Authentic leading as relational accountability:

Facing up to the conflicting expectations of media leaders

Introduction:

In this paper we analyze the way in which media executives understand their role within their organizations and society, the leadership challenges they confront, and how they deal with the demands of increasingly complex organizational environments. Bardoel and d'Haenens (2004: 173) identified four types of media accountability, i.e. political accountability (towards the law), market accountability (towards investors), public accountability (towards citizens) and professional accountability (towards the journalism profession). One of the main questions that arise is whether the conflicting expectations that media executives face, compromises their authenticity. In what follows, we explore how authenticity is understood within the authentic leadership literature, and draw on the literature on 'relational leadership' to seek a deeper understanding about what relationality could mean within the context of authentic leading. We hope that this will allow us to better understand leaders' response to the conflicting demands they face in the media industry.

Within the authentic leadership literature, authenticity primarily has to do with being true to oneself, i.e. knowing oneself, being self-aware, and acting in accord with one's own true self and one's values (Gardner et al, 2011: 1121). Most of literature on authentic leadership also associates it with moral maturity

(Gardner et al, 2011). However, there are also some who feel that it is not necessary to specify the content of authentic value-sets (Shamir and Eilam, 2005: 398), while others believe that associating authentic leadership with morality could even be objectionable (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2014; Ford and Harding, 2011: 466; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010). But even those who argue for the moral content of authentic leadership, draw certain important distinctions about which kind of moral response is required. Avolio and Gardner (2005) caution against confusing authenticity with sincerity. They argue that authenticity does not involve an explicit consideration of how one is represented to others, but instead has to do with 'existing wholly by the laws of its own being' (Avolio and Gardner 2005: 320). The main difference seems to lie in the nature of the leader's interaction with others. When establishing what is appropriate in mainstream authentic leadership, the focus is on the self rather than on the other. A relational orientation is considered an important component of authenticity, but relationality is defined in a particular way, i.e. as a demand for truthfulness or transparency.

In this study, we add to the literature that shows that much of the authentic leadership literature cannot deal with leaders' identity struggles (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2014). We interrogate the literature on authentic leadership to argue that it works with a very limited understanding of relationality. In fact, its references to relational transparency make it difficult to deal with the 'blended' nature of leadership reality (Collinson and Collinson, 2009), because it assumes

a fixed self that must be truthfully represented. In this way, we hope to extend Nyberg and Sveningsson's (2014: 438) critique of authentic leadership's depiction of an essentialist self, by arguing for the inclusion of constructionist perspectives on leadership (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012: xxii). We however propose doing so without losing the benefits of the entity perspective, which currently dominates the authentic leadership literature.

In what follows, we offer a review of the relational and authentic leadership literatures to identify certain emerging problems and questions. We then reflect on the unique challenges of the media industry as the context within which these questions will be explored. After explaining our methodology, we interpret emergent themes in our interview data by engaging with some of the theoretical questions emerging from the literature review. The results of our empirical study lead us to argue for an interplay between entity and more constructionist perspectives (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012: xxiii). Finally, we argue for 'relational responsiveness' as a core component of maintaining authenticity and accountability within leadership in the media industries.

Literature review: Entity versus constructionist perspectives

Within studies of relational leadership, there seems to be at least two general approaches, i.e. 'entity' perspectives and 'constructionist' perspectives (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012). We adopt this broad distinction to reflect on various leadership approaches' way of dealing with relationality. In doing so we are fully

aware of the risk of overgeneralization and ignoring the complexity of defining and describing leadership (Harding et al. 2011: 928). We however believe that it can shed some light on the limitations of current theories of leadership, and serve to inform the interpretation of the patterns that emerged from our interview data. Though both entity and constructionist approaches are interested in relationality, they approach it in very different ways.

The 'entity' perspective considers the traits, behaviors, and actions of individuals and group members as they engage with each other, whereas the constructionist perspective focuses on those practices and processes of social construction by which certain shared understandings emerge which allows leadership to function within organizations (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012: xxii). Scholars working from an 'entity' perspective have for instance identified inspirational, visionary, and charismatic leadership traits and behaviours (Conger and Kanungo, 1998), or values-driven leadership (Ciulla, 2002). Values-driven leadership focuses on the character of the individual leader, which makes him/ her both ethical and effective. Scholars with an 'entity' perspective are interested in the interaction between leaders and followers, and can even accommodate the fact that leaders are relationally shaped by their followers. Responsible leadership theories (Maak and Pless, 2012) propose a more relational understanding of the concept of leadership, yet does not depart from the 'entity' perspective. Maak and Pless define responsible leadership as the art of building and sustaining relationships with all relevant stakeholders. Responsible

leadership requires socialized, not personalized leaders, but still focuses on individuals, rather than processes.

It is clear that not even all entity perspectives have the same orientation towards relationality. Avolio and Gardner (2005) for instance offered us a detailed analysis of how authentic, servant, spiritual, and charismatic leadership approaches differ from one another. They (2005: 323) indicated that neither charismatic, nor servant, nor spiritual leadership theories display the balanced processing or relational transparency that characterizes authentic leadership. That however does not mean that authentic leadership loses its focus on individual leaders. Though the authentic leadership literature acknowledges the importance of followers and 'transparent relationality', it remains defined by the individual dimension, i.e. it is related to the personality and the choices and decisions of the individual leader appointed to positions of authority within organizations.

The other, opposing position on leadership is the constructionist view of leadership, which describes it as a social, relational phenomenon, or an ongoing process of leading that emerges within organizations. As Alvesson and Spicer (2011: 20) observe, "people construct or invent a version of leadership through drawing on their assumptions, expectations, selective perceptions, sense-making and imaginations of the subject matter". For researchers interested in broader leadership dynamics, rather than in individual leaders, addressing the individual in isolation of the social phenomena at work around him makes no sense

whatsoever (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011: 75). This kind of leadership study involves the analysis of interactions and relations, in particular power relations, between members of a community or an organization (Alvesson, 1996; Collier and Esteban, 2000). In this case, leadership is seen as a social, procedural construct and not as the expression of the particular will of an individual leader inspiring followers.

