

ABSTRACT

Anne Keränen

Oulu Business School, Finland

Responsible Leadership: A Shift from Individual Leader to Leader Relations

This chapter contributes to discussion on responsible leadership by exploring how integrative approach to leadership may enhance more inclusive responsibility adaptation in companies and especially at the practices level. At the core of integrative leadership is the view that formal hierarchical positions of leaders are not the only signs of leadership, but leadership should be enabled in interaction among many people (Pless & Maak 2004).

The data consists of ten Finnish business leaders' narratives about responsible leadership. As listening to the stories that leaders tell can improve our understanding of the often invisible socially constructed nature of leadership and its role in opening or closing down possibilities for responsibility in leadership.

The stories of business leaders support the idea that we can understand responsibility integration on the practical level in companies better by examining the integrative relational processes of responsible leadership (Pless 2007, Pless et al. 2012). In the stories leaders position themselves in the middle of the people and appropriate respond to responsibility challenge is co-created together with people around.

Discussion questions:

- How can integrative responsible leadership enhance responsible leadership?
- How can cultural context shape responsible leadership?
- What is the role of a formal leader in integrative leadership?

Short Bio:

Anne Keränen (PhD) is a University Researcher and Lecturer at Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland. Her main research interests are responsibility in business and leadership as well as narrative research. She develops programs and teaches in the areas of responsible leadership, sustainability, HRM, and entrepreneurship. She previously worked as a human resources manager in high-tech companies for 15 years. She currently holds the role of a Guardian in the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI) network.

University of Oulu, Martti Ahtisaari Institute

P.O. Box 8000

FI-90014 University of Oulu

email: anne.keranen@oulu.fi

tel. +358451348445

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4213-0615>

Anne Keränen

Oulu Business School, Martti Ahtisaari Institute, Finland

Responsible Leadership: A Shift from Individual Leader to Leader Relations

Introduction

As companies are taking a more proactive role in solving complex societal and ecological concerns, the importance of networks, shared value creation, and relationships is increasing (Maak & Pless 2006, Pless & Maak 2011). Responding to the complex demands is a challenging task for companies and their leaders. For that reason, companies are broadening the basis of their response by expanding leadership beyond formal leaders to incorporate a variety of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge (Pless & Maak, 2004).

Traditionally, organizations have developed formal long-term plans to address social, ethical, and environmental concerns in their operations by executing them from the top down through programs of change. But this method of responsibility integration has been challenged (Mirvis & Manga 2010) because of the resistance that it can trigger at all levels of an organization and also because it may not allow sufficiently quick responses to rapid changes and daily questions of responsibility. Instead, a less formal process has been proposed in which integration can be driven from any organizational level, as long as it is adaptive and responsive to the situation at hand and thus open to the emergence of responsibility (Mirvis & Manga 2010, Maak & Pless 2006). The capacity to adapt flexibly and respond creatively to changes in the environment is particularly important.

This chapter contributes to the literature on responsible leadership by demonstrating how an integrative approach to leadership (Pless & Maak 2004, Maak & Pless 2006, Maak et al. 2016) can enhance responsibility throughout an organization. The key challenge lies in companies' continuing struggle to convert their strategic responsibility aims to adaptive and practical outcomes at all levels of organization. The present research suggests that integrative leadership enhances responsibility adaptation. However, there is variation in how leaders interpret and practice integrative leadership, and the purpose of this chapter is to clarify the dynamics of an integrative leadership approach. In particular, the chapter explores how responsibility is constructed in and through leadership relationships with a diverse set of people.

An integrative leadership orientation plays a crucial role in advancing inclusive responsibility adaptation in companies (Pless & Maak 2011, Pless et al. 2012). Responsible leadership theory stresses the relational aspects of leadership (Maak & Pless 2006, Pless & Maak 2011) and defines leadership as a relational and ethical phenomenon based on social processes of interaction. The shift from a focus on individual leaders to

an emphasis on leader relations chances attention from leaders to leadership relationships, the ethical nature of the relationships (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011) and places relationships into the core of responsibility construction (Maak & Pless 2006). The focus of leadership should lie in creating responsibility through collaboration with others – that is, in an integrative manner (Pless et al. 2012). The next section addresses different approaches to responsible leadership, focusing on the integrative leadership approach.

Creating responsibility through integrative leadership and responsible relational practices

Responsible leadership can be understood in different ways. Pless et al. (2012) created a framework of four distinct responsible leadership orientations on the basis of the key narratives they identified in data drawn from 25 business leaders or entrepreneurs: traditional economist, opportunity seeker, integrator, and idealist. The first two orientations are narrow; the last two are wide. The traditional economist orientation stresses the interests of the owners and focuses on maximizing the economic benefit of the shareholders in the short term. The opportunity seeker also views economic benefit as paramount but operates on the idea that investments in responsibility will provide economic benefits in the long run. The integrator, meanwhile, understands responsibility as an integral part of the entire business and thus sees the role of the business as serving wider societal needs. The idealist orientation is best exemplified by social entrepreneurs who are guided by a moral commitment to use the business to solve social problems or to meet particular stakeholders' needs. The last two approaches are based on traditional moral thinking and are connected to business leaders' doubts in the ability of governments and markets to address social concerns adequately.

