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Power-with leadership practices: An unfinished business

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Abstract
This paper takes Mary Parker Follett's ideas of power-with and explores them within a contemporary context. Three illustrative case studies from a technology company, innovative manufacturer, and nuclear submarine are offered as ways of exploring the phenomenon. We find that in spite of being hailed for their revolutionary management styles, power-with is still challenging to operationalize especially given the tendency and culturally prevalent expectations to revert to hierarchical, leader-centric forms of guiding organizations. We propose a way forward based on power-with practices which organizations may adopt.

Keywords
Organization design, human resource management, hierarchy, ICT, military, politics, process, structure

> I have said that we find responsibility for management shot all through a business, that we find some degree of authority all along the line, that leadership can be exercised by many people besides top executives. (Follett, 1949/1987b: 61)

Introduction

The search for new leadership models is resulting in increased interest in alternative forms, away from the managerial models that rely on formal positions, systems maintenance, and decisions based in data analysis, towards processes that recognize that organizations function in complex and multifaceted environments. This position sees leadership as a

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continually emerging, socially constructed phenomenon, which cannot be easily accounted for by traditional hierarchical conceptions, and the definition of which may therefore remain vague, contested, and in need of critical re-thinking (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Ladkin, 2010; Raelin, 2003). Consequently, leadership is not associated just with a formal title, but emerges in organizations in dispersed forms and is socially constructed in ways that call for careful attention to the preconcepts with which we approach the phenomenon, and the turn to process ontologies necessarily involves the whole corpus in constructing the meaning and purpose of the organization, providing ways of seeing it dispersed throughout the enterprise.

This idea of leadership being diffused across an organization and taking form as processes through actions of many was flagged by Mary Parker Follett almost a century ago and is realized today in many forms and guises, such as dual manager models, rotating leadership, shared leadership, distributed and dispersed leadership, and as organization-wide or community-based leadership where anybody or everybody contributes to leadership as organizations change and morph over time (Denis et al.,2012; Edwards, 2015; Raelin, 2014). The underlying rationale is that distributing leadership among motivated accomplices creates a more flexible, resilient, and committed organization than vertical hierarchies (Spinuzzi, 2015).

Drawing from Denis et al. (2012) and Kort (2008), and discussions on shared leadership theories, in this paper we express these ideas under the notion of plural leadership. While ''plural'' alone does not encapsulate nuances of all the various forms, it reflects one of the key issues that underpin post-heroic leadership modalities, namely that leadership is not only seen as a quality of an individual (entity ontology), but also that of a team, group, organization, or culture (Raelin, 2014) and can be attached to practices (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Crevani et al., 2007; Raelin, 2016). As a consequence of flatter hiearchies and more autonomous employees, the heroic strongman versions of leadership become contested and resisted. But despite this, ''there is still a tendency to emphasize the role of leadership practices of formally designated leaders'' (Bryman, 2004: 758) both in research and practice and thus person-oriented belief systems continually reappear wanting to reclaim prominence. Intrigued by this dissonance and wanting critically to adopt a stance alongside Follett's vision that authority and responsibility be ''shot all through the business'' (Follett, 1949/1987b: 61), we went in search of forms of dispersed leadership in contemporary organizations. We continually asked the question ''are we there yet?'' and found in response that enterprises that claimed to be innovative forerunners had neither fulfilled Follett's ideals nor had they fully practiced on a day-to-day level the ideas that they proclaimed in mission statements. While there might be great promise in new and more liberating forms of organizing and leadership, this appears to be an unfinished business: while a new tendency towards plural practices and process-oriented theorizing has emerged, we are not there yet. Despite the dispersed nature of work, networked organizing, autonomous teams, and flatter hierarchies, Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) observe that in practice hierarchies still persist. As the discussion part will show, we agree with their observation.

In this article we focus on the inter-mingling of two seemingly contradicting tendencies: vertical top-down hierarchy and plural leadership that support horizontal engagement. To explore this contradiction further, we return to Mary Parker Follett's early 20th century notions of ''power-with'' and ''power-over.'' The guiding question is what kind of new, power-with leadership practices are required to support what is termed plural leadership within, sometimes, hierarchic organizing? To date, studies on distributed leadership show

mixed evidence about the salience of various plural forms (Edwards, 2011), and a lack of large organizations applying distributed leadership models has been noted (Grint, 2011). Our use of the term plural is further motivated by the notion that leadership models in practice are often "hybrid configurations" in mixing various theoretical tenets (Denis et al., 2012; Gronn, 2011).

After situating the article within current agendas in leadership research, our point of entry is Follett's writings in which she develops the idea of power-with vis-à-vis power-over traditions. We then describe three organizations (a technology company, an innovative garment and materials manufacturer, and a nuclear submarine) that have been hailed for successfully executing plural forms of leadership that either diminish hierarchy or enable autonomy within a hierarchy.

In what follows, we analyze these leadership models through power-over/power-with lenses. The findings of the analyses show that none of the three organizations reaches the high bar set in Follett's power-with concept. Resulting from organizational inadequacies in implementing and maintaining the ideologies, Follett's contribution is more radical than the practices we observed in the three organizations. Yet we found that the focal organizations all share and support plural leadership by four power-with leadership practices: *letting-go*, *engaging others*, *facilitation*, and *horizontal leadership*. We conclude the paper by discussing our central insight, the discrepancies, and controversies that seem to form around leadership theorizing, executions of the model and the unanticipated challenges of practical organizing. While the three organizations are still rather laudable exceptions than cautionary examples, we learned that both theorists and practitioners may use more scrutiny when evaluating even the "best amongst us."

Change in thinking: What leadership stands for

Thinking in post-heroic terms has become an important area of leadership research (Crevani et al., 2007; Denis et al., 2012; Edwards, 2011; Grint, 2012), and in the wake of an active search for alternatives to traditional heroic strongmen, the question concerning the nature (ontology) of leadership is witnessing a renaissance. For one, inclusive plural leadership, teams, groups, and networks have been acknowledged to contribute to leadership (Denis et al., 2012; Ford and Harding, 2007; Raelin, 2003). Other more or less radical suggestions range from a negative ontology of leadership (Kelly, 2014), to leaderless leadership (Sutherland et al., 2014), and the sociomateriality of leadership (Hawkins, 2015; Ropo et al., 2013). Considering leadership from these perspectives, traditional entity ontologies are criticized for being too limited in their conceptualizing of leadership phenomena. Therefore, the unifying element for the critical approach is that the question "what kind of *thing* is leadership?," is replaced by a formulation "what kind of *phenomenon* is leadership" (cf. Ladkin, 2010: 1). In other words, the romance of leadership – that leadership or leader may function as a major explanation for a company's success (Meindl et al., 1985) – may not fully be over yet, but now that the relationship between research and its topic has matured, it has also become more complex and complicated. Therefore, the questions "what do we mean when we talk about leadership and what is it good for?" are still salient and invite continued discussion.

