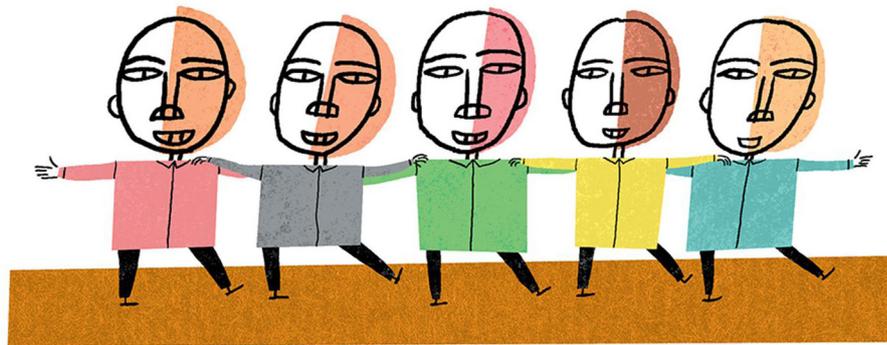




# From Leadership to Leading-ship: a personal responsibility model for organising work

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## Introduction

**Why is the nature of ‘leading’ such a determinant in the potential of an organisation? In search of a reasonable explanation to this question, we must look into what we are thinking and doing when we perform in the process of ‘leading’. In this article I offer a distinction between leadership and ‘leading-ship’, and advocate a personal responsibility model for organising work to facilitate creativity, productivity and efficiency amongst people.**

## The Vertical Relationship

We find the first examples of the conceptualisation of ‘leading’ in the late 19th century. During this period of industrialisation, the ‘leader-centred’ model emerged on the workplace stage, and was referred to as ‘leadership’. The term ‘leadership’ was then adopted into common usage and incorporated into the English language. The core element in leadership was the concept of command and control between leaders and followers. The leader should lead and followers should be led. This autocratic line of force was strictly based on a downward relationship between master and servant, and was characterised by a culture of domination, obedience and subservience from top to bottom. During the post-industrial period of the 20th century, numerous subsidiary leadership theories emerged, and books

on leadership became popular. One such was the enormously influential *Scientific Management* by Fredrik Taylor (1911). In the years that followed, the concept of leadership was further developed and interpreted. We might say that it evolved from a concept concerning actions directed by a leader to one of interaction between a leader and followers. This evolution was accompanied by a transition from the sole focus on a leader-as-superior, with followers as tailing instruments, to relationships characterised by interconnected actions and reactions between leader and followers. Within this modernising frame of leadership, the enforced humanised aspect emphasised cooperation, collaboration and coordination between people and work-processes.



From the 1930s, the Human Relations movement was established as a management discipline, and contributed to developing new perspectives in the organisation of work. For example, working-teams were developed as an organisational form, and were further modified from the 1960's onwards, through the socio-technical systems movement.

We find an example of contemporary leadership theory in Joseph Rost's *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (1991). Rost holds that leadership is a relationship of influence between leaders and followers. Participants practise this influence in one way or another, even where actors in the relationship are not equal. According to Rost, leadership contains four elements: (1) Relations based on influence, (2) Leaders and followers, (3) Both groups intending real change, and (4) Intended changes reflecting their mutual purposes. Again, the a priori belief that Rost and other leadership scholars have shared is that leadership is based on relationships characterised by leaders and followers, organised vertically, with the leader above and the followers below. The term 'leadership', and the thinking and practice that surrounded it, developed an increasingly broad scope during the last century. Nevertheless, these main features in the relationship were sustained. Attempts to distance the term from its leader-centred origin, and to lend it a more equalised image, have not changed the underlying substance of leadership:

1. The position of the leader above (to lead) and the followers below (to be led) is preserved and protected as an indisputable fact, as if it were a law of nature.
2. The relationship between the leader and follower is unequally balanced, with the leader having the authority to decide over the followers, and the followers obliged to follow imposed decisions.
3. The relationship, regulated through leadership, is vertically organised from top to bottom, in accordance with the order of hierarchical ranking.