Responsibility orientations vary according to the breadth of the constituent groups considered by the leaders and the degree of accountability they have toward others. Particular decisions and actions are associated with different orientations (Pless et al. 2012). Leaders can make divergent decisions and implement differing configurations of responsibility policies and practices in their organizations because of differences in their orientation. Leaders' orientations also influence how they engage with society and understand their social responsibilities, and they are manifested in a variety of responsibility-promoting activities. Integrative leadership directs attention to the relational nature of leadership. How does integrative leadership become visible and how is it constructed in relational practices? There are still only a few descriptive studies that have explored these questions (Pless 2007, Pless et al. 2012). The present research complements this approach with literature that highlights ethical relational leadership practices (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2010). Relational practices refer here to the social processes, practices, and interactions that construct leadership and responsibility in co-creation (Keränen 2015, Uhl-Bien & Carsten 2018).

Integrative leadership emphasizes the need for businesses to take a balanced approach toward value creation, considering both business and social objectives (Maak et al. 2016). In integrative leadership the

focus is not only on the company itself but also on its potential to address societal issues and broader societal needs. At the heart of integrative leadership is the view that formal hierarchical positions are not the only sites of leadership: the aim of leadership is to involve all people within the organization in leadership processes (Pless & Maak 2004). Knowledge is socially constructed and socially shared rather than constructed, accumulated, and stored in individual leaders' minds (Hosking 2007). Communication is recognized as an important part of integrative leadership, and it seeks to include multiple voices within and outside the organization (Maak & Pless 2004, Maak et al. 2016). In particular, the vision of the company should invite its members to view themselves as part of something greater in society. Integrative leadership means interacting with a wider network of stakeholders, including stakeholders beyond the organization's boundaries, even in situations of conflicting interests.

The integrative leadership approach entails certain perspectives that must be taken into account when studying responsible relational practices. First, language as the means of communication plays a central role in constructing leadership; second, leadership is based on relating respectfully to others; third, leadership is co-created among people; and finally, leadership is interpreted and embedded in a local social environment, which may give rise to multiple interpretations of leadership. The following sections elaborate on these perspectives.

Language as a medium of constructing responsibility in leadership

People learn and talk about social phenomena in interaction with each other through language, but not all language carries equal weight in communication. When speaking about leadership, for example, people are expected to use language that is recognizable and meaningful in their specific social context and thus resonates with their community's overall understandings (Sparkes & Smith 2008). Accordingly, the meaning of responsibility is created through the interaction of the people speaking about it with others. Responsibility, then, cannot be simply transmitted from an individual leader to other people; instead, it is co-created through interaction. It cannot emerge in isolation of the conditions of its production, because social settings shape how responsibility is interpreted by the people involved (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011, Barge 2012). For example, shared expectations are important in co-creation because interactions are based on the idea that others will respond to us in ways that are consistent with shared expectations. What is expected is constantly evolving in the context of changing social situations and the social actions that interpret them (Crevani et al. 2010). Consequently, expectations cannot be a fixed, stable set of norms. Responsibility in leadership is an ongoing relational process and co-created within a social context (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien 2012) in which communication plays a significant role (Vine et al. 2008).

Relating responsibly to others to co-create leadership

In considering the co-creation of leadership, it is vital to focus on how people relate to others (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011, Barge 2012). We cannot pre-determine what kinds of interactions will be deemed valid and will help in building responsibility. Instead, we should emphasize what McNamee (2009: 60) calls “a relationally engaged stance” toward others. She argues that with such a stance, an ethical relationship means being relationally sensitive and responsible in co-creation with others. In responsible leadership this would mean being sensitive to and creating space for the diverse understandings that arise among people (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011, McNamee 2009). Attention is given to the actual process of constructing relationships and the way in which a particular construction is established while others remain unrealized (Hosking 2007). Responsibility is constructed together, in an interactive manner, with the resources at hand.

Constructing leadership capacity through sharing responsibility

Sharing leadership means that leadership is built on participation and collaboration and that it can be the property of a larger group, a network of people, or even a community (Hosking 2007, Pearce & Manz 2011). The source of responsibility (or irresponsibility) in leadership, then, lies not in leadership itself but in the type and process of leadership that is being considered (Pearce & Manz 2011). The way leadership is constructed should encourage many people to take responsibility and should lead to an increase in leadership capacity and in the ability to respond to ethical concerns (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011). Sharing leadership opens the way for new forms of organizing, which may unfold not only within an organization but more broadly in networks and interactions with multiple stakeholders beyond organizational borders (Maak & Pless 2006). Leadership can extend beyond the organization and reflect the social world and the institutions in which it is embedded (Crevani et al. 2010). Building this kind of togetherness requires a strong sense of shared values, principles and purpose; otherwise, the result may be irresponsible actions (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015).

Responsible leadership embedded in and part of surrounding social world

The context of everyday leadership work is determined by locally interpreted and enacted social settings (Hosking 2007). Gubrium and Holstein (2009) describe social settings and their factors using the term “environment.” They argue that environmental factors such as local culture, status, the particular job, and the nature of the organization can affect how responsible leadership is understood. Traditionally, leadership is expected to emerge in formal or informal settings within an organization, even though interactions that happen outside work situations can contribute important perspectives to leadership. Experiences gained outside work-related contexts can change the normative expectations of leadership in organizations. Leadership can thus be constructed, produced, and exercised in many unrecognized arenas, including research literature, mass media, and leadership development programs, and these may strengthen or erode

the local understanding of what constitutes legitimate and effective responsible leadership. Constraints on and opportunities for action can be created locally in unfolding stories (Gubrium & Holstein 2009). Access to and the availability of certain language-based resources also shapes the formulation of certain understandings of leadership (Barge 2012), and an understanding of the local social world and the relevant language-based resources is thus imperative.