In another move away from essentialist and entity-based views of leadership, relational leadership theories consider the nature of leadership as *relations* between leaders, followers, and the environment (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien and Ospina,

2012). This view is originally based on an observation that outcomes of leadership process depend on multitude of inputs, interactions and contingent, unpredictable external factors. (Wood and Dibben, 2015). As with Uhl-Bien (2006), our emphasis is on the ontological nature of leadership where "relationships – rather than authority, superiority, or dominance – appear to be key to new forms of leadership" (p. 672).

One of the key impulses is the rise of an independent knowledge worker; for when an organization relies on the expertise of its staff to fulfil its mandate, it necessarily has to give more autonomy to them, releasing them to make decisions on the spot based on their own assessments. Similarly for those working in R&D or writing software codes, there is no heroic figure telling them what to do, because they *are* the experts, and problems are solved and innovations "produced" in informal interactions (Fayard and Weeks, 2007). Thus, "leaders can emerge informally in more subordinated and dispersed positions and locations" (Collinson 2014: 37). The challenges posed by complex business environments have led to decentralized decision making, lateral processes of organizing, and in general to flatter hierarchies (Frenkel and Sanders, 2007; Spinuzzi, 2015).

In spite of the increase in autonomy, we observe claims that oppressive forms, top-down power structures, and hierarchies still persist (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011), though their forms may change (Spinuzzi, 2015). Parallel to employee autonomy, more sophisticated mechanisms of control are continually being invented (Kantor and Streitfeld, 2015). Scholars in the Critical Leadership Studies community observe that these controls exist not only in hierarchies, systems, and structures (Collinson 2014; Edwards et al., 2013), but also in the architecture of buildings and office lay out which in turn influence and indeed inhibit the freedom of social interaction (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Ropo et al., 2015).

Supporting self-organizing requires changes in perceptions and often a reversal in leadership practices on both the part of nominated leaders and in the whole organization's understandings of what constitutes leadership. Instead of traditional control and command, leaders are now considered to be enablers and facilitators, providing autonomy to improve creativity and self-guidance (Raelin, 2003). Further, post-heroic leadership research has highlighted the distinction between the terms "leader" and "leadership," shifting the focus of research from an individual person to the quality of social relations among people (Crevani et al., 2007). While authority becomes dispersed to many, as Follett in the epigraph notes, people do not necessarily become leaders in a formal sense, but in an informal, everyday sense: they take responsibility for and contribute to actions that were once considered to be an exclusive right of upper echelons.

A turn to collective forms of leading was identified by Conger (1990) who claimed that too often leadership was the domain of individuals seeking to enhance their personal profile at the expense of organizational advancement. The ill-effects associated with leadership have been studied under various labels, ranging from "flawed leadership" (Hogan, 1994), "derailed leadership" (McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Shakleton, 1995), the "dark side of leadership" (Conger, 1990), and "toxic leadership" (Lipman-Blumen, 2005) to "impaired managers" (Lubit, 2003) and "destructive leadership behavior" (Aasland et al., 2009). Furthermore, in organizational climate research, employees typically complained that their immediate supervisor was the worst element of their work (Hogan et al., 1990).

In the light of these negative images, it is no wonder that the business of leadership development flourishes. But it could be asked whether developing individual leaders actually systematically maintains and reinforces the problem (Ford et al., 2008; Gagnon and Collinson, 2014).

These ideas that represent a significant shift of focus away from an individual actor (whether conceived as a leader or follower) and onto groups, objects, and/or a combination of both (Fisher and Robbins, 2015) are also described by Spinuzzi (2015), who calls organizations that orient their operations on project-based teams and an active on-flow of information "all-edge adhocracies." These models require that organization members attend to the needs of the moment, an idea proposed by Follett. For her, companies function around the "law of the situation" (Follett, 1949/1987d, p. 22), and it is the situation that leads, rather than an individual who drives the enterprise. In this way *all* staff and stakeholders understand the demands and expectations of the context and behave appropriately. Furthermore, this shift in attention facilitates all stakeholders to attend to their relationships among each other and to understand leadership as a collective phenomenon, and as a function of process, rather than being the possession of an individual (Crevani et al., 2010).

Follett and with-ness

Follett worked and wrote during a time of industrial unrest where unions and management were in bitter disputes on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, post-First World War. She was dismayed at the sometimes internecine battles that organizations became engaged in, with neither side willing to give ground. She became committed to a process of negotiating that went beyond compromise and that actively engaged parties in creating something new and previously unknown within their organizations. She wrote provocatively critiquing the stasis inherent in compromise, saying that "compromise sacrifices the integrity of the individual, and balance of power merely rearranges what already exists; it produces no new values" (Follett, 1924: x). Instead, she envisaged a world where all parties, whether family members, playmates at school, business people or city leaders, would continually work with each other to move beyond the destructive nihilism of embittered battles. To this end, she commented that even post-First World War Germany and the Allies could engage in the "unending task of co-adaptation" (Follett, 1918: 93), demonstrating the global scale of her ideas.

Herein, however, lies the problem of deploying Follett's ideas in the 21st century. Follett had come in contact with Alfred North Whitehead, who, along with Charles Peirce, William James, and Josiah Royce (Stout and Staton, 2011: 272), had explored process philosophy which saw the world as being in a continual state of flux.

Her orientation towards a continuous process of adaptation and change was at odds with the trajectory that leadership studies took. The drive for effective systems and efficient staff to keep the machines of industry running demanded a more totalitarian and controlling leadership ideology. Problems of nations set on arming themselves for the purpose of military expansion and defense, and industrial conflicts with embattled and intransigent actors on both sides of the negotiating table were solved by powerful elites in positions of authority who would exercise their power using all the resources they could muster. Thus, it fell onto "great men" to ensure national and organizational solidarity, even if that meant constraining personal freedoms.

Continual adaptation which underpins process theories is inconceivable when information is withdrawn from the system, as in the case of Taylor's continual re-telling of the pig-iron story which underpinned his notions of scientific management (Wrege and Perroni, 1974); and when organizational members favor the empowerment of individuals over the collective as Michels (1911/1984) so persuasively insisted. Thus, knowing the law of the situation as Follett advocated, would become all but impossible as single individuals or

leadership groups wrested control of the discourse, taking it on themselves to define the situation as they saw it.

Follett's vision was radically different than that advocated by the proponents of unitary leadership. Her expansive views are problematic because they challenge, for instance, the tendency found in Taylor's approach to suppress evidence of difference and ideas that challenged his methods. Where Taylor was anti-democratic, Follett insisted that all the complexities of human experience would be acknowledged and worked within community. Her goal was radical transformation by opening space for all voices to be heard, and she saw as ''facile'' and ''superficial'' (Follett, 1924: xii) any attempts at restricting freedom of expression.