We also have to acknowledge approaches which try to cast a bridge between entity and constructionist approaches to leadership, such as, relational and distributed leadership theories, and systemic leadership theories (Collier and Esteban, 2000: Edgeman and Scherer, 1999; Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey 2007, Uhl-Bien 2011). Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) went to great lengths to create the opportunity for conversation between the two broad positions on leadership, inviting proponents of both 'entity' and 'constructionist' positions to enter into a constructive dialogue. They encouraged an *interplay* between the two positions, arguing that relational leadership involves both individual leaders and the process of understanding emergent leadership dynamics.

We believe this interplay is particularly important when we try to understand 'authentic leading'. When exploring some of the multiple definitions of authentic leadership, some subtle nuances raise particular questions, which we would like to explore. Gardner at all (2011: 1121) built on Kernis and Goldman's (2006: 284) view that authenticity contains the following key components: 1) self-understanding, 2) openness to objectively recognizing their ontological realities

(e.g., evaluating their desirable and undesirable self-aspects), 3) actions, which are in line with one's values and preferences; and 4) orientation towards interpersonal relationships. In Gardner et *al.*'s (2011) definition, the four components are rephrased as: 1) self-awareness, 2) internalized moral perspective 3) balanced processing, and 4) relational transparency. Gardner *et al* (2011: 1123) explain that the 'internalized' moral perspective reflects the combination of two previously distinct components, i.e. internalized regulation and positive moral perspective. They therefore opted for a form of internal regulation based on moral beliefs, rather than acknowledging other orientation points for internal regulation, such as work ethic driven by ambition, or other amoral considerations.

In our reading, at least two dimensions of the authentic leadership construct merits further reflection: a) the moral character of authentic leaders and b) the nature and extent of relationality within authentic leadership. In the one definition, morality is made explicit, whereas in the other, consistent behavior according to whatever value-set the leader possesses seems to be considered authentic. Yukl et al (2013: 40) pointed out that only 2 of the 4 components of the AL construct have a moral dimension, i.e. internalized moral perspective and transparent relationality. But even in considering these two components, some questions remain: Is relationality really about constructing a truthful representation of the leaders' values? How are we to understand media leaders' sense of accountability?

Authentic leadership's references to relational transparency seem firmly rooted only in the entity perspective. This creates limitations in terms of its usefulness for understanding leadership paradox or leaders' response to conflicting demands. This limitation has been highlighted by Nyberg (2014), who argues for a more constructionist understanding of leaders' navigation of their authenticity when faced with paradox. It is also echoed in Ladkin and Taylor's (2010) view that authentic leadership is continuously enacted rather than being a fixed trait of a stable entity.

It is important to acknowledge that some see leadership as a dynamic that subjects both leaders and followers to its demands. As Ford *et al.* describe, leadership is a "norm that controls leaders, by making them strive to be something that is utterly unachievable. […] The very presence of leadership renders others, 'followers', abject" (Ford *et al.*, 2008: 169). However, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) rightly point out that the focus on leadership dynamics can easily lead us into a situation where everything can be leadership and everyone can be a leader, leaving the construct as such meaningless. Though we certainly need less blind faith in 'leadership', a rejection of the notion as such is not helpful either (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 368). One can argue that the emergent dichotomy between entity and constructionist leadership studies is a result of a unidimensional consideration of leadership (Gronn, 2002), which belies its inherent paradoxes. In fact, it can be argued that dichotomous thinking makes us incapable of understanding leadership at all (Collinson, 2014: 36). This is the

case not only because conceptual dichotomies constrain our thinking, but also because the subject-matter that we are studying is more complex. There is increasing evidence that successful leaders display a paradoxical combination of what seems to be irreconcilable qualities (Collinson, 2014: 43).

One of the main contributions of systemic leadership, for example, is the acknowledgement of leadership paradox (Collier and Esteban, 2000). From a systemic leadership perspective, 'leadership' is everyone's responsibility, yet in most cases, it is still exercised by one person at a time. We believe that the paradoxes that the systemic leadership literature helps us to understand how important it is to focus both on leadership dynamics, which involves more than individual leaders, while still acknowledging the role of individual leaders and diverse followers. It also helps us to redefine authenticity as relational responsiveness to others and situations. Building legitimacy within the eyes of others is just as important as a transparent display of one's own values (Eagly, 2005).

Collier and Esteban (2000) use the example of a jazz band, where certain unspoken conventions dictate who will be "soloing", and "comping" (supporting the lead) and how the switch between leading and supporting is initiated. Another paradox relates to the co-existence of unity and diversity within organizations. Though systemic leadership relies on a diversity of ideas and inputs, one cannot deny the need for congruence and a shared sense of purpose. Another paradox is that of asymmetry-mutuality. Even though a systemic approach to leadership

encourages all the members of an organization to step into the leadership role when required, it cannot be denied that differences in capabilities, roles, responsibilities and opportunities affect the way in which this plays out in practice. It also means that someone should still create the opportunity for the share of ideas. Systems that can help formalize, advocate and implement these ideas are also necessary and must be created. As a result of the asymmetries that continue to exist, the paradox of discipline-creativity emerges. Not all ideas are good ones, and though creativity must be celebrated and rewarded, discipline is needed to distinguish ideas that should be pursued further, from those that should be discarded or placed on hold. This also relates to another paradox, namely that of creation-destruction. In order for creative new ideas to flourish, old ways of doing things must be dismantled, which means that someone needs to initiate the destruction of organizational structures, familiar work patterns and positions of power, which inevitably creates discomfort and resistance (Painter-Morland, 2008).