How, then, can we study responsibility in leadership? One possible method is offered by the narrative approach. Leadership is part of social, cultural, and institutionalized discourses, and thus listening to the stories that leaders tell can improve our understanding of the often invisible socially constructed nature of leadership and its role in opening or closing down possibilities for responsibility in leadership. Narrative study is an effective approach to the subject because narratives have moral force and provoke ethical reflection; in addition, they include relational aspects (Bamberg 2006). The next section describes the methodology and the actual method of narrative analysis in greater detail.

Studying responsibility in leadership

When leaders recount episodes or stories of leadership, they are simultaneously reflecting on their thoughts, emotions, feelings, and morals in relation to the social context of their production (Sparkes & Smith 2008). Research on responsible leadership is turning increasingly to descriptive studies in order to understand how responsibility is interpreted. An example is the study of Pless et al. (2012), which examined leadership orientations on the basis of the core narratives of leaders and entrepreneurs. Pless (2007) used narrative analysis to investigate the role identity and motivational drivers of responsible leadership, using the life story of Anita Roddick as an example of responsibility. Through leaders' stories we can enter into the versatile relations in which they are produced to understand how various leadership positions are constructed (Bamberg 2006).

There are several distinct orientations within the study of narratives. Riessman (2008) argues that narrative research is rooted in the belief that people are storytellers by nature and that through telling and sharing stories they both understand themselves and connect with others. According to Hyvärinen (2009), narratives allow us to capture events and perceive how people experience them. Hyvärinen relies on Phelan's (2005: 18) definition of narrative as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened." This definition frames narrative within a temporal order. To reveal the construction of responsibility in leadership, we must interpret the stories of leaders as reflecting the relationship of the personal self, past experiences, and the particular social contexts in which the stories are produced.

The data used in the present study consists of the narratives of ten Finnish business leaders. The main criteria for selecting the interviewed leaders were the following: the interviewees had to occupy a leadership position, be active and interested in advancing responsibility in business, and possess varied leadership experiences. The selected leaders were working in a range of companies, from international corporations listed on the stock market to small and medium-sized family-owned enterprises. They held different positions, including managing director, owner acting as managing director, and director of corporate social responsibility. All had changed positions several times over the course of their careers. Their ages varied from 35 to 65, and both genders were equally represented.

The business sectors represented are shown in the table below:

Business sectors of companies in the study.

Business sector	Number of companies
Telecommunications	2
Industry	3
Health services	2
Financial services	1
Textile industry	2

Some of the leaders had changed companies several times during their careers, and their stories of responsibility related to more than one company. The stories arose from a range of experiences, not all of which were connected to a work organization or to only one work organization. The ways in which the companies approached responsibility issues varied, too. In some companies the approach to responsibility was rooted in the company’s overall leadership principles, and responsibility issues were integral to their business decision making. Other companies were actively seeking to move toward more responsible mainstream business activities. Finally, in one company a significant driver of responsibility had been a crisis in which the company had faced negative feedback because of the materials used for its products.

Analyzing the narratives

In addition to interviews with these ten leaders, the empirical material used in this study includes magazine articles and presentations given by the leaders on various occasions. The research involved two interview sessions with each person. The first interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours; it was recorded and subsequently transcribed. The first interview session focused on gaining an overall picture of the leader’s career, leadership, views of responsibility, and development over time. The first interview was

followed by a second, review discussion, which was shorter in duration. The purpose of the review discussion was to offer the leaders an opportunity to comment on the themes identified, as well as to add any new stories and questions that had emerged after the first interview.

The first cycle of analysis was partly a joint production with the interviewees themselves, because during the second interview round they had the option of assessing whether the thematic analyses and interpretation developed on the basis of the first round accurately represented their opinions and thoughts. The second interviews also offered a chance for a more detailed discussion of topics that needed further clarification. In this way the leaders themselves were involved in producing the research data as experts in leadership work. The first cycle played an important role in directing the focus of the analysis during the second cycle.

Second-cycle narrative analysis methods are used to identify those parts of stories that should be analyzed more closely for the purposes of the research topic. The leaders in this study used interactional positioning to explain responsibility in their storytelling. Accordingly, this study pursues such positioning in small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) as a means of analysis. The narrator can shift between different positions, functioning in an agentive role in some circumstances and in a passive role in others. Narrators use the positioning of other characters as well as of themselves in addition to grammatical resources to clarify their message. The aim of the analysis is to understand how responsibility is constructed socially in leaders' stories by identifying, first, how positioning emerges at the level of interaction (Deppermann 2013) and second, how positioning arises from more general understandings of leadership produced by certain institutions. The phenomenon under study is thus a common cultural understanding of responsibility in leadership (De Fina 2013, Gubrium & Holstein 2009).