But this is problematic, especially when ''the bottom line'' is significantly impacted by time-consuming dialogue. Perhaps its Follett's unyielding prescription for communitarian leadership by ''Everyman'' that makes her ideas difficult to realize in organizations where the ''forces for conservation'' (Gurvitch, 1964: 3) tend towards preserving existing hierarchical arrangements, allowing for speedy decision making (Goetz, 2014) which satisfies the needs of stakeholders and keeps privileged elites in power.

Again, this strikes at the heart of reasons why Follett's notions of power-with have become all but impossible to realize in the 21st century. Her orientation towards an ontology of *becoming* informs her view of the ''law of the situation,'' which we think is inaptly named, for her idea of ''unknown knowing'' runs counter to entity ontologies that underpin leadership practice, which is about someone doing something to resolve a situation that is bounded, and definable. Notwithstanding the growth of relational leadership modalities (Uhl-Bien, 2006) which resist fixed and final prescriptions in preference to knowing the fertile web of relationships in an organization, the powerful single-leader at the top of the hierarchy who takes it upon him- or herself to define the ''situation'' still dominates the terrain, whether they are benevolent (Collins, 2001) and/or totalitarian (Aktouf, 1995).

Yet, the scholarship around the importance of dialogue and of not pre-judging situations with a pre-pared plan is well founded. Indeed as Isaacs (1999) proposes, it is important for leaders to listen deeply and to hold space for other voices in order to ''uncover the hidden creative potential in any situation'' (p. 2). This is consistent with Follett's view that situations are fluid and can be understood in the moment by leaders willing to step out of fixed positions.

Achieving this condition where all parties in an enterprise continually invest their energy in creating their world anew necessitates a turn to democratic ideals. However, for Follett, this did not mean exercising choice in a ballot box. Her view of democracy was much more active, purposeful and continuous and is a condition in which people ''seek the *plusvalants* of experience'' (Follett, 1924: x, emphasis added). This neologism reveals Follett's struggle to articulate her idea that when parties come together for discussion or conflict resolution, they need to try to find ways of adding value rather than defending positions. And this is an ongoing, never-ending process where people continually invest in the development of their organization.

To illustrate her ideas, Follett takes an example from everyday life; the farming community seeking to extend knowledge to find the most nutritional diet for milch cows. No single farmer possesses all the information necessary to create the appropriate proportion of grains, but as they meet together, each farmer is able to add value to the developing corpus of knowledge, thereby acting democratically.

The idea of "common sense" where "the experience of *all* is necessary" (Follett, 1924: 19, emphasis added) which underpins consensus-building is a core theme in Follett's writings, and democracy in her sense does not refer to representative conventions which characterizes parliamentary systems. By taking a quotidian farming example, readers would be able to discern the absurdity of a single individual exercising power over others, even if that person had expert knowledge. Elevated to the world stage, such exercises of power had proven to be destructive during First World War, hence her advocacy for ways of leading beyond unitary command and control systems, claiming, "The remedy for coercion is not consent but co-action" (Follett, 1924: 200, emphasis added). *Co-action*, for Follett, goes beyond a battle of wills where one ostensibly seeks the approval of another, when all the while subversively pressing for control.

Therefore, Follett advances the notion of "power-with," which she calls "genuine power," in contrast to "power-over" which for her is only "pseudo power" (Follett, 1924: 189). Power-with liberates people, enabling them to cooperate actively together for the betterment of society. The leader's responsibility is to marshal all available forces so that power is exercised within and by a team. The leader's personal power diminishes and their role becomes one of creating "a group power rather than express[ing] a personal power" (Follett, 1949/1987c: 52).

Here, though, is a further problem with operationalizing Follett's ideas in the contemporary business world. In order to capture what she means in her assertions and to convince her readers about the creative potential inherent in collective power, she deploys an antithetical framing device which relies on binary contrast (Collinson, 2014; Dowis, 2000: 122–124; Leymore, 1982). Either-or forms of argument are more appropriate to a fixed view of leadership rather than the process approach which she espoused. Hence, in her attempt to persuade, she became philosophically inconsistent by asserting a polar contrast, thereby undermining her argument. As Berlin (1957) notes in his discussion of Tolstoy's advocacy for pluralism, in an attempt to keep the discussion open, he slips into a binary argument which contradicts his basic premise. While such "dichotomization may itself be viewed as an attempt to eschew from analysis ambiguity, paradox, and tension" (Collinson, 2014: 38), it is driven by a desire to demonstrate the efficacy of an idea by contrasting it with the paucity of those that currently exist.

The problem of Follett's binary construct may be mitigated by the challenge she offers of moving from "over" to "with" (Follett, 1924: 189), for, "thinking-from-within, or *withness*-thinking" (Shotter, 2006: 586, emphasis in the original), requires full participation in the warp and weft of the organization's activities. This "interested" engagement recognizes the importance of simultaneous involvement *and* detachment; of being "with" but without dominating (this goes for all involved in the plural leadership situation, not only for designated leaders). Denis et al. (2010) describe how "individuals in a position of leadership need to accept the need to leave space for others in an existing constellation" (p. 85), a process that requires determined effort, and "destroy[s] the illusion of *final* authority" (Follett, 1949/1987a: 41, emphasis added). Emphasizing that in work life it is not realistic to expect any one person to live up to "heroic" standards, there have been attempts to remind that – in the midst of success stories, best practices, core competencies and other rhetorics of dynamic business discourse attached to leadership – adding humility and incompleteness to leader roles and definitions is needed for more balanced and human accounts of leadership (Ancona et al., 2007; Collins, 2001; Salovaara, 2011). Broadly this applies to other organizational processes too: when looked at in detail in their nitty-gritty, prior to the "perfection

of outcomes," organizational process are incomplete: chaotic, messy, instable, incoherent (Boje, 2001; Hatch, 2006; Whittington, 1996).This goes to show how profound the change in prepositions is: the phenomenon of *leadership* does not refer only to a detached person on the top, but to a shopfloor or knowledge work practice of working along and with others.

Building upon these two moments and a social, shared construction of leadership, in what follows, we take three cases and explore the lesser known notion of these two, power-with, in more detail. Our selection was determined by the profile of the organizations and readily available popular accounts. The organizations have been written about in texts and leadership lessons have been drawn by scholars. We discuss an IT company TECH, the nuclear submarine USS *Santa Fe*, and W. L. Gore and Associates, well known for its flat organizational structure.

In each instance, we examined easily available accounts, reading them naïvely. Our first objective was to discover the prompts and motivations for incorporating power-with modalities within each focal organization. We wanted to discover the inspirational intent of each text, with the goal of becoming stimulated and educated ourselves. We then spent time discussing the stories, looking for the movements within each narrative, seeking to isolate particular practices that might be generalizable. In our discussions, we located contestations to the sometimes tightly woven stories, looking for ways in which the urge to return to hierarchy and/or the re-emergence of the hero-leader might be manifest.