Collinson and Collinson (2009) point out that while leadership studies tend to radically oppose what can be called 'heroic' and 'post heroic' perspectives – the former putting forward the individual nature of leadership, the second its collective nature – the employees in their study called for a leadership practice that combines the two. They argue that one should avoid opposing in more or less artificial and ideological fashion traditional forms of leadership and "distributed" forms of leadership, and instead understand their articulation, their

complementarity, and their particular effectiveness. Blended leadership meets the demands of employees by combining the particular qualities of a directive leadership approach, favoring 'agentic traits', a leadership approach oriented towards clarifying the big picture and enhancing commitment to it by aligning people (Northouse, 2004), with a shared leadership approach, i.e. "leading by invitation" (Alvesson and Blom, 2014) which celebrates everyone's differences and makes room for "dissensus" by favoring availability, deliberation, communication, and proximity. Simply put, blended leadership is concerned with the potential complementarity that emerges from, on the one hand, charismatic forms of exercising authority in a top-down approach, and on the other a relational perspective of peer-leadership.

Though some of the leadership theories mentioned above acknowledge the relational, 'blended' and paradoxical nature of leadership, it still does not fully address the implications for our understanding of certain leadership dynamics, which emerge as a result, not does it help us to think through what authentic leading means in practice within the media industry. The specific characteristics of this industry come into play here, but may also have broader implications for understanding leadership theory in general.

The context: the character of the media industry

Media professionals are increasingly faced with the challenges of monetary pressures, encroachment on the profession by other participants in the online

environment, and the speed that characterizes news and entertainment organisations. In this context, traditional professional ethics comes under pressure and media professionals have to redefine their role in maintaining accountability and trust in the profession. It is important to note that media professionals, especially journalists, producers, and artists, used to experience their profession as a vocation, not simply as a livelihood, and that they are particularly recalcitrant to "higher" authority (Perez-Lattre and Sanchez-Tabernero, 2003). Furthermore, it is assumed that their intrinsic motivation for work stems from sharing a common cause (e.g. the journalists' commitment to their newspaper) rather than from the managers' alleged leadership (Dal Zotto, 2005). When leadership therefore occurs, it is most likely not because it was explicitly exerted or enforced. Leadership questions are also particularly relevant to media industries in the wake of changes in the profession.

Media industries are subject to the forces of a "reactive economy" (Garel, 2003) where organizations are subject to constant reappraisal and the need to reconfigure resources to optimize their responses to demand in short time frames. Indeed, the very nature of their activity exposes these organizations to all sorts of economic, political, and technological pressures. This makes them an especially interesting field of investigation, notably for how "to manage the different levels of conflicting demands, stresses and difficulties that characterize contemporary organizations" (Collinson and Collinson, 2009).

Media organizations face the scrutiny of the multiple audiences (critical

readers, other journalists political elites, societal observers) at the same time, and continuously, because of the social media interactions. The power/value of media organizations comes from their reputation, which is painstakingly developed over many years but easily destroyed quickly. Without reputation the media loses its readership (which is attached to a specific identity and values of the outlet) but also sponsors and advertisers (Picard, 2002). As Dal Zotto (2005) demonstrated that leadership can aspire to increase the autonomy of teams; in this case, leadership is no longer a concept, it is a process that extends beyond the leader/followers relationship in favor of a leadership conceived as the coordination of efforts within a community of practice. We are particularly interested in exploring the relationship between this complex of community of practice, the various accountabilities at play, and leaders' authenticity.

It is also worth noting here that media projects lend themselves well to the transition from a traditional project management model – based on procedures of manual operation, linear phasing, emphasis on rules – towards an opposite model, allowing for general guidelines, contingent decisions, and structures of integration-cooperation (see Giard and Midler, 1997). Similarly, co-development and networking among partners, for example, is now a common practice in media organizations (Sydow, Lindkvist and DeFillipi 2004; Sydow, 2006). In short, the media world also appears to be highly decentralized, hyper-reactive i.e. less hierarchical. In the end, it reflects Benghozi's (2006) "agility paradox" (i.e. a space of flexibility and stability) and Feigleson and Lamberbourg's "paradoxical

consent" (2008) where the logic of cooperation and the logic of confrontation coexist.

Küng (2007: 11) summarizes this in the following terms: "the task of leadership in the media sector contains many inherent paradoxes. The span of competencies and talents required is best served by multi-leader structures, yet these complicated and dull decisiveness, the power, influence and responsibility place huge requirements in terms of self-knowledge and emotional maturity, yet individuals possessing such characteristics are unlikely to be able to stomach the temperamental, ego-driven, hard-nosed, power-hungry individuals who populate the sector". How then can the charisma of the leader be reconciled with the active participation of teams? How is it possible to point the resilient personification of authority in the sector (e.g. the strong personalities of newspaper editors, film directors, talk show hosts) while noting at the same time the decisive influence of media teams in the success of these specific type of organisations and projects? In this regard, Murphy and Ensher's study (2008), using interviews with directors and producers of television shows, provides the beginnings of an answer by bringing two concepts together that are clearly contrary: charismatic leadership and shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2003). For these authors the starting point for these leaders, high-level executives in the audiovisual sector, is their own idea of themselves as leaders (self-schemata leadership) and of their ability to get others to follow and accept a non-vertical style of collaboration, typical of media environments. The impact of

vocation on followers' expectations and experience of leaders has been studied by Gilbert et al (2014). They found that within vocations with a social orientation, relational leadership attributes are more common. In the media industries, the social orientation of the vocational sphere therefore privileges a relational orientation; the fact is that media leaders are continuously under the scrutiny of a very diverse audience (not only critical readers or journalists covering media business but also political elites, observers of public life etc.) The paradoxical tension of having certain vocational values, yet relationally responding to audience expectations in way that seems to compromise such values, lies at the heart of the challenge that media leaders face.

