

## **Shaping and generating powerful relationships at work.**

How our conceptions of reality are forming our  
ways of organizing the workplace in either  
vertical or horizontal relationships.

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## 1. Introduction.

*“Moving out of our present mental box of reality perception, will lead us on the way of changing our conception of reality. Remaining inside our mental box will confirm our existing perceptions of reality, and continue to preserve and protect our valid reality conceptions from change”.*

Why is the character in the performance and exercising of the work of “leading” so decisive for the distinctive features and qualities of the relationships between people in the workplace? In the search for some reasonable explanations to this question, we must look into what we in fact are doing and thinking when we perform in the process of “leading” at work.

## 2. The vertical relationship.

If we go back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century we will find the first examples of the conceptualization about the work of “leading”. During this period of industrialization the “leader-centred” concept appeared on the workplace stage and was referred to as “leadership”. The term “leadership” became adopted as a common word and incorporated in the English language. The core element in the term of “leadership” was a line of command and control between the leader and the followers. The leader should lead and the followers should be led. A line of autocratic force of power strictly based on the downward relation between the master and the servants, and characterized by a culture of domination, obedience and subservience from top to bottom in the hierarchical order. During the post-industrial period in 2000<sup>th</sup> century numerous of “leadership” theories emerged and established a wide range of different directions in the way of conceiving the term. Books on “leadership” became popular studies, for example “Scientific Management” by Fredrik Taylor published in 1911. In the years that followed the concept of “leadership” was subjected to a diversity of interpretations. In a way we can say that the conceptualization of “leadership” has gone from strictly personal actions from the leader above to the followers below, in becoming more of an interaction among the leader and the followers. We can describe the evolution of the “leadership” term as a process with the sole focus on the leader as a superior person leading the followers as tailing instruments, to a perspective of a relationship with interconnected actions and reactions between the leader and the followers. Within the modernized and contemporary frame of “leadership” the humane aspect has got a wide merit with an emphasis on cooperation,

collaboration and coordination between people and work processes. From the 1930's the Human Relation movement was established as a management discipline and contributed in developing new perspectives in the organizing of the workplace. For example the working-team was during this period developed as an organizational form and was further modified from the 1960's through the movement of the Socio-technical System.

We can find an example of a contemporary "leadership" theory in the book written by Joseph Rost "Leadership for the Twenty-First Century" (1991). He is stating that "leadership" is an influence relationship between leaders and followers. He does say that the participants in this relationship practise influence in one way or another, even if all the actors in this relationship are not equal. His definition is composed of four basic elements: (1) The relation is based on influence. (2) Leaders and followers are the people in this relationship. (3) Leaders and followers intend real changes. (4) The changes the leaders and followers intend reflect their mutual purposes. The modern conceptualization that Rost and other leadership scholars and theorists have in common, is that "leadership" is based upon the following main factors:

1. A relationship among leaders and followers
2. The structure of the relationship is organized vertically with the leader above and the followers below.

The term "leadership" and the thinking and practise around it, has indeed developed a wide scope of supplementary aspects during the last century. None the less the main and substantial feature in the conceptualization of the relationship between the leader and the followers is sustained. The attempts and efforts in distancing the "leadership" term from its "leader-centred" origin and equip it with a more equalized and mutualised image have not changed the substance of "leadership". The original value ingredients of "leadership" have survived unchanged since the time of its birth:

1. The position of the leader above to lead and the followers in the position below to be led, is preserved and protected as an indisputable de facto in the cause of a legitimate law of nature.
2. The relation between the leader and followers is unequally balanced where the leader has the power of authority to decide over the followers and the followers are obliged to follow the imposed decisions from the leader.
3. The relationship regulated through "leadership" is vertically organized from top to bottom according to the order of hierarchical ranking.