Cases

The organizations selected for this paper, W.L. Gore and Associates, TECH, and USS *Santa Fe*, caught our attention as part of a part of growing body of organizations that applied in practice innovative, dispersed, and distributed leadership models. Hamel (2010) argues that these kinds of organizations are an anomaly in an era where hierarchies, top-down leadership, and command and control practices have become an international standard. While the organizations were hailed for distributing power along the members, and mainly avoided hierarchical layers, our original idea was quite straightforward: to distil out of these exceptional organizations their empowering, plural, and power-with leadership practices. Edwards (2015) notes that evidence of applying distributed leadership is limited to the educational sector, and Grint (2011) adds that distributed models are not widely observed in larger organizations, so the fact that the three also represent different industries and take place within a large organizational context was an additional selection criteria. The organizations also reveal different facets of power-with ideas. There is an early adaptor from 1980s (TECH), an established flat, "lattice" power-with model that has succeeded in being extremely innovative and among the best places to work for past 18 years (W.L. Gore), and distributing power in a hierarchic organization (USS *Santa Fe*). Finally, as these organizations were hailed for their models, the materials were both publicly available and provided more than anecdotal evidence.

While we intended to highlight the power-with practices, we soon realized that reaching that goal is not quite as simple as we originally thought. To use the narrative approach's terminology, beyond the *dominant* success story of the model, also *marginalized* voices emerged (Freedman and Combs, 1996; White and Epston, 1990). Once the marginalized accounts challenged the consistency of the dominant story, it started to look as an idealized version. In order to write fuller *petit narratives* (Young, 2008), the following descriptions

include observations that partly contradict the celebrated model. The re-telling is ''like adding a new block to an old quilt, the stories take on new meanings and nuances'' (Young, 2008: 1017).

TECH: A high-technology corporation

Gideon Kunda (1992, 2006) conducted an ethnographic study in late 1980s at a high-tech corporation ''TECH'' that employed globally more than 100,000 people and made at the time US$10 billion revenue per year. The story of TECH is a precursor to the autonomous workforce and engagement that characterizes early 21st century IT companies. TECH aimed at collaborative leadership that eschewed command and control systems, creating a setting where no single individual would be able to dominate; an environment characterized by intrinsically motivated staff and an absence of power-over, as one member reported; ''Power plays don't work. You can't *make 'em do anything*. They have to *want* to'' (Kunda, 2006: 5, emphases in the original). The TECH culture is not about ''the ideas and actions of managers, but the responses of members'' (p. 22).

So what kind of culture is this and how is it maintained? TECH's *Engineering Guide* describes the cultural values as being focused first on people rather than the technology itself, underpinned by mutual trust and respect. This is reflected in how the company is described in terms of bottom-up, controlled anarchy, minimizing status differences, and, repeatedly, calling themselves ''family.'' Accordingly, responsibility for productivity, project outcomes, and team work are not managed by power-over structures, but rest on the shoulders of individuals within teams. Key attributes describing how people are encouraged to behave are ''informality,'' ''trust,'' ''maturity'' and ''self-direction,'' and the staff are supposed to be self-starters, self-governing, self-managed and autonomous, to take individual responsibility for the tasks they undertake and to manage their own performance (Kunda, 2006: 54–56).

Though not fully leaderless, TECH's ethos of self-management and hard-working creativity calls for shared responsibility for tasks that are traditionally expected to be carried out by ''management.'' This is a culture where leadership is not understood as the work of an individual, but of a collective, possibly all the organizational members (Denis et al., 2012; Raelin, 2003). What leads then? Emphasis is placed on superior technological ability and this implicit assumption should not be under-estimated as a tool for alignment. Yet TECH mainly relies on its culture that facilitates the committed but ''unmanageable'' staff (Kunda, 2006: 4). In-house talk about the right mindset and how one has to ''get'' the culture underlines the emphasis on cultural awareness as the guiding factor. Reinforcing this kind of cultural engineering are company rituals and normative control that is supported by the human resources department, key personnel, and cultural agents (Adler and Adler, 1993). Additionally, a raft of backdrop materials, ''tapes, slogans, speeches, newsletters, videos, fliers, manuals'' (Kunda, 1992: 228) contributes to cultural enhancement. This is reinforced architecturally by open office spaces designed to maximize communication, contact, and face-to-face work, while minimizing status differences (Kunda, 2006: 192). This materiality curates, socially maintains, and continually re-constructs the culture.

The bottom-up approach at TECH does not mean a laissez-faire attitude. When new projects and plans are proposed, they still need to fit the corporate goals, ''but when they are accepted, they are the responsibility of those who proposed them'' (Kunda, 2006: 22). The knowledge workers are expected to give their best efforts to the task, where ''hard work and

a high level of achievement are to be achieved by self-discipline and by taking an active role in managing one's performance'' (Kunda, 2006: 56). Performance is measured by achievements, which makes the ethos individualistic: it is up to oneself to push the limits. The flip-side of self-management and hard-working ethos are long days at work, detachment from families, stress and burnout. The ultimate goal against which achievements are judged is the slightly ambiguous expectation to do what is ''right'' in each situation when dealing with client, supplier, or colleagues. This ''right'' is part of the technology jargon. It is an ideology that relies on technological advancement and refers to a belief that there are always better, leaner solutions to technical problems.

It almost looks as if management (and there is this layer) exploits staff engagement. This cultural flip-side is underlined by the fact that in the epilogue to the 2006 edition of the book Kunda has devoted a full chapter for the issue of the self and the organization. The employees are aware of the cultural tendency of over-working, commenting:

> During the day, I'm 'on' all the time. No time to stop and think. (. . .) so you put up with all the shit, all the talk about Tech culture. (Kunda, 2006: 164)

> You have to keep your sanity somehow. . . Finding a few minutes for yourself is a problem. . . People get caught up in this shit. . . I can't take too much bullshit even though I'm paid to be an asshole. (Kunda, 2006: 164–165)

> The most important thing is keeping a boundary. Prioritize. You can't do everything. (Kunda, 2006: 165)

Combined with the extensive number of burnout cases (Kunda, 2006: 198–199), these comments evidence contradictory elements of work. The paradox, with the emphasis on freedom and self-management, is that successes are attributed to the cultural dynamics, whereas negative features are dismissed as resulting from an individual's lack of self-management. The toxic effects of the highly competitive environment include dismissing peers and something called ''Setting up – deliberately causing someone to fail'' (Kunda, 2006: 201). Combining collective leadership with high levels of self-direction within a competitive environment seems to cause unhealthy side-effects at TECH.