Positioning can also be affected by the basic values being pursued at a given time. For example, in leadership transactions with others, leaders can either pursue power positions or relate to others in a more caring manner. Positioning is thus also shaped by the nature of transactions (Apter 2003). If the leader pursues power, he or she likely feels that a leader should be tough and in control, be looked up to by others, and demonstrate superior skills. By contrast, approaching transactions in a more caring way emphasizes leadership that is more sensitive to people and contexts, with the leader positioning him- or herself in a friendly and close relationship to others. Leaders often use positioning implicitly to describe social hierarchies, power relations, and differences, for example by referring to male vs. female, manager vs. subordinate, and expert vs. novice (Raggatt 2007). The following section presents the leaders' stories of responsibility, with a particular focus on how leaders narrate responsibility and on the narrative resources they rely on in telling their stories.

The stories that leaders tell about responsible leadership

I first provide an overview of the leaders' stories and present two key findings based on this overview. This overall view serves as an entry point into the subsequent discussion of the four distinct storylines, or "metastories," that emerged from the leaders' narratives of integrative leadership. These four main storylines illustrate the richness and variation in the leaders' narrations of responsibility in their work and also reveals the diversity of people they included in responsibility construction. Each excerpt is labeled to identify the interviewee whose account the excerpt represents. The letter "S" stands for "story," and the subsequent number (1–10) denotes the interviewed leader.

The big picture in the stories relates to how the leaders saw their organizations and where they positioned themselves in their stories. First, the interviewed leaders seemed to perceive their organizations through people and to connect the meaning of responsibility to their relationships with those people. The leaders talked a lot about people, relationships, and social interactions. They connected responsibility in leadership to daily work, actions, and relationships. For them, responsibility was about people in the organization and often also about invisible networks among people based on tacit knowledge that people have created together but that is invisible and cannot be identified in formal organizational charts, for example.

Periods of transition, in particular, highlighted the centrality of interpersonal networks. One example is the story told by a leader in a multinational technology company, who described ongoing organizational rearrangements in the company and his actions after them:

"Every time the cards are dealt anew, you have to look up your network right away." (S5)

Networking and getting to know people were important for the leaders. This priority underscores the significance of knowing people who have importance for one's work. After an organizational change, the first thing to do, as this leader's comment shows, is to acquaint oneself with one's new network. Knowing people means also knowing them personally. It is not enough to know what people do at work; one must also show interest in them more broadly by, for example, becoming familiar with their families, hobbies, and interests.

Another leader, the managing director of a service organization, gave a similar description of her situation when she entered her current position:

"You have to know the people. I deliberately focused on this in the beginning. I started an online discussion and got something from that, and then I did the rounds of our stations and talked with people there, and this is actually what I'm doing now, too, all the time." (S6)

The second key finding from the stories was that when the leaders spoke about responsibility, they positioned themselves in the middle of people instead of using hierarchical positioning. Positioning

themselves in this way also meant that the leaders started to talk about leadership from that position. One of the leaders used the metaphor of a bicycle in her story to describe her positioning:

“As a young girl I built racing bicycles with my father. And we also tailored the wheels ourselves. I have used the wheel to describe my way of thinking about the leader and the organization. I draw myself in the middle and the people are around me like the spokes of a wheel. The wheel needs all its parts to turn and function well.” (S7)

Using positioning as an analytical lens enables us to enter into the dynamics of responsibility creation in the stories, because we can start to identify who is included in the story of responsibility and what specific responsibilities these positions include. Leaders can add people both nearby and further away into their stories; the positions they allocate to these people may be fluid and may also reflect their own positions. Leaders use positioning in stories implicitly to describe social hierarchies, power relations, and differences between people.

Through their stories, the leaders conveyed that responsibility is about being close to people and in direct interaction with them and that there are many important participants involved in constructing responsible action. Being in the middle of people is thus important. The commitment, knowledge, and expertise of everybody in the organization is needed because of the complexity of business and because of the need for quick responses and adaptability in tackling everyday ethical questions. In their stories, leaders included people both within and outside their organizations as participants in the construction of leadership.

The leaders told stories pertaining to a range of different settings, demonstrating that leadership was built on invisible and formal relations alike, both within and beyond the work context. The leaders’ stories depicted a variety of relationships – beyond work-related relationships also those related to associations, hobbies, and family. All these relationships appeared to be important and shape leadership, but there was also variation and different emphases among the stories in their perspectives on responsibility and in the types of people included.

Four responsibility storylines and dynamics of relationships

The four principal storylines that appeared in leaders’ narratives illustrate the variance in leaders’ approaches to integrative leadership, manifested in different focus areas and the inclusion of different people. These storylines represent differing ideas of leadership relations, the co-construction of leadership, and the nature of responsibility. The storylines also highlight certain values, tensions, and possibilities that either help or hinder responsibility integration at a practical level in organizations.

The four storylines were characterized, respectively, by personally committed leadership, which emphasizes deep personal engagement with responsibility and close relationships with people around the leader; family leadership, which emphasizes long-term continuity in responsibility and family-like relationships; community leadership, which emphasizes sharing leadership responsibility and relationships across organizational boundaries; and holistic leadership, which emphasizes the role of business in serving larger societal needs and all-inclusive relationships.

