

A TALE FROM THE FIELD: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC  
STUDY OF POWER DYNAMICS IN LEADERSHIP  
WORK

Christopher Mueller

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
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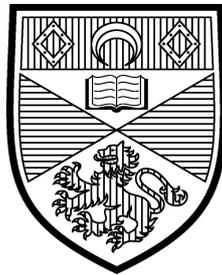
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A Tale from The Field: An Ethnographic Study of Power  
Dynamics in Leadership Work

Christopher Mueller



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews

13/03/2017

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## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (I): A PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1.1 THE PRACTICE CONCEPT	16
2.1.2 DEFINING PRACTICE	21
2.1.3 PROBLEMATIZING THE PRACTICE CONCEPT	24
2.1.4 SUMMARY	26
<b>2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW: LEADERSHIP-AS-PRACTICE</b>	<b>29</b>
2.2.1 THE WORK OF LEADERSHIP	32
2.2.2 RESOLVING DUALISMS IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES	35
2.2.3 LEADERSHIP AND CONTEXT	36
2.2.4 WHAT IS LEADERSHIP, THEN?	38
2.2.5 A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LAP	43
2.2.6 SUMMARY	47
<b>2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (II): POWER DYNAMICS</b>	<b>51</b>
2.3.1 'CONVENTIONAL' VIEWS ON POWER	53
2.3.2 TOWARDS A PRACTICE-BASED VIEW ON POWER	56
<b>2.4 SUMMARY &amp; RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM/PHILOSOPHY</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.2 DATA COLLECTION</b>	<b>77</b>
3.2.1 RESEARCH SETTING AND ACCESS	77
3.2.2 AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH	79
<b>3.3 DATA ANALYSIS</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>3.4 BEYOND VALIDITY &amp; RELIABILITY</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.5 SUMMARY</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>4. FINDINGS</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>4.1 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>110</b>
4.1.1 THE OLD DAYS	120
4.1.2 SETTING THE 'TRUE NORTH'	124
4.1.3 SUMMARY	128
4.1.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP & POWER	130
<b>4.2 THE 'BOUNDEDNESS' OF EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>134</b>
4.2.1 HOW EMPOWERMENT IS ENACTED	134
4.2.2 HOW EMPOWERMENT IS PRODUCED	140
4.2.3 HOW EMPOWERMENT IS LIMITED – THE FAÇADE OF EMPOWERMENT?	146
4.2.4 SUMMARY	152
4.2.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP & POWER	154
<b>4.3 INCLUSIVE PRACTICE &amp; ELITISM</b>	<b>158</b>
4.3.1 WORKING CROSS-FUNCTIONALLY	158

4.3.2 DIVERGING CONCERNS	163
4.3.3 ELITISM	168
4.3.4 SUMMARY	171
4.3.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP & POWER	172
<b>5. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>5.1 SHAPING NORMATIVITY</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>5.2 ENABLEMENT &amp; CONSTRAINT</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>5.3 INCLUSION &amp; EXCLUSION</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>221</b>

## Overview of Tables

Table 1 – Similarities among different theories of practice	19-21
Table 2 – Power as a coercive capacity	55
Table 3 – Power as a productive capacity (II)	55-56
Table 4 – Power as doing	56
Table 5 – Elements of ethnographic research in this thesis	87-88
Table 6 – Main ‘plot characters’	109

## Overview of Figures

Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework; practice-based understanding of power	62
Figure 2 – ‘Methods map’	76
Figure 3 – Degree of participation	81
Figure 4 – The thematic analysis process	90
Figure 5 – ‘Sensitizing framework’	93
Figure 6 – Relationship between text, codes, and themes	94
Figure 7 – First preliminary thematic map	95
Figure 8 – (Almost) Final thematic map	98
Figure 9 – Thematic map illustrating <i>relationships</i> between themes	99
Figure 10 – Final thematic map	101

## Overview of Photographs

Photograph 1 – Office entrance	113
Photograph 2 – The POD area	113
Photograph 3 – Office quotes	114

## Abstract

In this thesis, I take a practice-based approach to examine the ways in which the work of leadership is socially accomplished, and thereby implicated with power dynamics. Although the Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) literature acknowledges the omnipresence and significance of the ways in which power dynamics are brought to bear on leadership, studies that focus on such dynamics remain rare.