This shows how official manuals, managerial, or systemic intentions rarely predict informal actions. Engineering culture, that is, making people work in tandem as if they had internalized an external agenda, is an attempt that Schein (2006) has compared with brainwashing prisoners-of-war. Also, Kunda observes critically that in order for the TECH culture to function effectively, a member is ideally ''driven by strong beliefs and intense emotions, authentic experiences of loyalty, commitment, and the pleasure of work'' (Kunda, 2006: 216).

TECH in California was an early adopter of power-with structures that liberated workers to assume a more independent role and make business decisions based on their professional knowledge. Although TECH ostensibly disperses leadership throughout the company, from a human resources perspective the social and psychological effects of the system leave room for improvements.

Nuclear submarine USS Santa Fe

Plural leadership aims at activating and empowering, and it has been tried out in strictly hierarchical organizations like the military. In an inspiring story about the shift in

managerial thinking in the nuclear-powered submarine USS *Santa Fe*, Marquet (2012) explores how to create power-with practices within a culture that is almost totally ingrained in power-over structures.

Informing his change in orientation were experiences as a junior officer and a ''dispiriting'' sense of failure of trying to engage in collaborative leadership within a strongly hierarchical environment. He describes his realization that leaders empowering followers is a flawed project because ultimately, he claims, employees are disempowered.

He argues that empowerment boosts the ego of leaders but fetters followers in cycles of dependence. Thus he says: ''Psychologically for the leader, this is tremendously rewarding. It is seductive. Psychologically for most followers, this is debilitating'' (p. xxvi).

Inherent within the empowerment agenda is the problem that it is the leader who sets the limits of the power that is given, thus he or she acts as a constraining agent. In this way, the leader defines the exceptions and limitations within which power may be expressed (Schmitt, 1922/1985).

Marquet came to his position of ceding control through painful experience. As engineering officer early in his career on board the another nuclear submarine, USS *Will Rogers*, he describes wanting the crew in his section to take ownership of their roles. Yet, on a final inspection prior to a deep dive, he discovered that the bolts holding the end bell of a seawater heat exchanger were inadequately installed. He reluctantly informed the Captain that they could not carry out the dive, because the seal would give way and highly pressurized seawater would spray into the vessel. In response to the failure of his staff members to take appropriate action and correct the fault, he reverted to type, barking orders, closely monitoring all work carried out by his team members. He describes being profoundly unhappy, but more importantly, the sailors were also demoralized by this degree of intense surveillance. Most troubling for Marquet was that he became the central focus of the team, with all decisions and actions passing through him.

Marquet (2012) further illustrates the deleterious nature of the empowerment concept in his observations about a fire drill on board USS *Santa Fe*, when he was Captain. Sailors have no more than two minutes to extinguish a fire before the air becomes toxic and life-threatening. During pre-deployment preparations, he noted that when a fire alarm sounded, only those delegated the role of fighting fires were active, and sailors with other designated responsibilities either left their posts to give the fire-fighters room, or stood nearby just looking on, and were therefore obstructive. Marquet observed that following procedures took precedence over responding to the crisis. But once crew members were encouraged to take immediate action because they were closest to the fire, response times to the drill were dramatically reduced, thereby potentially saving the lives of all on board. Despite the obvious challenges this approach may confer, Marquet believes everybody wants to be emancipated, and his aim is to establish that culture Marquet (2012: 212).

The complexities of this world make the military an apt case to explore the power-with processes. Follett was alert to the problems of giving orders and chain-of-command practices. She illustrated the issue with a discussion with a military officer. The officer expressed dismay to her that subordinates would not follow direct orders he gave (Follett, 1949/1987d). However, after a stint as an instructor at military college, he learned about the human dimension of military life and realized that men would only follow orders that *they* had deemed reasonable. Thus, for Follett, it is those who follow an order that give power to their commander to give the order in the first instance.

Certainly, there are occasions when people must exercise authority. However, Follett insists that it is the situation that determines who has the right to give appropriate orders. She argues, ''of course we should exercise authority, but always the authority of the situation'' (Follett, 1949/1987d: 24). Thus, for Follett, leadership does not revolve around a single individual who exercises authority at all times. As expertise is required, experts in that field step up and express leadership. Guiding this process are the needs of the situation rather than the idiosyncratic vision of an individual. Then as action is required, individuals will continually ask of themselves, ''how do my decisions impact on the *situation* as it is playing out now?'' This is an exercise in simultaneously applying power-with and power-over perspectives.

For Marquet (2012), this idea is expressed under a ''leader–leader'' rubric, where everyone in an organization is considered to be a leader because everyone is responsible for their enterprise, a view held by Follett and her notion of the leadership of everyman (see Monin and Bathurst, 2008). In turn leaders produce more leaders, thereby mitigating the cult of personality which dominates heroic models, making active engagement in the organization by *all* its members, a real possibility.

Our readings of the USS *Santa Fe* story reveal limitations to its applicability across other enterprises. We acknowledge that the system that Marquet devised is remarkable and worth celebrating. That it occurred within a highly structured military environment, is both intriguing, and constraining in that it may offer only a few generalizable factors.

The environment within which a military submarine operates is literally and symbolically hermetically sealed. There is minimal outside influence on the on-board activities once the vessel is at sea, making it easier for sailors to comply with the power-sharing regime that Marquet instituted. Further, although a great deal of trust is placed on each sailor, they are qualified to bear that trust. Loyalties to the national flag, commanders and peers are firmly established during the extensive training that recruits receive. Thus, the crew form a homogenous group of sailors committed and subject to the dictates of their Commander and military system. Finally, in case there was any doubt on the part of sailors to initiating the power-with systems, Marquet was an ever-present (re)enforcer of those dispersed leader practices.

Whereas TECH and USS *Santa Fe* explicitly rely on hierarchies, but have created power-with practices, W. L. Gore and Associates claim to base their leadership on power-with ideas in the first place.

W.L. Gore and Associates

Since its foundation, W.L. Gore and Associates (known for Gore-Tex materials in clothing) was designed as a decentralized organization. Founded in 1958 by Bill Gore and his wife Genevieve, the first ''associates'' (employees) were paid partly through shareholdings in the company, making them co-owners. In 1960, Gore issued their first profits to the associates (W. L. Gore and Associates, 2015), thus sharing business success directly with them. In terms of organizing, the company wanted to liken their internal communication with what took place during car pools – according to Bill Gore's experience, being in a car during the morning commute was the place where people talked to each other without hierarchical restraints (Deutschman, 2004). Accordingly, people are pooled into flexible and effective task forces with no facility having more than 150–200 people so that people know each other and what they are working on.

The second key is employee engagement enabling Gore to continually adapt and change. It has been selected the most innovative company in the USA (Deutschman, 2004). In 2015 the company achieved its 18th year in succession nomination on the Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For® list, – an achievement that only 12 companies since the list has been published from 1998 onwards (100 best companies to work for, 2015).