### The Horizontal Relationship

In an effort to develop an alternative model of leading, I began a work-in-process some years ago, seeking to develop a model based on equally-balanced relationships in the workplace. I introduced

the term 'leading-ship' into the management discipline in 2006 through the paper, *A change from leadership (vertical power-structure) to leading-ship (horizontal power-structure) at work*. I thought it necessary to create a neologism because the term 'leadership' had become so laden with associations, assumptions, perceptions and beliefs that yet another modified interpretation could never help to establish a qualitatively new model. If real change were necessary, I felt it must involve a reorientation of language and terminology as well – a paradigm shift to help make the unthinkable thinkable, the unconceivable conceivable. The term 'leading-ship' embodies the function of leading through personalised and internalised processes that involve every person in the workplace. Put simply, leading-ship consciously manifests itself as a contrast to leadership.

In my paper "*The DemoCratic Workplace*" (2009), leading-ship is characterised as:

*"Leading-ship" is the expression of freedom and trust exercised by the individual human being as an autonomous person. "Leadership" is, on the contrary, the expression of subjugation to a superior authority in control of the individual human being as a subordinated person.*

*The participative character of "Leading-ship" establishes and maintains the values of personal influence, involvement, engagement and encouragement that are critical factors in motivating creativity, productivity and efficiency among people. Self-determination is the main outcome of leading through participation, where the individual makes self-directed decisions within his or her own area of responsibility.*

*The significance of "Leading-ship" is power-sharing. Sharing of power through competence-based authority enables everyone to become empowered leaders throughout their actions in their respective workplaces. When the people are in charge of their own leading-processes, they are able to assume responsibility for themselves and share responsibilities with the others in the workplace community."*



Mary Parker Follett, an author, lecturer and consultant in the field of management, presented a qualified view on this topic in her *Lectures in Business Organization* during the 1920's where she stated: "The duties, authority and responsibility belongs to the job and stays with the job". Follett substantiates her statement in her lectures by emphasizing that people must take the responsibility that goes with their job, and should not be given responsibilities from persons with superior authority in the hierarchy. "As distribution of function has superseded hierarchy of positions in many plants, delegation of authority should be an obsolete expression, yet we hear it every day." Follett expressed her position 90 years ago, yet today 'delegation' is still a key factor in management thinking:

"In order for managers to achieve goals in an efficient manner, part of their work may be assigned to others. When work is delegated, tasks and authority are transferred from one position to another within an organization. The key to effective delegation of tasks is the transference of decision-making authority and responsibility from one level of the organization to the level to which the tasks have been delegated. In order to effectively delegate work, some guidelines should be followed: Determine what each worker can most effectively accomplish; decide whether the worker should just identify a problem or also propose a solution; consider whether the person can handle the challenge of the task; be clear in the objectives of the task; encourage questions; explain why the task is important; determine if the person has the appropriate resources, budget, data or equipment to get the job done on a deadline; create progress reviews as part of the project planning; and be prepared to live with less than perfect results. Authority should be delegated in terms of expected results. Generally the more specific the goal, the easier it is to determine how much authority someone needs." <sup>1</sup>

Horizontal relationships are therefore based on the construction of the following elements:

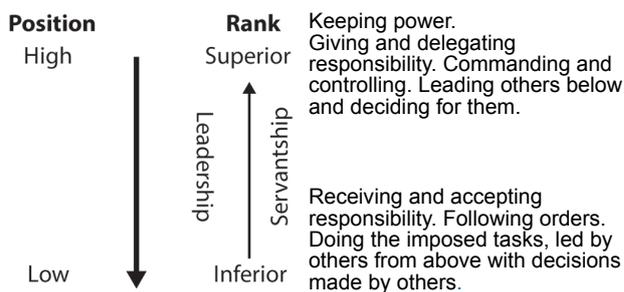
1. Everyone in the workplace is leading themselves, in concert with others.
2. Relationships between people are equally

balanced by the personal authority everybody is assigned, enabling them to make decisions within their own sphere of responsibility.