In this thesis, therefore, I contribute to conversations indeed concerned with the relationship between power dynamics and practices, by asking how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership, and how said dynamics contribute to the ways in which leadership gets accomplished. I studied these questions ethnographically at a British textiles organisation, comprising approximately 100 employees. Access, thereby, concentrated on the ‘commercial’ part of the company. The main methods of inquiry were participant observations supplemented with variously structured interviews. To analyse my substantial data set subsequently, I conducted a thematic analysis. Doing so yielded three major ways in which power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership: through *shaping normativity* of leadership work, *enabling and constraining* action, as well as *including and excluding* actors from practices.

My thesis thus contributes to the literatures of practice and LAP in several ways. First, theorising power dynamics in practices can itself be seen as an important contribution – whilst my conceptual framework developed in this thesis might be adopted to conduct future research. Second, I demonstrate the critical role of normativity in the work of leadership, which also entails showing that not only do practices produce power dynamics as argued by the present literature, but that power dynamics affect the way in which practices and thus leadership are accomplished. Third, by theorising the recursive relationship between practice and power further, my thesis demonstrates that it is not practice per se that enables and constrains possible activity, but the *interplay* between the two phenomena. Lastly, I contribute to the literature by highlighting the ways in which dynamics of access to practices are brought to bear on how the work of leadership gets accomplished.

# 1. Introduction

In this thesis, I examine the intersection between leadership and power dynamics. To do so, for reasons delineated below, I adopt practice theory as both a theoretical and philosophical approach, which means that my study is situated within the domain of Leadership-as-Practice (LAP).

LAP constitutes one of several so-called ‘post-heroic’ approaches to leadership, which are fundamentally dissatisfied with their yet prevailing counterpart, heroic leadership studies. Heroic approaches, in fact a term coined by its critics (see Murrell, 1997; Yukl, 1999), centre on the grandiose deeds of particular individuals that occupy positions high in the organisational hierarchy (Wood, 2005). These leaders are argued to exert unidirectional influence to inspire their followers (Yukl, 1999). These ‘mainstream’ approaches (Collinson, 2011) include the trait approach (Stodgill, 1948), transformational and transactional leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972), strategic leadership (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), situational leadership and contingency theories (see Graeff, 1997), authentic leadership (e.g. Avolio and Gardner, 2005), or behavioural theories (see Northouse 2013 for a thorough overview).

Despite their wide popularity, however, heroic approaches have witnessed an increasing wealth of critique regarding their ‘romanticised’ portrayal of leadership. Critics argue that heroic approaches are too individualistic and static, neglect the social conditions that constitute leadership and how it is enacted, disentangle it from context, exhibit a ubiquity of competences, and ignore how a number of actors might actually be involved in leadership (Meindl et al., 1985; Yukl, 1999; Barker, 2001; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Wood, 2005; Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Carroll et al., 2008; Ladkin, 2008; Gronn, 2009; Crevani et al., 2010). Not only do these scholars offer critique, they also suggest alternative conceptualisations, such as shared leadership (e.g. Pearce and Conger, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Ensley et al., 2006; Pearce et al., 2009, 2011; Muethel and Hoegl, 2013), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), hybrid (Gronn, 2009) and blended leadership (Collinson and Collinson, 2009), integrative leadership (Ospina and Foldy, 2009), empowering leadership (Vecchio et al., 2010), collective leadership (Contractor et al., 2012), discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2009), or relational leadership (e.g. Uhl-bien, 2006; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Instead of the grandiose

acts of individual leaders and inherently hierarchical conceptions of leadership, these writers seek to foreground that leadership is better understood as a social and collective accomplishment (Draft, 2001; Fletcher, 2004). Leadership ‘stretches’ over a variety of actors (Parry and Bryman, 2006; Raelin, 2014).