Though the company today has a CEO, divisions and product units, employs over 10,000 associates, and exceeds US$3 billion in sales annually, the structure described on the company web-page is ''team-based, [a] flat lattice organization'' with ''no traditional organizational charts, no chains-of-command, nor predetermined channels of communication'' (W. L. Gore and Associates, 2015). The crisscrossing lines are the determining quality of a lattice, which brings forth the importance of connections and a free flow of information. Associates are encouraged to spend 10% of time for independent projects, so if someone comes up with a new product idea, he or she puts together a team of people who have the desire and knowledge to make it work. This is how, through an ad-hoc team, the company created Gore-Tex covered guitar strings, ''Elixir,'' that last three to five times longer than traditional strings. Elixir soon gained a 35% market share in classical guitars strings (Deutschman, 2004).

In order to collaborate in a horizontal lattice, one does not need to follow the formal procedure or wait for a member of the hierarchy to respond or escalate issues, but can directly interact and talk with others. Thus, informal organizations carry more weight than the ''façade of authoritarian hierarchy'' (Hamel, 2007: 87). Language promotes the egalitarian ideas, too, as the terms boss, executive, manager, and vice-president are banned from their lexicon, and in this respect Gore is an ''unmanaged company'' that has no bosses, hierarchy, structures, or clear-cut roles (Deutschman, 2004; Raelin, 2004). However, there are peer-selected leaders, who need to earn the trust of others. These leaders need to restrain from grasping power and control, which, as a consequence, allows and invites diverse teams to come together for figuring things out (Hamel, 2010). With the right people and a ''few clear objectives and guidelines,'' not a lot of hierarchy or rules are needed, CEO Terri Kelly explains in a presentation (Kelly, 2008: 22–45).

Getz (2009) has termed this kind of model ''liberating leaders,'' and the liberation has a dual meaning. It gives space for employees' initiatives and frees leaders from the obligations of control-keeping, enabling them to focus on tasks other than corralling staff. This requires managers to consider people as independent and responsible, a habit that resonates with McGregor's Theory Y construct (McGregor, 1960). Certainly, as Carney and Getz (2009) argue, when people feel intrinsically equal they tend to cooperate more willingly.

A more egalitarian power-with system poses a threat for those in manager roles when redistributing power. As Hamel (2007) describes, ''most managers support the idea of empowerment, but become noticeably less enthusiastic when confronted with the necessary corollary – to enfranchise employees you must disenfranchise managers'' (p. 97). This requires a lot from associates, too.

The lattice places a lot responsibility for the individual to find his or her work. It can be problematic figuring out how to contribute in a self-directed environment. Like a newly hired Gore associate tells: ''When I arrived at Gore, I didn't know who did what. I wondered how anything got done here. It was driving me crazy'' (Whitehurst, 2015: 91). On the one hand there is freedom to choose what to contribute to, on the other hand there is pressure to contribute, which, tied to performance measured by peers, can become exhausting. For people who are used to oversight and support, Gore may be a difficult place to work.

Also, for people who are looking for a promotion or anything akin to a more traditional career path, Gore apparently lacks the management layers to climb. Yet to date, Gore seems to be able to choose those who fit the culture because in 2007 they had 34,585 applications for 272 vacancies (Manz et al., 2009).

The peer review system handling compensation and leadership promotions is based on how one appears to others. It can also be manipulated in that it favors people by their relations, not by their ability, and the ranking system can be manipulated by cliques, as postings to Glassdoor.com[1] reveal. This problem seems to dog other companies that favor open processes and peer-to-peer leadership, such as Amazon.com (Kantor and Streitfeld, 2015). Despite the promise of participative culture, involving more people in decision making can be blocked.

Whereas leadership in more traditional systems is formally in the hands of few but be practiced by many, at Gore this is reversed. Although formally and widely shared, informally leadership can in some cases become concentrated in the hands of few. In those instances, leadership is not only stymied, it is also misused. When leadership is used as something coercive it necessarily includes repressive power-over structures, the potential of power-with forms can become corrupted. Issues like these show that the power-with system at Gore tends to create its own problems that differ from those in traditional hierarchies.

Analyzing the power-with structures within the cases

In our examination of the three organizations, we relied on written accounts stemming from publicly available sources. Questions that underpinned our analyses were: what causes organizations to consider power-with modalities; what becomes of the leader role under power-sharing regimes; and how do these models work in practice? The first discovery was that despite being lauded as examples of innovative leadership models, none of them realized the idealized form in practice. Recognizing this was a disappointment and led to self-doubt. Had we chosen ''wrong'' organizations based on a halo-effect (Rosenzweig, 2007) created around these? Were we, as researchers, victims of propaganda? These questions motivated us to ensure that the *petit narratives* fulfil dual aims. They highlight both the organizations' unusual approach to the architecture of power *and* the practical consequences that remained mainly undiscussed in the public domain.

Each organization designed their particular power-with model based on different backgrounds and needs. The catalyst for Marquet at USS *Santa Fe* was his personal experiences of effective and ineffective leadership. For W. L. Gore and Associates, the starting point was a hankering for social experiences in one context (carpooling) to be translated into the work experience, and for TECH the driver was the urge for continual innovation and to be ahead of competitors. McGregor's Theory X and Y (McGregor, 1960) is explicitly mentioned as the inspiration for TECH (Kunda, 2006: 61) and Gore management and leadership models (Getz, 2009; Hamel, 2007), whereas Marquet implicitly relies on the similar principles, all the while being unaware of McGregor's theory.

From a theoretical perspective, a power-with model within hierarchy is basically a contradiction in terms. But as these organizations show, power-with forms in practice function within hierarchy *both* vertically *and* horizontally. Plural leadership can include individuals (incl. leaders) from various organizational layers, particularly when this takes place in a more informal setting (though the individuals would, according to the organizational chart,

carry different responsibilities and lines of authority). In line with Diefenbach and Sillinge's (2011) observation, we note how power-with concept "releases" the apparent contradiction between hierarchy and plural leadership, and within informal organizing hierarchical leadership, processes can become more aligned with horizontal leadership processes.

These organizations all acknowledged the pervasiveness of power-over tendencies and therefore consciously designed their structures to mitigate this. But once we revisited Follett's ideas about collaboration and leadership in a power-with frame, we recognized that her vision was much more radical than found in any of the three organizations. Her idea of plusvalants (seeking added common value instead of defending positions) is all but unrecognizable. At both Gore and TECH, the nature of the cooperative model easily risks becoming too competitive or corrupt, where individual benefits are sought to the detriment of others. As a result, both companies apparently evidence problems with staff well-being and burnout. With the USS *Santa Fe*, it is Marquet himself who continually sponsors the leader–leader phenomenon, and the difference is that the emotional and long-term well-being increased after the shift to power-with model. Although it was the least autonomous of the three organizations, the crew experienced much more freedom, albeit within a very confined context.