Personal engagement and close relationships

In the first storyline, the central theme is personal involvement and caring about responsibility. The leader is dedicated and involved and carries responsibility as a matter of personal passion, values, and interests that is not limited to the leader's professional position. The leaders recounted many stories about engagement and the need for presence to direct discussion and find solutions promptly in any problematic situation. The following excerpt provides an example of this kind of an account:

"In my opinion a good leader can't be a wimp; you have to have the courage to step in and take responsibility and of course also grant responsibility. If someone thinks that by being all quiet and not getting involved they will be a more polite and nice and likeable supervisor, I don't believe that. You have to grapple with things, and if there is something that's bothering me I don't want to waste time and energy thinking about it; I would rather talk it through with someone so we can move forward from the situation. I am pretty direct and someone who says what they think, but I believe that many of my employees appreciate the fact that they don't need to try to guess what I think about things." (S9)

In this storyline, the leader focuses on personal relationships with people close to him or her. Communication and interaction between people, both formal and informal, are important. Although the leaders described informal chatting as central, not all chatting served to construct responsibility. Organizational politics appeared as a powerful type of informal conversation and sometimes had a negative effect on the construction of responsibility.

"I guess I work for too large an organization, because I don't particularly like politicking, this kind of organizational politicking, and in a company of this size you inevitably have quite a lot of it. But I try to stay well out of it, in so far as I can; it's pretty difficult." (S9)

There were also accounts of vulnerability experienced by the leaders in the course of pursuing business responsibility. Vulnerability and credibility were connected in the stories, and some leaders argued the one should be considered a credible business leader before one can start talking about responsibility in business. One leader reflected on a time when he had been about to resign from his position, and the reason he

nonetheless stayed. He decided to stay, he reported, because he had started to see business as a way to express his personal values and to show that business can further beneficial aims. . He had felt that if he succeeded in growing the business, he could show others that strong and positive values really can work in business. The most sensitive aspects of this storyline include spiritual elements. These relate to a view of life as having a purpose that goes beyond traditional business goals and that should be incorporated into business activities. This view does not necessarily entail adopting the viewpoint of any specific religion.

“[I saw] business as a tool, an example of being credible in the things that I deep down want to promote. Success in business leads to these things getting more attention. This was my motivation for staying in the company. It was a chance to do something to prove things that are significant.” (S1)

What is problematic about the focus on strong personal commitment that marks this storyline and appears in this specific excerpt is that it risks placing too much responsibility on one person. The potential pitfall in the concentration of responsibility in the hands of a single leader lies in the fact that there are limits on what one person is able to accomplish, and if responsibility is not shared, commitment can turn into weakness. The story of commitment highlights the need for personal dedication, but the path to more inclusive responsibility lies in expanding that one person’s commitment to other people and sharing responsibility more widely.

Long-term continuity and family-like relationships

Many of the leaders referred to family-like relationships within their business organizations and connected responsibility to these relationships. Stories exemplifying this second storyline were typically recounted in the first-person plural. Talking about leadership as something “we” do means the leader does not conceive of him- or herself as a separate entity but rather as a member of a larger group of people. Responsibility is shared as it is in a family among the family members, as the following excerpt illustrates:

“We’re a family company that reflects the family, we have our opinions and we express them. For us, that means that we believe in continuity and we believe that we’re going to pass this from one generation to the next, and we value that private ownership. We’re very committed to the company, to its welfare, its personnel, its customers, everything.” (S4)

A family-like story does not necessarily indicate a family-owned company; this storyline can describe any company. At the core of this storyline is a long-term perspective on responsibility, with the business passing from one generation to the next. The central focus is on the continuity of the business over time. Accordingly, the short-term reporting practices of companies are seen as problematic.

Connected to this storyline were stories stressing the importance of belonging to different networks and having a broader view of responsibility. For example, some leaders mentioned serving on another company's board or in an association as a good way to learn and see different ways of doing things:

"For an entrepreneur it's incredibly important to be active outside your own company, whether in a voluntary role or on the board of another company, or in any context that also broadens your own perspective and your way of looking at things and interpreting them. I think that I have developed as a person, a supervisor, and a colleague much more in this way than in any other for many years. And when you do these other tasks, it opens up your horizons in a completely different way. It would be good for every entrepreneur to be involved in some way, even if it's just some position or charitable activity in the immediate community that broadens his or her view." (S4)

The tension inherent in this storyline came out in leaders' descriptions of situations in which close-knit family relationships threatened to become a weakness because the boundaries around the group were too tight. In this kind of circumstances responsibility may be defined too narrowly, as an idealism that does not tolerate other, different viewpoints. A family can have strong uniting values built into its history, and loyalty among family members may be strong. Thus, an outsider may find it difficult to gain a place in the family. Acting responsibly requires openness to reciprocal interaction with the world outside the family and welcoming of the fresh ideas of others.

Relationships across organizational boundaries and sharing responsibility in a community

The third storyline expanded the scope of leadership creation to a wider context and across organizational borders through informal as well as formal relationships. People who share an interest (such as certain profession) and are like-minded may form a community within which they share knowledge, ideas, and opinions with each other. Communities can be informal, like pop-ups, but they can also be or become formal. Technology plays a key role in enabling people to create communities and communicate with others around the globe. Internet and mobile communications make new kinds of communities, interactions, and relationships possible, and these communities form contexts in which responsibility may emerge among people:

"The advantage of all this globalization and internet, though of course there are many disadvantages connected with them too, is that they make possible a new kind of discovery, because everything you do is in the end based in some way on relationships and on contacts in general, and on doing things with people whom you can trust and with whom you enjoy working. That's the hope, though global companies can't always change the rules; but you have to start at the level of the individual and precisely through a better understanding at the individual level." (S2)

This excerpt conveys the idea that young people, who are “born global” with respect to their interactions, are the best hope for change, because they know their “global friends” personally and care about them on an individual level. The challenge with such relationships, as in family-like relationships, is that the community’s culture may make the members of the community blind to divergent opinions and trends, whether within or outside the community. The spirit of a community can become a kind of hegemony that binds the members together while restricting their ability to appreciate other views and interpretations.