In an earlier focus group study (reference removed for blind review), we found that senior media managers describe themselves as 'architects' or 'curators', but at the same time as 'sluts' or the providers of 'fast food'. We were interested in understanding what these metaphors suggest. It seems as if there is the paradoxical need to respond to whatever audience demand, while at the same time maintaining judgment, discretion and self-reflection as professionals. Yet oftentimes 'power' in the media industries results from agreements between stakeholders, not from orders 'coming from the top' (Perez-Lattre and Sanchez-Taberno, 2003). In our earlier study, we asked our focus group participants how these challenges posing the media profession are navigated in practice. We found that media professionals need the kind of leader who can create a space within which audience demand meets the discretionary

responses that display of experience and professional judgment. The reference made by focus group participants to media leaders as 'chief content architects', is informative here. An architect typically designs a space, not unilaterally, but in interaction with a client. S/he brings professional experience, expertise and discretion to the design of a space that literally creates a world for others to live in. However, in the case of the media professional, the creation of this world is by no means the brainchild of a single individual, but emerges in the process of leaders juggling many contradictory demands and conflicting stakeholder interests. The challenge that this juggling act presents lies in the fact that it involves conflicting or paradoxical demands, which poses challenges in terms of understanding leaders' authenticity and accountability.

Methodology

Leadership within the media environment remains relatively unexplored (Küng, 2008). This may be because there are a number of significant methodological difficulties specific to the study of this topic. For instance, it is sometimes difficult to determine who the leaders in media organizations are. This is the case because several "powers" coexist in media organizations: political power (shareholders), managerial power, and editorial power, all of which are legitimate (Lavine and Wackman, 1988; Cohen, 1999). From a legal standpoint, the newspaper editor, for example, has considerable power; the editor can activate a confidence clause if he/she feels that his/her professional independence has

been impaired; an editor also enjoys a certain aura in the public opinion. Next, there is a problem of interlocutor availability and confidentiality in the data collection phase (Cohen, 1999). In the media professions the role of information is critical, and very few media leaders feel sufficiently comfortable with the subtleties of management research to be willing to disclose strategic information.

The study we conducted can be located in the realm of qualitative leadership research, drawing on grounded theory (Hunt and Ropo, 1995; Conger, 1998; Parry, 1998). We selected twelve high-level interlocutors representative of various activities in the media industry in Europe and the United States, focusing on finding right quality of interlocutor than a large number of respondents (Kauffman, 2011). Our interviewees reflect a broad spectrum of media professions involved in the production (stock and flow) of audiovisual, digital, print and radio press contents. These twelve top-managers not manage/managed important structures in the media industries but have also developed a personal reputation which make them visible outside their organization, as is expected of senior professionals. As editors-in-chief or entrepreneur in the media, one can also consider them as opinion leaders before seeing them just as mere business executives.

Though we use the grounded theory approach (Hunt and Ropo, 1995), we however remain distinctly aware of the limitations that a purely inductive approach like grounded theory entails (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2012: 4). We tend to agree with Alvesson and Skoldberg (2012: 5) that theory is poetry in and

through the 'facts' – facts that are always value-laden. We also believe that 'facts' serve to occasion the theory, and allow us to fine-tune and criticize existing theory. We therefore attempt to use empirical data that we have gathered in an abductive, rather than strictly inductive manner. As such, we engage with the data and the research literature by moving back and forth, allowing for the constant development of the research object (Parry, 1998), trying to understand how what we hear our interviewees say relates to already established theories.

Following Cohen's (1999) advice, our approach for interviews included active listening, non-directivity, adopting an empathetic attitude. We encouraged our interlocutors to not only answer our questions but to engage in thinking about the challenges of leadership in the media industries. Thus, our in-depth interviews can be likened to a discussion, 'a scene for a conversation' (Alvesson, 1996, 465), or better still a 'co-production meeting', enabling us to tease out the discourse, both the representations and the practices (Blanchet and Gottman, 2006). This enabled us to steer clear of an approach "*dominated by positivistic or neo-positivistic assumptions and methods emphasizing ideals such as objectivity, neutrality, procedure, technique, quantification, replicability, generalization, discovery of laws, etc.*" (Alvesson, 1996: 455). We also tried to follow Becker's advice (2002: 154) about being doubtful as to what a person of authority might say in such interviews. "The 'trick', Becker explains, that enables the research interviewer to escape the hierarchy of credibility, is very simple and can be stated as follows: doubt everything a power person tells you" (2002: 154). This is

especially important when interviewing worldwide leaders, since they tend to be better at trying to influence and to persuade their interlocutor, than at gathering the facts (Cohen, 1999).

Gilbert's et al's (2014) analysis of different kinds of leadership dynamics in particular industries or vocations is helpful in this regard. Since the media industry has a distinct social service orientation and employs professional journalists, its leadership dynamics can be distinguished from other industries such as manufacturing. In industries such as manufacturing, unquestioned loyalty to the company leadership is desirable, but in the media, 'followership' functions in a very different ways because of a 'free-lance' spirit of the professionals working in it. One may even argue that the media is a professional sphere, one characterized by followers' need for independence, which could act as substitutes for both relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership (Kerr and Jermier, 1978: 378). We were therefore interested in understanding whether our interviewees indeed perceived themselves as leaders, and how they interpreted what is expected of them. In addition, we are interested in how they experienced the dynamics of leading that go even beyond leaders and followers.

To make good use of the data we gathered, we analyzed the transcribed interviews using Nvivo 8.0 with a thematic purpose: using the interview data, we created categories (Conger, 1998: 107) in order to reflect on existing theoretical frameworks, in order to refine them, or to produce new ones (Locke, 2001). The most important part of the methodology however centers in the interpretation of

the data. We believe that our engagement with the data is characteristic of reflexive/ reflective research, which requires careful interpretation and reflection (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2012: 9). We acknowledge that we came to the interviews with certain theoretical understandings and presuppositions, and that our reflection on what was said is a conversation with the broader community of leadership scholars. This interplay between theory and data, which characterizes abductive methodologies, will be evident in our discussion of the empirical findings, which follows below.