Participants of each organization show a willingness to make sacrifices for the common cause, whether that is more effective IT-solutions (TECH), better designs and more sustainable products (Gore), or operational excellence (USS *Santa Fe*). In practice, the Gore and TECH models create negative side-effects of demanding too much, whereas the new culture at the USS *Santa Fe* eased frustration and, unlike the previous passivity, enabled the crew to observe, and take charge of their own environment.

At TECH, autonomy of members seems to be greatest because of technology being the driving force; a mastery that implies that everybody plays a part in leadership. At Gore, autonomy is limited by the peer review system. And on the submarine, as long as the commander is able to maintain the power-with practice, it works, but as soon as the more familiar military hierarchy takes over, the crew's autonomy is far more limited and there is an ever-present threat of it being cut completely by those more senior in the hierarchy.

Notwithstanding that both TECH and Gore promote Theory Y ideologies which assume people are inherently interested, active, and self-managing, Follett's ideas would take this further by looking for richer identity constructs. Her concept of the self is not of a unitary being who stands alone and isolatable from the environment. Follett draws on biological metaphors to try to articulate her ideas of how humans add value to each other. In all relations, she argues, the "law of organic growth" (Follett, 1924: 73) is at work where all parties involved in the situation continuously grow and "become something different" (Follett, 1924: 63). But at both TECH and Gore there are signs of sabotaging other's work for individual benefit. At the USS *Santa Fe*, the concept of the leader–leader relies strongly on Marquet's sponsoring and being sponsored within the system. Remarkably, the US Navy has put Marquet's book on the official reading list, yet within the military system, there is a high likelihood of it reverting back to traditional forms of command and control once "the exceptional leader" leaves that assignment.

What are the consequences of power-with systems? Paradoxically, the increased freedom at Gore and TECH requires a level of commitment that has negative consequences, revealed in an increase in stress symptoms and the politicization of the system. At TECH there are power plays, cliques, and setting others up to fail, whereas at Gore, the peer review system is accused of being manipulable. Because of a corrupted system people feel that their best

accomplishments and merits do not always get rewarded, but that compensations and promotions follow from personal connections to somewhat opaque networks.

Power-with practices

In this paper, we have explored Follett's view that the experience of everyone is essential in order for organizations to resolve their challenges. No individual leader has sufficient knowledge to initiate solutions to the myriad of issues organizations confront on a daily basis, and leadership practices can either prevent or enhance organizational members' participation in collective leadership. Underlining this, Follett rooted her power-with concept in democratic notions where all members actively participate in the organization's life and genuinely feel they are in charge of the action. The "with" preposition denotes a link between several actors beyond one-to-one power-over relations. Implying a plurality of leadership across an organization, power-with differs greatly from the traditional leader-centric power-over practices. We propose that there are several prompts that would open space for with-ness in leadership.

Though the three organizations had radical and innovative models to lead the enterprise in a power-with fashion, in practice all of them fall short of power-with ideals. Despite this, we recognized four features that these organizations share and that, rather than enhancing power-over structures, contribute to power-with leadership practices: *letting-go*, *engaging others*, *facilitation*, and *horizontal leadership*.

The first, *letting-go*, is where all members of the organization relinquish the need to control outcomes and "surrender" to the needs of the situation (Schaeffer, 2002), thereby allowing the law of the situation to operate. This is akin to what Barrett (2000) calls an "aesthetic of surrender" (p. 237) where the act of letting go enables fresh ideas to be generated.

However, letting go on the part of leaders implies that all members of the organization are curious and "interested" in the progress of the company. Regardless of whether leadership comes from within the people or is exercised by nominated leaders, if power-with is developed, leader roles will become less dominant leaving more room for staff to become intrinsically motivated in their work. It is about giving control, not taking it (Marquet, 2012). Being led by intrinsic motivation implies that the processes and content of work at hand are the antecedent influences for directing the work (Amabile, 1997), not a managerial power-over structure.

Second, managerial roles center on *engaging others* for the purposes of direction, alignment, and commitment (Drath et al., 2008) and creating an environment where co-action and democracy can take place. This includes an ability to see the strategic and organizational meaning of work arrangements, and these range from considerations about the balance between present and remote work (flexi-time), and work place design, to thinking how technologies support power-with arrangements. There is no escaping, however, that all members of the organization take responsibility for its strategic design and implementation. Here, the role of leaders may be to unsettle the status quo and encourage new ideas to develop, rather than maintaining order (Plowman et al., 2007).

Third, both in peer leader models and for nominated leaders, the role shifts into *facilitating* and *coaching*. Although highly valued in the education sector (Shook and Keup, 2012) and associated with positive work performance (Kidwell and Valentine, 2009), peer leadership is not well understood in business organizations. Kellerman (2012) argues that companies need to mirror the social changes and values that families have undergone in

recent decades. Just as parents are no longer uncontested authorities, so too organizational leaders need to understand the current climate oriented around digital technologies. In that climate, the CEO needs to "recede from foreground into background, to a point where he or she is more of a coach, a facilitator, or a genial host at a family gathering than a lodestar around whom turns everything and everyone" (Kellerman, 2012: 43). USS *Santa Fe* is a case in point. In contrast to previous practices, the new system provided tutelage towards self-improvement and professional development.

With the leader stepping back from the limelight, comes a concomitant fourth opportunity of enabling a horizontal leadership process (Bekman, 2010). Instead of focusing on vertical hierarchies, *horizontal leadership* processes aim at producing added value to a customer *throughout* the organization. When inviting co-workers to act in a personally responsible fashion and instigating them to take personal initiative by allowing them more freedom, even a "rigidly bureaucratic" bank was able to shift a previous vertical, managerial task into a horizontal responsibility (Bekman, 2010: 16). Horizontal practices are noted to positively impact organizational performance also in other traditionally hierarchical organizations like the Police force (Wuestewald and Steinheider, 2012) and religious groups (Houston and Todd, 2013). According to Bekman (2010), creating horizontal leadership in hierarchic organizations requires both *invitation* (from the hierarchy) and *joining* of the community. Choosing the strategic to direction and creating movement are products of the collective.

In these ways, the social design of organization enables and restricts leadership practices, and acknowledging this is vital in power-with systems. At Gore, this includes the social production of spatial design (small units house 150–200 people and transparent physical structures), whereas TECH lays more emphasis on culture. In USS *Santa Fe*'s, case plural leadership practices were created on the top of, beyond, or in addition to formal hierarchy. But if plural leadership can be made to work in a strict military hierarchy, we believe it has a chance anywhere.

Are we there yet?