All-inclusive relationships and the purpose of business

The fourth storyline embodied a holistic view of business that saw leadership as being about serving others and the purpose of a business as the creation of greater good in society. This vision was interpreted to mean that the purpose of a business was to meet a societal need and that all business operations should be sustainable.

The following excerpt describes this holistic storyline of responsibility and the idea of business as serving others:

“[You should] constantly think not about yourself but about looking at things from the other side as a basic orientation, and when you accomplish this then you also accomplish your job almost as a side effect. In this sense most companies are completely messed up. They think only of me, me, me, “I’m coming to sell you my products”; not “I’m coming to make your life easier by providing you with a good product that is so reliable and has such a good turnover,” and then you have happy people and a committed customer base that keeps coming back.” (S7)

The same leader went on to describe profit as the result of operating responsibly in serving others, with the profit shared among the business network members or chain of partners:

“What was so wonderful about this process was being able to build a system in which the families of raw material producers in developing countries supported themselves and their kids went to school, and in addition our employees supported themselves, I supported myself, and so did our whole crew of agents, that is, all parties concerned, and we got good, lasting products that people could use as long as they wanted and even sell on afterward.” (S7)

The leaders frequently based their accounts of responsibility on business values and argued that the company’s ethical values should be manifested in practice instead of remaining a mere document or policy on paper. In their view, business values should guide strategic choices and be apparent in daily business practices. One leader articulated the challenge of translating values from policy documents into everyday practices as follows:

“You have to come up with the rules of the game for the company right from the beginning. Ethics is a strategic question: do you take it into account in all decision making right from the start or don’t you? It’s not something you keep in the desk drawer, something you use when it gives you an advantage and hide when it doesn’t seem to be of use. It’s not a tool but a way to act and live.” (S1)

Statements of the company’s values should not only hang on the wall but be lived and enacted every day:
“Many people, especially our new employees, would like the company’s values to be visible, like displayed on the wall somewhere, at the office for example. I have always said no, I don’t want to have to show off our values in every phone call and every e-mail message; they have to be inherent, not something in pretty golden frames on the wall.” (S8)

This storyline is underpinned by the idea that the members of the company should be able to view themselves as part of something bigger that promotes the sustainable development of society. The challenge to the holistic storyline lies in the potential for the vision to become so abstract and expansive that it can no longer be easily connected to the daily practices of the company. Responsibility can be used for marketing purposes and as window dressing without any connection to the practices of the business.

Discussion and conclusions

The ten leaders’ stories revealed various approaches to constructing responsibility through integrative leadership. In the stories, formal leaders positioned themselves in the middle of a network of people. This positioning demonstrated a view of responsibility as built and negotiated on an equal basis among leadership participants. The present study identified four distinct storylines about responsibility construction in the leaders’ narratives. The variation among the stories reflected differences in who was included in each story of responsibility. Each of the storylines conveyed a different central message.

Figure 1 illustrates the four storylines. The first storyline represents an interpretation of responsibility that emphasizes close relationships among leadership participants and highlights personal commitment to leadership work. The second storyline contains a multiplicity of responsible actors and embodies family-like sharing of responsibility. This storyline prioritizes continuity in responsibility. The third storyline centers on community-based responsibility, made possible by technological advances and the consequent ability of people to form communities regardless of their physical location. This storyline is about sharing responsibility among members of a community. Finally, the fourth storyline represents a holistic understanding of responsibility. This storyline focuses on the purpose of business as contributing to society overall and draws attention to the responsibility carried by multiple actors in society together with business actors.

Through the variety of storylines, we can gain insight into the dynamics of responsibility construction in leadership work. My argument here is not that these stories constitute definitive and fixed ways of representing reality but that they capture some of the shifting ways in which responsibility can be constructed in leadership.

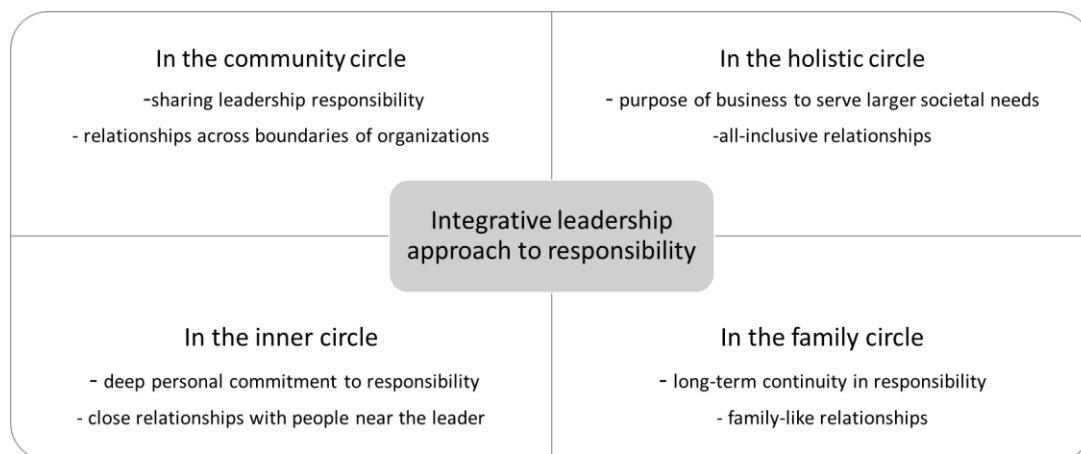


Figure 1. Four storylines of responsibility in integrative leadership.