A further, more recent, type of post-heroic approach is indeed the practice-based (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002; Gherardi, 2006, 2011; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Nicolini, 2013) study of leadership – ‘Leadership-as-Practice’. The rationale for adopting this particular perspective lies within the compelling potential of the practice concept, as it focuses on hitherto neglected aspects of social and thus organisational life. For instance, for practice scholars the mundane is equally important as the sublime, meaning that leadership may occur as part of the most unlikely encounters (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2013). At the same time, this means that no matter how individual an activity may seem, according to the practice concept it is principally social, meaning that leadership is seen as a collective endeavour (Gherardi, 2006; Raelin, 2011a, 2014). Practice also conceives of social life as highly situated, i.e. contextually dependent (Schatzki, 2005; Gherardi, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), meaning that leadership can be studied in its ‘lived experience’ rather than in an abstract fashion (Garfinkel, 1967; Carroll, 2015). What makes practice-based inquiry particularly worthwhile for this thesis, however, is the idea that social phenomena such as leadership, as situated activities, are inherently *contingent and contested*, bringing to the fore the role of *power dynamics* in social life and thus leadership (Nicolini, 2007, 2011, 2013; Contu, 2014; Ford, 2015; Raelin, 2015). Taken together, seeing leadership as possibly taking place anywhere and through anyone, and considering its highly contextualised and contested fashion, affords different, if not greater, insight than previous approaches that see leadership as individually centred, abstract, and static.

LAP, however, is a rather dispersed movement. As such, some emphasise the role of the body (e.g. Fisher and Reiser Robbins, 2013; Küpers, 2013), context (Endrissat and Arx, 2013), or materiality (e.g. Sergi, 2015), whereas others consider the actual *doing* of leadership (e.g. Denis et al., 2010) and how leadership practice is actually achieved (Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2015). Moreover, different scholars have varying understandings of practice (see Geiger, 2009; Corradi et al., 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Some perceive it as an empirical device, focusing on

the situated activities of actors, whereas some take it as a theoretical tool, articulating “particular theoretical relationships that explain everyday activity” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011: 1241). Still others see the practice concept as a philosophy, fundamentally questioning the nature of social phenomena such as leadership or power – as I am going to do in this thesis.

Amongst others, a philosophical perspective on practice entails examining leadership in its ‘relational whole’ (cf. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). That is, not merely scrutinising the situated deeds of individuals, but taking into account every aspect of practice from which leadership emerges – be it *all* actors and their activities involved in the *accomplishment of leadership*, the wider practices in which leadership occurs and acquires meaning, norms and rules that guide its conduct, the use of materials, and so on (cf. Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013). From this perspective, it is impossible to single out and make sense of constituent parts of ‘leadership practice’ (Schatzki, 2001b; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). To signify my focus on this ‘relational whole’ rather than leadership practice as mere activities of particular agents – which some practice approaches in fact do (see e.g. Pickering, 1995; Nicolini, 2013) – I use the phrase ‘the work of leadership’ (see Crevani, 2015). The two primary implications of this concept are that any actor may contribute to accomplishing leadership, and, secondly, that given its mundane nature, that leadership might be accomplished anywhere.

From this transpires that leadership *materialises*; in other words, it is the effect of collective activity (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Sergi, 2015). To identify whether leadership has materialised, I follow the recommendation, that “it is the situated, moment by moment, construction of direction that becomes interesting” (Crevani et al., 2010: 81; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Grint, 2005b; Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Crevani, 2015). Leadership, therefore, is about setting direction – so-called ‘turning points’ or ‘leadership moments’, which change the flow of practice into new, or different, directions (Crevani et al., 2010; Simpson, 2015). As Crevani and colleagues (2010) suggest, however, direction need not mean ‘one direction’ in the sense of agreement – as the emphasis on leadership’s collective character might insinuate. On the contrary, the production of direction encompasses debate and negotiation as well as

diverging views and unresolved conflicts (Crevani et al., 2010; Küpers, 2013; Crevani, 2015).

In fact, a plethora of scholars highlight the importance of *power dynamics*, both in practices generally and therefore leadership in particular (e.g. Fox, 2000; Schatzki, 2002; Gherardi, 2006; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Nicolini, 2009a, 2011, 2013; Mørk et al., 2010; Ford, 2015). Previous studies, for instance, indicate that practices are imbued with power relations in terms of differently empowered social positions, which in turn may result in privileging some voices at the expense of others, or including some actors but excluding others from opportunities to partake in practices altogether (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Ospina and Foldy, 2009; Ford, 2010, 2015; Nicolini, 2011; Raelin, 2015). As I am going to show in Chapter 2.3 in particular, practices are thus argued to produce power dynamics that in turn guide what activities can or cannot be accomplished (e.g. Foucault, 1978, 1980; Latour, 1986, 2005; Schatzki, 2001a; Nicolini, 2007; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Haugaard, 2010; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Arguably, therefore, power dynamics also fundamentally affect the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished (cf. Collinson, 2014; Simpson, 2015).

