcefulness in order for relevant leader identities to be granted. This suggests that proactiveness or passivity in

followership might result just as much from the possibilities and limitations in the ongoing interaction as from previously held cognitive schemas (Carsten et al., 2010) or implicit theories (Sy, 2010). The interactional context in itself constitutes a complex terrain, presenting both possibilities risks for constructing a follower position.

The analysis demonstrates that accomplishment of leadership (as a relationship) demands considerable work and skill on the follower side. While a central concern in previous followership studies has been cognitive resources, such as schemas (Carsten et al., 2010) or implicit theories (Sy, 2010), our analysis demonstrates that the ongoing interaction is a crucial arena to study to obtain a deeper understanding of followership and the leadership process (Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2017) where leadership effects are produced. In Excerpt 3, rather than Anna simply enacting a followership schema, the participants collaborate to both create and then navigate a complex situation. Although Anna's actions in some sense are guided by an implicit theory of followership (in relation to her supervising manager), the actions are in the here and now collaboratively produced together with the other participants, whose active contributions are crucial for creating the resulting project leader role. This is perhaps even more evident in Excerpt 2, where followership and leadership identities are rapidly shifting, effectively managing a complex situation. To reduce what happens to an individual expression of an implicit theory clearly does not acknowledge this relational and practical work. The type of close analysis presented here clearly portrays the establishment of a follower identity as deeply relational and situated, as a process that ontologically resides in the interaction as such (Fairhurst, 2011).

Constructing a viable and constructive position and identity as follower thus entails managing a range of interpersonal risks and an ability to skillfully identify ways to draw on situational resources. It depends on the ability to read the social situation and manage both task demands and interpersonal sensitivities. In essence, it seems to depend on an ability to skillfully read one's interlocutors and the potential social implications of various action alternatives. Followership clearly demands the same interactional and interpersonal skills that are traditionally attributed to the leader. Rather than one party being competent and influencing the other, the leadership and influence process emerges as truly collaborative and relational.

A second theme in the analysis is what interactional identities the participants actually do orient towards. DeRue and Ashford (2010), as well as Carsten et al. (2010), Lord and Brown (2004), Shamir et al. (1993), and Sy (2010), focus on the negotiation and establishment of leader and follower identities as such. In contrast, the analysis here indicates the importance of more situated versions of identities. In Excerpt 1, the important identities are "expert" and "non-expert"; in Excerpt 2, "chair" and "meeting participant"; and in Excerpt 3, "project leader" and "project member." Each of these identity pairs establishes an authority differential that on a somewhat more generalized level is meaningfully labelled "leader" and "follower." Using the notion of participants' concern (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1997), it is clear that what the participants are concerned with is organizing around the task at hand. Establishing relevant roles and identities is helpful for this. We find participants orienting toward the task of sharing information in a meeting, where the local identity of an expert works as a local leader

identity or the local identity of a project manager who is enacting this identity through the task of chairing a meeting. However, the more abstract notions of leader and follower are less relevant, precisely since they are somewhat abstracted from the current situation and the situated challenges present.

Based on the results of the analysis, we suggest that the labels of leader and follower are meaningful only on an analytical level, as a generalized category for range of a local, more task-oriented practical identity. Indeed, to assume that participants in everyday organizational action orient themselves in relation to the labels of leader and follower might be to commit a category mistake (Kelly, 2008). Of course, on an analytical level, each of the practical identities found in the interaction, can readily be seen as subcategories of the follower and leader categories. The point, however, is that although this is true on a conceptual or analytical level, in practice, we find only the situated and task-oriented categories.

This might illuminate the findings reported by Kempster and Cope (2010) and others, about a hesitancy to call oneself a leader. It might be that the concept of leader, and subsequently that of follower, is too disconnected from practical and engaging tasks for them to be intuitively attractive to organizational actors in many contexts. The label of “leader” might have quite different implications, even distancing from the actual work tasks, as in Sveningsson and Larsson’s (2006) description of leadership as a fantasy that is disconnected from actual practice.

Conclusion

This article presents an analysis of followership in interaction and utilizes conversation analysis to explore the mechanisms and dynamics through which this is accomplished. The article makes a number of contributions to the existing body of research on followership and has implications for the broader field of leadership studies.

The analysis demonstrates that followership depends not only on individually held conceptions (Sy, 2010) and organizational culture (Carsten et al., 2010) but critically on the local interactional context. This gives substance to the claim that followership is an interactional phenomenon because it is necessarily actively accomplished in actual interaction, through the resources and constraints locally available. Followership is visibly created in and has subsequent consequences for work interactions (cf. Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010).

Second, the interactional realization of followership means engaging with a relational landscape that at times is complex and contradictory. As a consequence, the positions of leader and follower might be rapidly shifting rather than established as stable identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), to the effect of accomplishing leadership effects. Rather than being roles that have stability, these positions emerge as interactional resources that are utilized in complex ways in the gradual realization of a leadership process.

Third, the study demonstrates that followership is a fragile and interpersonally risky accomplishment, one that takes a certain amount of delicate interactional work

to accomplish. In contrast to the common emphasis on the value of activity and initiative in the followership position, our study demonstrates how the establishment of followership tends to involve downplaying initiative and authority in order to avoid the risk of challenging rather than supporting the leadership position. Through complex interactional moves, the followership position is established partly by showing uncertainty, a lack of knowledge, and hesitation, even though the follower position established is active and includes a certain form of subsequent leadership. In essence, the study demonstrates that followership is crucial for the construction and accomplishment of influence effects and is a critically important active element in this process.

Finally, it is evident that it takes social and interactional competence to accomplish a viable followership position. In contrast to leader-centered perspectives, where competence and skill are attributed only to the leader, our study demonstrates that without a considerable amount of skill in the followership position, the influence that is at the heart of leadership cannot be accomplished.

There are several implications of this study for further research and practice. For research, the study shows the value of studying interaction directly, through recordings and observation. Such studies could potentially develop the themes identified here, of negotiating knowledge-related authority (Heritage, 2012) as an important aspect of the leadership process. Furthermore, studies could examine how different leadership styles potentially create quite different possibilities and risks for establishing followership.

Our study has primarily focused on short stretches of talk, and the subtle negotiation of identities in these. Further studies could widen the perspective to see how identity contributions and risks are developed over time and develop a deeper appreciation of the relational as opposed to interactional dynamics of the management of such contributions and risks. On a more general note, our study also points toward the need to theoretically develop our understanding of the relationship between leadership and followership identities and the production of leadership effects (i.e., influence and organizing of actions).

On a more practical level, our study implies the value of appreciating that establishing a constructive follower position takes time, energy, and skill. It points toward the practical value of attending to followership and appreciating the intricacies involved in establishing a working leadership relationship. Not least could this be of value in leadership development activities, helping shift the attention somewhat from the leader to the follower side of the relationship, thereby facilitating more flexible and constructive identity negotiations.

The study suffers from a range of important limitations. First and foremost, all our data are from a relatively coherent Scandinavian cultural context, characterized by low power distance, high individualism, and high institutional collectivism (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). This might influence the interactional possibilities in the follower position, as well as the willingness from formally established leaders to locally construct themselves as followers. Second, the data we use come from prescheduled meetings. This type of interactional setting also influences

the possible actions for both the leader and the follower, and in itself offers certain possible positions (such as chairing the meeting). Third, the study focuses on interactional contributions and risks. There are certainly possible risks of a different nature (as also indicated by DeRue & Ashford, 2010), not immediately connected to interaction, that would call for other kinds of data (such as interviews).

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