Applying Follett's power-with concept, we studied how plural leadership practices have been applied in three organizations. To our surprise, though we had carefully chosen three organizations (out of a number of options) that were celebrated as forerunners in exemplifying new power-with leadership models, all the chosen organizations failed our humble litmus-test. Although ideologically and on a structural level organized for power-with practices, our analyses showed that at TECH and Gore, the system can be corrupted. While the most hierarchic of these, the nuclear submarine, became operationally excellent, it guarantees the least autonomy for workers in the first place; seen critically, it can be doubted whether the military system can actually exemplify egalitarian participation. It may be just a "pretence … [an] illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives" (Braverman, 1974: 29; Crawford, 2009). Although USS *Santa Fe* has excelled also after Marquet's posting, compared to Gore and TECH the disadvantage of this system is that in the midst of military hierarchy it may break down without persistent sponsoring. Considering that these three organizations were all highly praised, it seems that the practical world of organizing poses dilemmas for applying plural and leaderless leadership systems. Despite our initial research and hunch that we have chosen organizations that excel in power-with forms – and they are indeed showing very promising results and practices – we are not

quite there yet; Follett's vision is either unattainable, or core structures are not flexible enough for it to be realized.

"How can organizational and management theories be developed so they better reflect the way actors enact their practice and, thus, are more relevant to practice?" Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011: 339) ask. The above plural leadership practices we studied stem from practice, but they fall short of Follett's radical vision. Is that a flaw of theory or practice? Compared to theory-laden plural leadership models, we do not think Follett's power-with concept was developed with theory in mind. In the midst of resolving actual industrial disputes in the early 20th century, Follett saw that lazy compromises between two choices do not work for anybody, and that third and fourth options are needed. How to achieve these in the middle of hot disputes? What is going to break off the deadlocks where too many individuals are struggling against each other? Through her observations she became convinced that solutions from an authoritative power-over position are hardly acceptable and thus would not solve disputes; rather, everybody's engagement produces creative solutions. Having studied the focal organizations we would argue that in these cases, the reasons for operational incoherence in supporting the power-with model are not necessarily of a theoretical, but practical nature.

If Follett's power-with concept stems from her experiences and thus represents more a theory-in-use than an espoused theory (Argyris and Schön, 1974), why are these principles yet hard to fathom in practice? We think this has something to do with the way leadership is culturally represented. We have grown up with stories where, as Biehl-Missal's (2010) title "hero takes a fall" implicitly suggests, heroes seldom take a fall: in fairy tales powerful individuals succeed in spite of the odds. On the contrary, collective or group achievements do not seem to be as celebrated in the Western fairy tale canon or other cultural expressions as is the individual hero. To answer the above question, we think that Follett's power-with concept is based on a more plural understanding of leadership and therefore does not apply well to fully individualized leader situations – the ones that dominate today's managerial landscape. Even today for collective leadership forms to exist or be present in discourse requires constant sponsorship, to keep the barbarians of bureaucratic obfuscation from the gate. In order to promote collective leadership forms throughout the horizontal and vertical organization, more innovative management systems are needed. Working on the societal acceptance of plural forms of leadership, while at the same time "diminishing" the value placed on individual leaders, is the first element where plural leadership models, if these are to be encouraged, need support.

What TECH, Gore, and USS *Santa Fe* have accomplished are social experiments, and it is through these practical pilots that we learn about the *possibilities* Follett's vision offers and the *requirements* it poses for the current social order and co-operative models. How can someone be so radical in 1920s, but nearly one-hundred years later, we have not caught up with her vision? The practical challenge Follett's power-with model poses is how to make collective forms of leading psychologically and soci(et)ally more acceptable?

Another challenge inherit in this question is that plural leadership forms are attached to process ontology instead of entity ontology. This requires making the history and subsequent development of this idea visible. This is the second element where we think that plural leadership needs continuous sponsoring, because process ontologies are much more radical in their conception and difficult to operationalize.

Third cultural bias comes from organizations – their managers, boards and employees – still looking for strong leaders. The expectation is that leaders take the lead – yes, it should

take place through empowerment and team work, but they should initiate it, motivating others. In plural leadership forms, staff are expected to take responsibility, but it is easier to get guidance, appraisal and have someone to comfort when suffering. Even in this enlightened world, we privilege people who say they can do and accomplish tasks; who work long hours, tirelessly carrying the company in their minds and hearts, and defend it 24/7; these people show "leadership." But the reversed question is, "why do we make demands like this on people?" In times of knowledge work, quoting Tina Turner's hit, "we don't need another hero."

We believe the kind of theorizing Follett practiced enables to better explain leadership phenomena in plural, collective, knowledge-work-based environments, where leadership can arise from various instances.

So what is our conclusion about plural leadership and the power-with concept? Are we there yet? Today ever more companies apply loose hierarchies, decentralized decision making and, consequently, different forms of plural leadership, because respectful interactions facilitate communication and creativity (Carmeli et al., 2015; Spinuzzi, 2015). The power-with models are experiments in social organizing, and we believe they hold great promise to become applied in a more coherent fashion and to gain in relevance for practice. While there are a great many popular sources reinventing leadership, there is a tendency to idealize versions of organizations, while success stories sell better than messy realism. In contrast, our research aims at making sense of the messiness.

The growth of plural leadership models shows that there is an increasing appetite to apply them, but while evidence on the productivity of egalitarian models is mounting, hierarchies still persist. In the light of our discussion, and for the sake of more humane workplaces, where people can utilize their capabilities and exercise freedom, we think there is demand for courageous pilots in spreading power along the organization. No company or culture can transform from a rigid hierarchy to freedom in a matter of few weeks. While "going against the grain," and whether based on experience, Follett, McGregor or something else, chances are that the pull of the dominant (individualized, leader-centric) culture is strong, and therefore, as contradictory as it sounds, a practical advice is to maintain a process that keeps the vision alive, so that one day, not that far in the future, we can say: "You see it, over there? See it? I think we are almost there."

Author contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the article, and the order of names indicates the initiator of the study.

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Note

1. We asked for interviews at W.L. Gore, but our request was rejected "due to the large volume of requests." In the internet we yet found various sources (comments to Hamel's 2010 article; review and recruiting page www.glassdoor.com; http://www.indeed.com/cmp/W.-L.-Gore-and-Associates/reviews) and comments that contradicted the rosy picture on Gore culture. However, since we cannot verify the identity of the web-commentators, we decided not to use these materials directly. But considering the comments on various web-addresses, certain similarities about the negative aspects do emerge. This is all the more intriguing when compared with Great Place to Work (GPW) survey, where W. L. Gore is ranked as a great company to work for the past 17 consecutive years (https://www.gore.com/en_xx/news/FORTUNE-2014.html). GPW review only lists positive comments. http://reviews.greatplacetowork.com/w-l-gore-associates.

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