All of these storylines about relating to others reflect an idea of positive long-term effects for the company:

“It’s not even about doing it deliberately; it’s just that gradually, when you have good relations with those around you, doors start to open. Sometimes you have to be open with people and participate, and not think too mathematically about whether something is going to make money for you, because if you always think that way you will never succeed. And on the other hand, when you practice your appearance and behavior and how you organize things with these kinds of stakeholders, you’re simultaneously rehearsing for that big deal. It’s the same with getting accustomed to engaging with people.” (S10)

The ability to sense the feelings of other people and possession of good social skills to interact productively and respond appropriately were stressed as important factors of leadership. In addition, acknowledging the significance of everyone’s potential contributions by paying attention to the nuanced details of interaction – questions, tone of voice, the selection of words, and posture – emerged as a feature of responsible integrative leadership. The leaders stressed that one can learn to relate with others in a variety of circumstances ranging from formal work-related situations to experiences outside professional contexts.

Previous research has indicated that we can understand responsibility integration on the practical level in companies better by examining the integrative relational processes of responsible leadership (Pless 2007, Pless et al. 2012). The stories of business leaders discussed in this chapter support that idea. They show

leaders positioning themselves in the middle of people and responsible leadership unfolding in many different types of interactions between people. The stories indicate that opening oneself to participation in contexts beyond one's own immediate environment affords the possibility of a fresh, broader understanding of responsibility.

These findings suggest that we should study how responsibility is formed in networks and communities of people rather than only within specific organizations, and we should develop methods that facilitate the study of situations in which local micronarratives are mixed with global ones. For such an approach, a relational perspective on leadership, which emphasizes interactions in everyday work situations, provides a meaningful lens. It directs research attention to the integrative approach to leadership and everyday relational and interactional practices, and it encourages investigation of the ways in which responsibility can be integrated in companies through these practices and of patterns that might restrict such integration.

The four storylines also bring out the interplay between responsibility construction and the circumstances in which responsibility stories are produced. The story of community responsibility, in particular, casts the relational view in light of developments in technology, such as mobile communications, and the emerging leaders who have grown up using the technology. Opinions about what is right and wrong are formed in part by chatting online with others. Digital communication facilitates the formation of common opinions and shared values and the expression of mutual support in relationships over long distances with little time delay. Earlier leadership studies have highlighted the perspectives of leaders and their authenticity in terms of their own personal values and convictions as the basis of their actions (Shamir & Eilam 2005), but the interviews in this study offer an alternative perspective by centering collaboratively formed and shared meanings rather than the individual values or opinions of a leader. In these stories, values are formed together by collaborating members, and shared understandings are crucial.

Community responsibility suggests a new understanding of interactional positioning in relationships, but it also contains the risk of conflict. Through communication, the members of a community develop both ontologies and ethics (Gergen 2002). There is the possibility that a community positions itself in opposition to "them," as somehow better than "them." People create common understandings on the basis of shared language and meanings, but these may exclude other interpretations and contrasting voices. Issues that are not in the interests of the community are ignored. There is thus the danger that the boundaries of the community are too exclusive and only one way of seeing things is accepted.

The cultural context – for example, power distance and expectations about leadership – may constrain or enhance the possibilities open to a leader (Maak et al. 2016). Finnish culture scores low in power distance and masculinity, which, according to the GLOBE study of cultural dimensions (House et al. 2004), points to a

feminine society in which managers strive for consensus and people value equality, solidarity, and quality in their working lives. According to Maak et al. (2016), low power distance encourages leaders to be more interested in all stakeholders and supports integrative leadership. In the present study, the interviewed leaders negotiated the limits of responsibility against the theme of credibility. They felt that one should first establish oneself as a credible leader before expanding to areas that are not part of the conventional understanding of leadership. Some positions may be difficult to express in leadership if they are not appreciated. They remain inaudible in discourses, and the official discourse would rather do away with them altogether. When talking about responsibility, the leaders were sensitive to being seen as “freaks” or “weird,” and there was consequently a tendency to limit the story of responsibility to a level that would be accepted by the business environment. But once a leader had earned appreciation as a “hard” business leader, he or she had sufficient credibility to speak about a comprehensive conception of responsibility in business. The formulation of responsibility is thus sensitive to the limits of what is potentially accepted as a valid interpretation.

The results of responsibility construction may vary because of the tension between what is accepted as credible business leadership in a certain cultural context and how this is interpreted and implemented in a company. Institutions may shape the stories that people tell (Gubrium & Holstein 2009, De Fina 2013). Accordingly, institutions within the cultural environment of leadership, such as families, organizations, business schools, and the media, influence how leaders construct their stories of leadership and reflect what is considered to be part of leadership (Gubrium & Holstein 2009). The turn toward more descriptive research in the area of responsible leadership is justified and necessary to support an improved understanding of how to integrate responsibility into business practices (Pless et al. 2012).