Although these scholars are fond of stressing the significance of power dynamics, only a handful attends to such dynamics explicitly and empirically. In relation to LAP, meanwhile, studies that explicitly consider power dynamics are virtually non-existent – although there are some exceptions (e.g. Ford, 2015) begin to communicate with Critical Leadership Studies; a niche that foregrounds and critiques power relations in leadership (e.g. Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Collinson, 2011, 2014), yet not from a practice-based perspective. Therefore, exploring power dynamics in practices per se and leadership especially is a worthwhile avenue of inquiry. Firstly, since power dynamics are ‘under-explored’, they constitute a major ‘research gap’ (e.g. Heizmann, 2011). Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, power dynamics might be taken to *problematize* (see Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Ford, 2015) the work of leadership, thus potentially affording more nuanced and novel insights about how it is accomplished, negotiated, and sustained – an arguably pivotal yet rarely considered question by empirical LAP research (see Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

In this thesis, therefore, I explore two interrelated research questions that contribute to the LAP and practice literature by highlighting the omnipresence of power dynamics. First, I ask *how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership*, and, secondly, based on the insights gathered regarding the first question I consider *how power dynamics affect the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished*.

To answer these questions, I adopt a constructionist-interpretivist philosophy and hence a qualitative methodology. In particular, in order to capture the everydayness of practices (e.g. Nicolini, 2009a, b; Gherardi, 2011; Contu, 2014; Carroll, 2015; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015), I use an ethnographic approach with participant observations as the bedrock method of inquiry, supplemented with interviews (see Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988) and reflexivity techniques such as writing memos and keeping a diary (e.g. Nadin and Cassell, 2006).

The research setting of this thesis' ethnographic endeavours, meanwhile, is a British, 150 year-old manufacturer of textiles for industrial use I call 'TexCo'. The organisation comprises approximately 100 employees, and as part of a recent substantial change initiative moved from family to employee ownership. This change initiative is going to feature prominently throughout this thesis. Apart from ownership change, it involved introducing new products, redeveloping the organisational structure, redesigning the office space, and, most importantly, introducing an initiative to profoundly change the ways in which TexCo operate – in other words, their practices.

To analyse my substantial data set gathered at TexCo over the course of five and a half months (250 pages of observations and 39 interviews, differently structured), I conducted a thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) iterative process model. This analysis yielded three major and interrelated ways in which power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership: by *shaping normativity*, i.e. what is seen as legitimate and acceptable ways of practicing leadership; by *enabling and constraining* which and how turning points may materialise; and by *including and excluding* certain actors in the work of leadership.

Vis-à-vis shaping normativity, by highlighting various mechanisms of power, such as driving expectations or discursive interventions, I show how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership by shaping and negotiating what are considered legitimate and acceptable ways of practicing. For how the work of leadership gets

accomplished, this means that some forms of producing direction (i.e. ‘turning points’) are ruled in, whereas other ways to do so are ruled out – addressing the hows and whys of producing direction. As my findings demonstrate, however, shaping normativity through power dynamics also entails influencing *what* courses of action may materialise instead of others. I thereby contribute to the LAP literature by demonstrating the important role of normativity in the work of leadership in general, and how it may get accomplished specifically. In that sense, my findings by extension also demonstrate that not only do practices produce power dynamics, as argued by the present literature above, but that power dynamics affect the very practices from which they transpire. Practice and power, therefore, are in a recursive relationship.

Vis-à-vis enablement and constraint, I delve deeper into the relationship between practice and power, and how their relationship affects the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished. I argue that power dynamics are not only implicated in the work of leadership by shaping what is seen as legitimate and acceptable, but also enabling and constraining leadership by shaping the field of possible action. To illustrate this, I draw on arguments in both the practice and leadership literature, contending different practices to inextricably ‘hang together’; in other words, different practices are connected, as they constitute each other’s resources (e.g. Nicolini, 2009a; Shove et al., 2011; Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Crevani, 2015). The idea that a practice in the here and now may set up another enactment in the there and then, however, has not yet been discussed thoroughly in LAP research. Here, my thesis makes another important contribution to the literature, by theorising the role of power dynamics in this process, and by extension how these dynamics contribute to how the work of leadership is accomplished.