A reflection on our interview findings:

We found that executives in the media industry report contradictory demands. They have to be able to deal with contradiction, and allow vision to emerge despite, and maybe even because of it. In what follows, we provide overview of some of the emerging leadership paradoxes within the media industries. It will become clear that many of our interlocutors experienced themselves as distinct entities with certain trains and behaviours, but that there as an equally strong emphasis on the types of dynamics that conspire to generate authentic leading, in an ongoing process of construction.

Decisiveness *and* experimentation

Media executives are expected to be decisive and display some force of conviction when asked to make their determinations. But on the other hand, they

should know when to delegate and keep their distance and allow certain emergent dynamics of experimentation to shape their organizations. This may seem like the characteristic of any good leader, but in the case of the media industries, it is problematized by the fact that the media provides the public with certain professional services, which raises ethical expectation around accountability, fairness and honesty. The tricky balancing act seems to be when to exercise control, and when to let go. Various interviewees insisted on decisiveness as an important leadership characteristic. JRO, the digital director of a large public radio station in Europe, explains this:

> *"Having a point of view is related to having a vision and creating things that haven't been done and so on, but it is also related to the ability of expressing your personal point of view and taking a decision quickly. I mean making a decision with an opinion and an assumed bias: 'This is what should be done, I like this topic and not this one'. I don't have to gather a committee to decide for that. You can have a committee that discusses about the organisation, the collective projects, like the contractual field for music rights, work groups."*

For JR, the CEO of a media strategy consultancy based in Europe, this capacity to decide editorial matters also derives from the legal obligation resting on the editor's shoulders; the editor is legally liable for all information published under his or her authority. While compromises are always possible on marketing and sales issues in management committees, in editorial matters and in terms of

content, the editor of the newspaper or the film director (in Europe) or film producer (in the USA) takes the decision on the publication of an article or the filming of a scene. JRO continues:

> *"to be a good leader, you need to have enemies. Well, you don't need to have enemies, but a consequence of your behaviour is that you have enemies, because you said no to 99% of the people."*

At the same time however, our interviewees also emphasize the importance of leading by letting one's followers be, allowing them to experiment freely. Instead of 'directing' change, successful leaders seem to be capable of embracing experimentation, which allows for the emergence of a dynamic that facilitates the change that is needed, in a kind of autopoetic fashion. This may mean that what emerges as 'media leadership' goes beyond 'entities', and requires a consideration of dynamics which allows new forms of 'leading' to be revealed. As one of the interviewee says, to be reinvented online the most established brands, like Le Monde, "need incubators with young people… the wild kids". As ORV, the executive director of a public investment fund for the film industry, says:

> *"The basis of this activity is really curiosity and the idea that you will meet situations for projects that will make you discover a new world you didn't expect. The best moment in my professional life, is to meet people that are bringing something really new to you. It can happen if you produce a*

situation to make that happen. (…) And then diversity, new approaches,

new cultures, new relations with cultures, is the most important. (…) Vision

is to be surprised. Vision is to see something you have not expected.(…)

Then I think there is no power without vision and the capacity of feeling

the potential evolution, which means the active contradictions.."

The paradoxical co-existence of strong agency, i.e. decisively producing

situations to make new things happen and having a distinct vision, while at the

same time acknowledging that vision is about being surprised, could be better

understood if we move our focus beyond the individual leader towards a broader

dynamic which reveals the unexpected. This paradox of creating freedom to

experiment and without abdicating the responsibility to give direction is indeed an

interesting one. As SH, the producer of TV shows in Europe and Asia, explains:

"*First of all, I don't think it necessary comes as a vision. It can come as an*

experiment. I love the movie about Facebook. You see how it starts with

friends; I mean it is not necessarily a vision of "I am going to build an

empire". It starts by trail and error and making something new happen. I

don't think the boss of a big company does a break through. I think society

generates the breakthrough and one is able to catch it."

One can argue that it is a freedom that emerges from the blended

leadership phenomenon. It does require an 'entity' perspective on leadership in

that it demands strong strategic action and deliberate incentives to attract and manage the right talent. But at the same time, it requires an acknowledgement of experimentation, and of the ongoing construction of dynamics of trust in others - a dynamic that allows leaders to step back and allow others the space to try and even to fail, and to forgive them these failures (Caldwell and Dixon 2010). In reality, it seems that the expectations of leaders are more complex, and that contemporary organizations demand versatility rather than simplistic consistency. Both delegation and direction are valued, i.e. leaders can be both forceful and enabling, and both strategic and operational. In fact, what 'leading' means in various circumstances, seem to be continuously reconstructed and renegotiated.

Charisma *and* connectedness

Another conclusion from our interviews is that there is the paradoxical expectation that executives should be both independent, charismatic figures, while being very connected to their different constituencies. Not only should media leaders avoid micromanaging their organizations, they seem to be required to live beyond it. They must have open ears and eyes for what is to be gauged from the broader networks in which they participate. In fact, it seems to be precisely this connectedness that enables the intuitive, strong individual to make authentic decisions. This relates to the fact that leaders are expected to have individual conviction, and sometimes use this to create spaces for new business models and initiative to emerge, which are not the products of their own

ingenuity.