3. The relationships generated through leadership are horizontally organised, consisting of people on the same level operating with mutual understanding.

### Models and Definitions

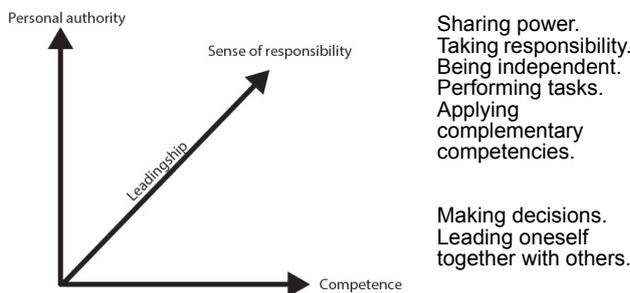
#### For Leadership:



#### The definition

'Leadership' refers to the leader as a person. The leader with the superior rank, is assigned to the task of command and control in leading the inferior subordinates to follow imposed orders. The subordinates are awaiting orders as followers in the cause of doing their jobs, and performing their work when the responsibility is given to them from the person in the position above. The subordinates are performing servantship in their obedience towards their superior leader.

#### For Leadingship:



#### The definition

'Leading-ship' is referring to the function of leading in the process of joining personal authority and individual competence throughout the performance of work. The individual person is leading herself or himself in mutual understanding, trust and confidence with others through a Shared Reality Conception



in the workplace. Everyone is a leader within their respective area of responsibility, exercising freedom of will (the individual power to decide) and freedom of choice (the individual power to choose). Everyone is a dignified and responsible person (assuming responsibility voluntarily and autonomously as fully human beings) rather than having it imposed upon them.

## Conclusion

'Leadership' has been conceived and defined as a relationship between those above and those below on a hierarchical ladder. This vertical relationship is an inherently authoritarian system, whereby a person in a higher position is assigned the authority to make decisions regarding those below. 'Leading-ship' is predicated upon relationships between equals and peers, and their interaction is carried out without position or rank. Leading-ship is an egalitarian system, with equal dignity as the core value in shaping powerful relationships between people in the workplace.

The domination of the Leadership mantra in managing people and work has led to the perception of change as an alteration of the lines in the organisational chart without changing the power system of the organisation. Restructuring, reorganising, regenerating and re-engineering are examples of action-based terms that have evolved during the last decades to describe this phenomenon: change can be achieved by remaking the organisational structure of superiors and subordinates. And yet the structure is only the reflector of the power in the system. To release the full creative power of the organisation requires the reorganisation of workplace society to provide for the emergence of leading-ship. It is only by creating a model for a new flow of power in an organisation that we create a new model of corporate reality.

*"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete".* Buckminster Fuller

## Biography

Rune Kvist Olsen is a designer in the structuring of power and work in organisational life, and an inventor of concepts revealing the relationship between Leading-ship as a management model for leading oneself together with others, and Leadership as a model for leading someone below and being led by someone above. He is also a lecturer and facilitator of courses and workshops. His Workshop Conceptual Exposition with an extensive set of displayed text posters together with training exercises, plays a significant role in illustrating and illuminating the relationship between Vertical Relationships versus Horizontal Relationships at work. His vision of Humanology is expressed through the practical application of Leading-ship for Everyone versus Leadership for Someone. Kvist Olsen has lectured at educational institutions and academic programmes, and monitored and facilitated organisational projects on the transition of power from the few to the many within the public and corporate sectors. He is educated in Social Science from the University of Tromsø, Norway.

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## NOTE

1. Sourced originally from [www.enotes.com](http://www.enotes.com)

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