### 3. The horizontal relationship.

In the efforts of developing a new and alternative conceptualization of the work of “leading”, a working process was started some years ago. The purpose and intention behind this work was to create and establish a term that indicated and implicated an organizing of the relationship in the workplace as equally balanced. The term “leadingship” was introduced in 2006 as a contrary option to “leadership”. The main reason for this new invention was that the term “leadership” was so heavily loaded with old and ingrained associations, assumptions, perceptions and beliefs that one more additional modified version of “leadership” would not comply with the purpose of establishing a new reality conception. A real change in view and attitude was necessary, being made achievable through an accessible reorientation in language and terminology. Only a genuine and complete paradigm shift could do the job. The need to make the unthinkable thinkable, the impossible possible, the unconceivable conceivable, was as ready as the dawn of the day because of the deadlocked convictions and beliefs regarding the conservation of the vertical relationship in the “leadership” doctrine (ref. the metaphor of our mental box). The new understanding of the work of “leading” would describe the term “leadingship” as the function of leading throughout a personalized and internalized process within every human being in the workplace. “Leadingship” would then be manifested as the contrast to the conventional conception of “leadership” (with a person above in the lead of someone below to be led as the essential and central objective).

In my paper “*The DemoCratic Workplace*” from 2009 the term “leadingship” was characterized as follows:

*“Leading-ship” is a force of internalized willpower generated by the person from inside. In comparison, the notion of “Leader-ship” is a force of externalized power imposed on the person from outside. “Leading-ship” is the expression of freedom and trust exercised by the individual human being as an autonomous person. “Leader-ship” is on the contrary the expression of subjugation to a superior authority in control of the individual human being as a subordinated person.*

*“Leading-ship” acknowledges the people’s rights to self-direction within their respective field of work. “Leading-ship” means that people use their will-power and work-power in their contribution to the pursuit of common goals whether alone or together with others. 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.*

*“Leading-ship” requires that people are treated on the basis of their person - as unique and equal individual human beings – as opposed to being treated on the basis of their positions and ranks. “Leading-ship” enforces consequently a system where people are getting self-organized through a structure that acknowledges and grants individuals their right to work and function as sovereign and autonomous human beings. This self-organized structure will provide and ensure equal and mutual access to personal freedom and individual independence for everybody.*

*“Leading-ship” in practise amounts to “getting things done through oneself in collaboration with others”. The model of “Leading-ship” is therefore based on the principles:*

- 1. The right to lead one self.*
- 2. The duty to support each other in the leading of themselves.*

*The outcome of “Leading-ship” in the workplace is that everyone in the organization, gets their work done through their independent and responsible actions as equal members and partners of the organizational community. In the process of “Leading-ship” people are treated as the persons they are and not as the persons others have decided they should be”.*

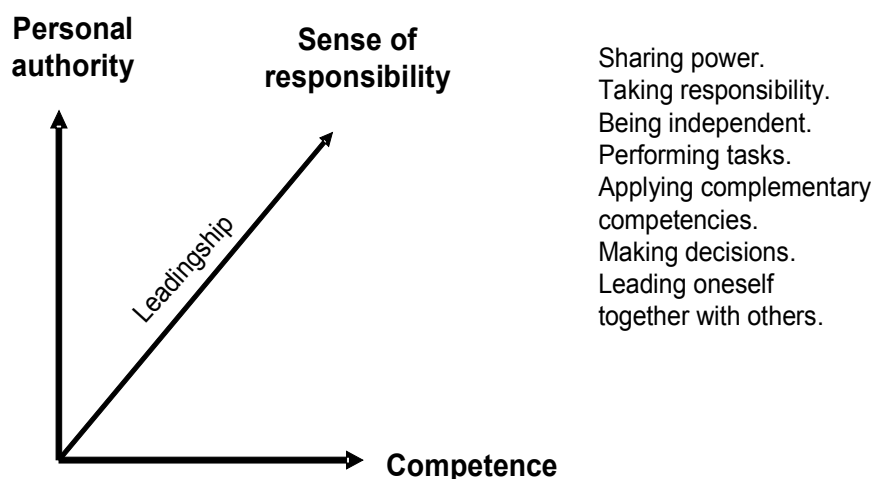
The horizontal relationship is therefore based on the construction of the following elements:

1. Everyone in the workplace is leading one self together with the others.
2. The relation between the people is equally balanced by the personal authority every individual human being is assigned with in making individual decisions within ones respective responsibility field of work.
3. The relationship generated through “leadingship” is horizontal organized consisting of people on the same level of equal footing and mutual understanding.