For MV, the French producer of TV series, this know-how comes from the experience and intuition he calls "feeling". One has to have a sense of what the right thing is to do, but more importantly, find ways to legitimize one's own convictions in the eyes of followers (Eagly, 2005: 462). "*My vision, the way I use it in my business, is to have first a gut feeling and intuition*", he says, "*You have to trust yourself and make the people trust you. You have a certain type of charisma.*" Here, charisma, the historical value of traditional leadership, is widely tipped as the element that inspires and motivates teams. JPL, the COO of a large international press group, explains: "*A very good example is Steve Jobs. He was a visionary, but he had a way of talking about his products, about the vision he had about media convergence that was incredible. People have to believe in you but you need to create some enthusiasm. If you don't do this, it is very tough.*" This is a reference to the drive and talent to lead teams down a particular path, giving oneself the means to pull it off. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, these 'charismatic', 'decisive' business leaders in the media sector are asked to display humility in making themselves available for connection. As ORV comments:

> "*What I love about American professionals (…) is the principle of availability. When you are an American tycoon, whatever your status, you try to be in a permanent availability. The new can come from anywhere, and the new talent can come from anywhere and it is not difficult to have a*

meeting with a great producer. It is easier to have a meeting with a great

producer in Hollywood, than to have a meeting with a small producer in

Paris."

SH also emphasizes the need to move beyond the charismatic 'superman' culture in leadership. The desire "to be perceived as powerful", is common among many bosses, though often this is hardly the case at all. It augurs an inflated ego, fringing at times on a pathological one. SH gives the example of the British publishing baron of the 1980s, Robert Maxwell, though she hastens to add that it is no longer the typical profile of media leaders today and seems destined to disappear in the future. For BE, a former CEO of one of the main international news agencies, it is simply bad strategy to exercise responsibility in the media sector in order to figure among the powerful of the world. When this is the sole aim, "*you want to meet the pope, the president, the CEOs, but you don't have time to work on your industry (…) I mean they are losing their time as far as the industry is concerned.*" In BE's opinion, no one can claim to have "*a total and permanent vision. There is no 'superman' anymore.*" Here, the 'entity' perspective is supplemented with an acknowledgement that being involved in the dynamics of one's own industry is equally important. There is no 'superman' perspective, without these dynamics. AT, a journalist and former editor in chief of a news magazine in Chicago, observes that the Rupert Murdoch "model" is passé and deserves to be challenged:

"People think of this super rich owner of a giant media conglomerate as a

media leader and that that view is about making money, making profit, about having questionable ethics, and not about doing good and solid journalism. (…) I think the lines of leadership have also gotten a little more blurred. Because people are doing multiple kinds of jobs, working with multiple different departments heads and it is not the same kind of direct relationships anymore. I think that leadership is required of a broader collection of people working in these organizations today and we should all kind of see ourselves playing a leadership role."

Today's media universe is indeed decentralized; leadership is distributed across different units and different responsibilities, as BE confirms here: *"You have the structure of the program, and everybody is responsible to deliver in due time, content for this part, for this part, etc… So I think the leadership is very small."* This insight seems to reflect an acknowledgement that there are dynamics outside of the 'leader's' direct influence that shape the functioning of the organization. 'Leading' takes place, and is constructed in and through the process of shaping and delivering the media product.

Moreover, networks and professional affinities within media organizations have to be reckoned with. JR provides a description of what he understands to be the management of a personal "network of influence" – or personal power base – in the media industries: *"The network is key word for the leader in media. They shouldn't be however dependent on this network, they need a network on each field: political, economic, cultural, lobbies. (…) The more you are*

connected, the more you are efficient." In addition to "having a point of view", charisma, and the force of conviction both inside and outside the organization, leaders must manage the sometimes strong sensitivities of professionals and employees, competitors and partners alike. It is because of this interconnectedness that it becomes unclear who is leading whom. In fact, it may be less about 'who' is leading, and more about what is happening in the *process* of leading. This 'process', may in fact make all leaders followers of various phases. In the words of SH:

> *"My feeling from inside is just the opposite that first of all being obsessed by public opinion, by ratings, by success, by being in the right phase with the opinion, I feel that what is perceived as top down is really bottom up. The industry per se is made of followers vs really leaders."*

This indeed sounds like a quite pessimistic embrace of laissez-fair leading, but a more positive interpretation could be that more connected, participatory version of visionary leadership seems to be emerging which AT believes gives to *"voices that normally don't get heard become heard, creating a space that is really inclusive"*. This 'inclusivity' requires some attention to what lies between 'entities', rather than within them (Letiche 2006: 10).

Profit-making *and* traditional professionalism

Media executives are both profit-makers and professionals, with all the tensions implied. The paradoxical charge that those in positions of authority in media

companies face, is well described in the words of Gerald Long a former CEO of Reuters, quoted by one of the respondents: "*If we take care only of money, we destroy news, but without money, there is no news*". This balancing act between money, talent and technology was reiterated by a number of respondents. One could sense an awareness that the "leader" in these contexts was not entirely in the "driving seat", directing all operations in linear fashion, but responding to the conflicting challenges that characterizes the industry.

We therefore found that media executives are expected to be politicians and money-generators as much as they are professionals who are supposed to serve the public with quality information and generate independent perspectives. As JR explains:

> "*There are no more real leaders in media. Most of them are head of corporations that need to make money. They have lost the leadership that wants to have influence on the content, on the spirit; they want money because shareholders are asking that. And the fact that many medias are owned by private companies which are not at all involved in media. They ask the media of their subsidiary to be run like another company without any ethics. (…) My feeling is that there is a kind of end of the power of the leader in the media because they didn't respect these three parameters and there were too less ethics and too much economy.*"

Dealing with these paradoxical tensions in an effective way requires of leaders to be ambidextrous, versatile and flexible (Collinson, 2014: 43). The complex power

dynamics that this dichotomy presents is something that clearly emerged from the interviews. One can see these parameters as a relational space with certain distinct pulls and pushes, which go beyond individuals, but also demand an individual response. The interplay between entity and constructionist perspectives is therefore helpful in understanding this reality. For BE it is indeed difficult "to *break the patterns. "La grille de programme, le chemin de fer du journal" (the program grid, the newspaper's railroad). You have to break that and it is very difficult."* This reference to the 'newspaper railroad', which creates certain constraints, seems to acknowledge the 'agency' of particular dynamics, which should be acknowledged if we want to understand leadership in the media industries. But this does not make the entity perspective any less important. HP for instance reflects on Rupert Murdoch's response:

> *"When you take Murdoch, again let us say ten years or fifteen years ago. He happened to be able till that time to keep the good balance between his marketing objectives, his political objectives, and a certain type of acceptable quality of news. This is what I call in my articles or speeches the balance of finalities. (…) I should sum up the ethics of a media leader with the respect of the balance."*

This statement seems to reflect a clear commitment to the 'entity perspective' on leadership. It is an acknowledgement that although a concern for profit and financial sustainability has become important, there is still the expectation that leaders in the media industry must display a certain professionalism. For BE,

"media people", especially journalists, are a critical force even inside the organizations that employ them. At *Le Monde* newspaper or at the *Liberation*, for example, the newsroom can take a vote of confidence against the newspaper's editor or against one of its shareholders. These kinds of dynamics put the individual under pressure, but also acts as checks-and-balances. BE points out: "*You don't have this in the chocolate industry or in the automobile industry. The workers in the automobile plants don't spend their time judging the boss. It is no use. It is not interesting. But in the media industry, it is fun and it is interesting.*"

Discussion: Leadership authenticity and accountability in the media industries

As we have seen, leadership in the media sector cuts across a number of interrelated dimensions that exert contradictory demands: a central imperative is profit-generation, which requires creating spaces for experimentation, whilst maintaining the professional duty to produce high quality editorial content. The pursuit of profit does not always sit comfortably with the insistence on journalistic integrity. Furthermore decisiveness does not always foster openness towards experimentation. We therefore see that 'blended' expectations of leadership that are alluded to in Collinson and Collinson's (2009) analysis are definitely in play within the media industries. From our perspective, a 'blended leadership' approach to the media profession urges us to rethink the false dichotomies between delegation and direction (experimentation/decisiveness), internal and

external engagement (high quality content/profit generation). As Collinson (2014: 47) quite rightly argues, we would do better to reframe these leadership binaries as 'multiple, intersecting dialectics'.

This is particularly important if one considers the fact that reflection on how contradictory demands impacts leadership authenticity and accountability still remains amiss. Most leadership theories, especially the ones focused on authentic leadership, take an entity perspective on the relationality that plays itself out in organizations. Valuable as such perspectives may be, it could add great value to also look at how leadership is continually being constructed, distributed, and even undermined within the relational realities that constitute the media industries. These competing demands need to be considered together and at the same time, focusing on the interplay between entities and other dynamics, and what lies between, especially when it comes to the construction of notions such as legitimacy:

> "*If like Murdoch you think about money before content and ethics, it is wrong*", JR comments. "*If you change the content because your team is on the left wing, this won't respect the balance between the 3 parameters. Of course you have to be successful to be independent. But the business can't be prominent compared to the content and the team, and with respect to the ethics. The legitimacy is the key.*"

It is clear that unless these three aims of media management are in balance, a sense of 'leadership' will be absent. And when we think about 'authentic

leadership' we may do well to supplement an entity with a constructionist perspective. We saw that the most common understanding of 'authenticity' is 'being real, genuine or true to yourself'. The competing demands that leaders face may bring one to question whether it is possible to 'be true to yourself', if one takes only an 'entity' perspective. The problem with this definition is that it assumes that an individual or organization has a unique, fixed identity, and that an authentic agent would display the beliefs and traits that characterize his/ her/ its "self" in everyday behavior (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2014: 438). Ford and Harding (2011: 465) have argued that the idea of 'authentic leadership' is based on the assumption that leaders possess an ontologically fixed inner sense of self, separate from an exterior world. This view of self has to be challenged if the dilemma of being responsive towards conflicting demands is to be resolved. If one looks at this from a systemic perspective, one can also view the adaptations that leaders make as authentic responses to very complex realities. Leaders' 'authenticity' should not be doubted as a result of their continuous adaptation to the variety of roles that they are expected to play. Though this kind of balancing of various roles is accommodated in certain authors' conceptualization of authenticity, the assumption of a fixed self does not explain the leadership dynamics at play. Kernis' (2003: 13) explanation of the various components of authentic leadership for instance makes room for the navigation of role-responsibilities. He argues that role experimentation need not be considered inauthentic, but should reflect 'an extension of one's true self in action'. According

to Kernis (2003) transparent relationality need not mean an unguarded disclosure of one's deepest self in each and every situation. Authentic relations involve a selective self-disclosure, which depend on the development of relationships of intimacy and trust (Kernis, 2003, p. 15). Though this perspective acknowledges relationality, it still focuses only on the individual self, and it relies on specific assumptions. For instance, it assumes that it is possible for individuals to have this fully transparent sense of self. We follow critical scholars like Ford and Harding (2011: 469) in disputing this possibility.

We therefore may have to go beyond 'transparent' relationality towards a more constructionist understanding of it. From this perspective, authenticity is not always about representing one picture of the self, but more about relational responsiveness, which may take one beyond 'yourself'. This may mean following certain dynamics that may even surprise one, and lead one in unexpected directions. In this regard, we follow Charles Taylor's (1991) description of authenticity. Taylor (1991: 82) argues against the kind of authentic self-referentiality that expresses only the individual's own desires and aspirations, and for the authentic self-referentiality that orients the individual against something that stands beyond these, and draws the individual beyond him/ herself. In the same way, authentic leaders respond to a broad 'horizon on significance' with a variety of emergent priorities, to construct a sense of authentic leading that goes beyond merely reflecting the leader's inner self as a fixed entity.