References

- Apter MJ (2003) Motivational styles and positioning theory. In: Harré R & Moghaddam FM (eds) *The self and others*. Westport CT, Praeger: 15–27.
- Bamberg M (2006) Stories: big or small—why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry* 16: 139–147.
- Bamberg M & Georgakopoulou A (2008) Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk* 28(3): 377–396.
- Barge JK (2012) Systemic constructionist leadership and working from within the present moment. In: Uhl-Bien M & Ospina SM (eds) *Advancing relational leadership research: a dialogue among perspectives*. Charlotte NC, Information Age Publishing: 107–142.

- Crevani L, Lindgren M & Packendorf J (2010) Leadership, not leaders: on the study of leadership as practices and interactions. *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 26: 77–86.
- Cunliffe AL & Eriksen M (2011) Relational leadership. *Human Relations* 64: 1425–1449.
- De Fina A (2013) Positioning level 3: connecting local identity displays to macro social processes. *Narrative Inquiry* 23(1): 40–61.
- Deppermann A (2013) Positioning in narrative interaction. *Narrative Inquiry* 23(1): 1–15.
- Fairhurst GT & Uhl-Bien M (2012) Organizational discourse analysis (ODA): examining leadership as a relational process. *Leadership Quarterly* 23(6): 1043–1062.
- Gergen KJ (2002) Self and community in the new floating worlds. In: Nyiri K (ed) *Mobile democracy: essays on society, self and politics*. Vienna, Passagen: 103–114.
- Gubrium JF & Holstein JA (2009) *Analyzing narrative reality*. London, Sage.
- Hosking DM (2007) Not leaders, not followers: a postmodern discourse of leadership processes. In: Shamir B, Pillai R, Bligh MC & Uhl-Bien M (eds) *Follower-centered perspectives on leadership: a tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl*. Greenwich CT, Information Age Publishing: 243–264.
- House RJ, Hanges PJ, Javidan M, Dorfman PW & Gupta V (eds) (2004) *Culture, leadership, and organizations: the GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Sage.
- Hyvärinen M (2009) Narrative analysis. URL: http://www.hyvarinen.info/material/Hyvarinen-Narrative_Analysis.pdf (accessed March 3, 2014)
- Keränen A (2015) *Business leaders' narratives about responsibility in leadership work*. Doctoral dissertation. Oulu, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu.
- Maak T & Pless NM (2006) Responsible leadership: a relational approach. In: Maak T & Pless NM (eds) *Responsible leadership*. London, Routledge: 33–53.
- Maak T, Pless NM & Voegtlin C (2016) Business statesman or shareholder advocate? CEO responsible leadership styles and the micro-foundations of political CSR. *Journal of Management Studies* 53(3): 463–493.
- McNamee S (2009) Postmodern psychotherapeutic ethics: relational responsibility in practice. *Human Systems* 20: 57–71.

- Mirvis P & Manga J (2010) Integrating corporate citizenship: leading from the middle. In: Smith NC, Bhattacharya CB, Vogel D & Levine DI (eds) *Global challenges in responsible business*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 78–106.
- Pearce CL & Manz CC (2011) Leadership centrality and corporate social ir-responsibility (CSIR): the potential ameliorating effects of self and shared leadership on CSIR. *Journal of Business Ethics* 102: 563–579.
- Phelan J (2005) *Living to tell about it: a rhetoric and ethics of character narration*. Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press.
- Pless NM & Maak T (2004) Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice. *Journal of business ethics* 54(2): 129-147.
- Pless NM (2007) Understanding responsible leadership: role identity and motivational drivers. *Journal of Business Ethics* 74(4): 437–456.
- Pless NM & Maak T (2004) Building an inclusive diversity culture: principles, processes and practice. *Journal of business ethics* 54(2): 129–147.
- Pless NM & Maak T (2011) Responsible leadership: pathways to the future. *Journal of Business Ethics* 98(1): 3–13.
- Pless NM, Maak T & Waldman DA (2012) Different approaches toward doing the right thing: mapping the responsibility orientations of leaders. *Academy of Management Perspectives* 26(4): 51–65.
- Raggatt PTF (2007) Forms of positioning in the dialogical self: a system of classification and the strange case of Dame Edna Everage. *Theory & Psychology* 17: 355–382.
- Riessman CK (2008) *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles CA, Sage.
- Shamir B & Eilam G (2005) “What’s your story?” A life-stories approach to authentic leadership development. *Leadership Quarterly* 16: 395–417.
- Sparkes AC & Smith B (2008) Narrative constructionist inquiry. In: Holstein JA & Gubrium JF (eds) *Handbook of constructionist research*. New York NY, Guilford Press: 295–314.
- Uhl-Bien M & Carsten M (2018) Reversing the lens in leadership: positioning followership in the leadership construct. In *Leadership now: reflections on the legacy of Boas Shamir*. Emerald Publishing: 195–222.
- Vaccaro A & Palazzo G (2015) Values against violence: institutional change in societies dominated by organized crime. *Academy of Management Journal* 58(4): 1075–1101.



Vine B, Holmes J, Marra M, Pfeifer D & Jackson B (2008) Exploring co-leadership talk through interactional sociolinguistics. *Leadership* 4: 339–360.