## 4. Definitions and models.

In my paper “*Leadingship v.s. Leadership*” from 2009, an illustration of a conceptualization of the terminology was presented. The model and definition of “leadingship” is as follows:

### 1. The model

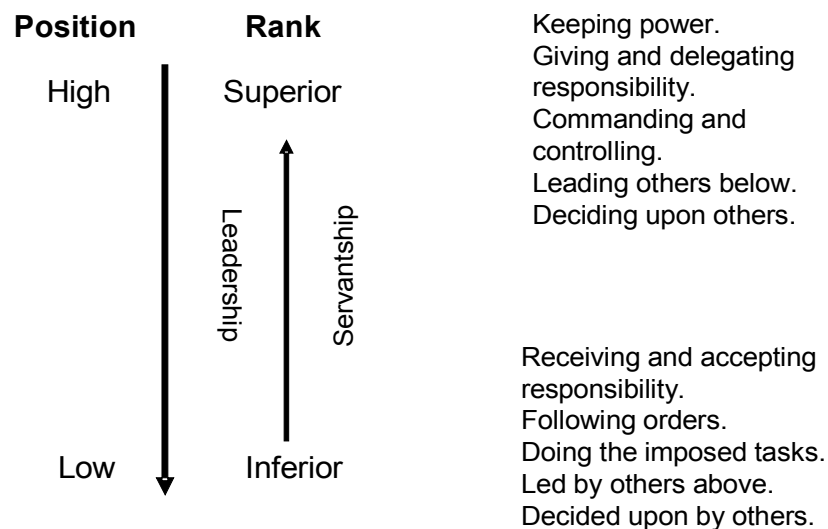


### 2. The definition

Leadingship 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 oneself in mutual and equal understanding with others through a Shared Reality Conception in the workplace. Everyone is a leader within their respective area of responsibility, and have the power of authority to make individual decisions and to influence on decisions concerning their respective field of work.

The model and definition of “leadership” is as follows:

## 1. The model



## 2. The definition

Leadership is referring 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 the 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 from the person in the position above. The subordinates are performing servantship in their obedience towards their superior leader.



## 5. Conclusion.

“Leadership” is defined and conceived as a relationship between someone above and someone below on the hierarchical ladder. The vertical relationship between people is therefore an authoritarian system where a person above (in high position) is assigned the authority to decide upon the persons below (in low positions), who on their part are not granted such an equivalent authority. “Leadingship” is generating a relationship between equals and peers and the relating is done without positions and ranks. The horizontal relationship is equally balanced between people on the same level of co-existence. “Leadingship” is an egalitarian system with equality in dignity as the core value in the shaping of powerful relationships between people worthy of equal freedom and mutual trust in the workplace.

The distinctive features and qualities of the relationship between individual human beings in the workplace are made up by the strategic choices we make in organizing the workplace society. We have in reality two main choices to our disposal as it is presented in the following overall model:

### **Authoritarian power system**

Vertical power structure (high and low positions)

Hierarchical organizational structure (someone above as superiors and someone below as subordinates).

Leadership (leader-based work processes)

Vertical relationship (someone is leading and someone is led)

### **Egalitarian power system**

Horizontal power structure (side-lined functions)

Egalitarian organizational structure (everyone has independent and responsible roles)

Leadingship (individual-based and collective-based work processes)

Horizontal relationship (the individual person is leading one self together with others)

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

Buckminster Fuller