The individual will need to figure out what the appropriate, authentic response would be by asking "Who am I now, in this relationship to the other(s) that confront me?" This means that the self, and its grasp on what is real or true, is more of a relational "work in progress", being yourself would go hand in hand with the process of perpetual self-reflexivity about change. Linstead and Pullen (2006: 1293) echo this insight by pointing out that identity is constituted out of the relational mobility of dispersion, and that each moment of self-identification is therefore also the moment of self-multiplication and dispersal.

This does not mean that one is completely reconfigured and therefore unrecognizable in each situation, nor does it entail the kind of compartmentalized role-morality that Werhane (1999) and MacIntyre (1999) would warn against. Since the various dimensions of the leadership role are lasting and coexist with one another, many aspects of the self are present in various instances. It may just be a matter of "changing gears" rather than being a completely different "vehicle" in each case. But one moves into first gear because of the steep hill one confronts… Different organizational realities may lead one in different directions. Each relationship, not just with followers, but with money, or with new technologies, requires a unique responsiveness. The pursuit of a single coherent vision in all aspects of the organization is replaced with an acknowledgement that organizational life may go through many iterations, which all contribute to the sense of normative congruence. The conclusion that we come to, in line with Freeman and Auster (2011) and Auster and Freeman (2013), is that authenticity

should be defined not as the simplistic application of a set of core values, but rather a responsiveness to history, relationships, and context, that is shared by all those who participate in the relationship. We draw on these authors to argue that authenticity emerges as the ongoing articulation of values through conversation and process (Auster and Freeman, 2013: 42).

In addition to understanding authenticity as relational responsiveness, we need to consider how expectations around accountability could be understood. In our previous research (reference removed for blind review), we came to the conclusion that complex organizations demand a specific form of accountability, which can deal with the absence of strict cause-and effect relationships, unpredictability, and fast-paced change. The accountability that emerges in such settings, is one which acknowledges that it is less a case of accounting *for* certain decisions, actions or assets, and instead being accountable *towards* various stakeholders, with whom relationships are built over time.

This insight is echoed by Fairhurst (2009: 1611) who argues that relational control patterns of management dominance and control-sharing emerge in a dialogical manner in high-quality leader-member exchanges. She also comments on the 'relational-rhetorical work' that is performed by strategists when they "put history to work". These strategists succeed in drawing on existing forms of knowledge, mitigate and observe moral protocols, and at the same time managing to question and query (Fairhurst, 2009: 1622). Carroll and Simpson (2012: 1284) describe a similar relational dynamic when reflecting on leadership

development taking place through online interactions. Through an ongoing relational process, the social capital that is needed to build the relationships that promote cooperative work is developed (Carroll and Simpson, 2012: 1284). The ongoing practice of relational meaning-making serve reflexive purposes, and challenge participants to stand in the shoes of others (Carroll and Simpson, 2012: 1288). Though relational meanings shift over time, it does not amount to a situation where 'anything goes'. In fact, the relational constraints that emerge can be quite firm.

In the context of the media industries, relational responsiveness, discussed from and interplay between entity and constructionist perspectives, offers us a way to not see the competing demands that leaders face as necessarily undermining authenticity and accountability. In fact, it demand the nurturing of relationships through which authenticity can emerge as the congruence that exist in patterns that emerges over time, and in the trust and legitimacy that are constructed through multiple interactions in various contexts. One however has to acknowledge that such relational fabric is also fragile, and that it can be torn apart if patterns of congruence cease to exist and repeated disappointments set in. Recent disappointments in the media's engagement with the public therefore signal the need for enhancing efforts to stimulate active dialogue. Only in this way, can the meaning-making take place that allows for relational accountability, and for authentic leadership as such, to be maintained.

Conclusion

The media industries are always at risk of losing the public's trust or interest, and of failing to gather the resources it needs to survive. Leadership in this context is indeed a delicate balancing act that requires responsiveness to multiple demands over time. Authenticity in this environment requires leaders to respond to many different stakeholders, to deal with new pressures emerging within their changing industry, and to develop new business models in conversation with them without losing sight of the histories that shape the public's expectations of the media. It is a process by which continuity and change could wrestle with each other in productive ways, but only if the relationships that foster patterns of congruence can be maintained.

We believe that a combination of entity and constructionist perspectives allows one the best chance of understanding the contradictory demands that leaders face. Many of the leaders we interviewed still perceive themselves as authentic 'leaders', i.e. as distinct entities with certain traits and behaviors. At the same time, they acknowledge the impact of dynamics outside their control and engage in a constructionist embrace of such processes when they talk about how leadership comes about in their industry. This however does not mean that the epistemological tensions between the two paradigms disappear. In fact, dealing with these tensions may require the development of pluralist research methodologies, which can combine diverse perspectives.

For now, we came to the conclusion that the relational space that pertains

to leadership goes beyond entities, i.e. beyond 'leaders' and 'followers'. We believe that what leaders say about themselves and their organizations indicate the need to supplement entity perspectives with constructionist perspectives. Future studies should be conducted to ascertain whether followers' testimonies about their perceptions of leadership also highlight leadership dynamics in addition to traits and behaviours of distinct leaders. It would be interesting to compare whether followers think more about processes and emergent practices, or more about entities / individuals, when speaking about leadership. It would also be meaningful to conduct ethnographic studies into leadership dynamics that emerge without direct decisions of particular 'leaders'.

What seems clear from our own study, is that accountability *towards* multiple stakeholder groups and responsiveness to wide variety of industry-specific dynamics are required for leadership in the media industries. This requires ongoing conversation and practice, which should be as challenging as it is reassuring. The online environment creates new spaces for these conversations, and though its speed and complexity has created many challenges within the media industries, it has also broadened the relationships within which relational responsiveness could emerge. Since it is a much more dense network of relationships, it may well be that the accountability that emerges as its product, could offer meaningful measures of constraint. Whether this is a much too optimistic reading of the state of affairs, future research will have to judge.

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