Lastly, vis-à-vis my third main finding – inclusion and exclusion as an ‘expression of power’ – I contribute to the LAP literature by highlighting the ways in which dynamics of access are brought to bear on how the work of leadership gets accomplished. For instance, actors who did not comply with certain expectations and thus an at times imposed sense of legitimacy and acceptability (as argued vis-à-vis my first finding) were excluded from opportunities to partake in the work of leadership. Although the notion of access has been a central concern of other practice-based literatures, such as learning and knowing (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and

Brown, 1999; Gherardi, 2000, 2006), it has not been a major focus of LAP studies. Moreover, the third finding in particular highlights the important role of authority in leadership practice – which has been neglected in favour of romanticised portrayals of the collective character of leadership work (e.g. Gronn, 2009; Grint, 2010; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Specifically, my findings suggest that authority is required for leadership to be a dispersed practice *to begin with* – a seemingly contradictory relationship.

In summary, the main argument of this thesis is that leadership materialises *in and through* practices and their enactments. Practices, in turn, are inherently contingent, negotiated, and contested, and therefore permeated with power dynamics. Power dynamics in social life generally and practices (and thus LAP) specifically are widely agreed to be important, yet at the same time studies rarely explicitly focus on such dynamics. To make this argument, the thesis is structured as follows.

In the first chapter after this introduction (Chapter 2), I establish the theoretical background of the study. That is, I begin by delineating the practice concept – exploring origins and applications, differences and commonalities, and specifically how I use the concept in this thesis. Thereafter, in Section 2.2, I delve into the theoretical ‘core’ of the thesis, exploring leadership from a practice perspective. This includes introducing key concepts, such as ‘the work of leadership’ and defining what I mean by leadership (producing direction), as well as resolving dualisms that traditionally permeate the social sciences (e.g. subject/object). I also explore the niche of Critical Leadership Studies, and attend to the ways in which LAP scholars conceive of power dynamics in relation to leadership. Since, as suggested, power dynamics remain an overlooked phenomenon in spite of their significance, I go on to develop a practice-based understanding of power in Section 2.3, which results in a heuristic framework to study power dynamics empirically. Finally, I conclude Chapter 2 by summarising it and introducing my two research questions; namely, how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership, and how leadership is socially accomplished.

In Chapter 3, then, I thoroughly delineate my research design. This chapter in turn consists of four major sections. In 3.1, I first discuss my philosophical approach, which, fundamentally informed by practice as a philosophy, is a constructionist-interpretivist approach. This affects the methodology applied, which is qualitative. In

Section 3.2, therefore, I explain an ethnographic approach is especially useful for studying practices. Here, I outline the ‘common traits’ of such an approach, and establish how it pertains to my thesis and my research setting, also described in this section, in particular. In the subsequent section, 3.3, I then consider my analytical approach which is a thematic analysis. I followed seven iterative steps, which are outlined in detail, and illustrate how I move from my analysis to my empirical findings: the ‘expressions of power’ as described above.

In Chapter 4, I explore my findings in terms of three interrelated sections based on my thematic analysis. These sections deal with inherent tensions evident in the data, between TexCo of old and more contemporary organisational life, empowerment and disempowerment, as well as inclusion and exclusion. At the end of each section, I return to the literature to explain how I perceive both power and leadership dynamics to be present in the data. This sets up Chapter 5, in which I engage in deeper interpretations of my data, and discuss these in relation to present debates in the practice, LAP, and power literature. Lastly, in Chapter 6 I summarise and conclude the argument and contributions of this thesis, as well as indicating potential limitations and avenues for future research.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework (I): A Practice-based Approach

In recent years, a ‘practice turn’ has been identified in social theory, and not least in management and organisational studies (Schatzki et al., 2001; Gherardi, 2013; Nicolini, 2013). This ‘turn’ is founded on the idea that social phenomena such as “knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects or components of the field of practices” (Schatzki, 2001a: 11). In other words, the idea of practice is a means of understanding social life (Schatzki, 2012), concentrating on hitherto neglected or unrecognised aspects of the social world, and proposing to rethink core aspects thereof, such as abstract structures, culture, individual agency, affect, as well as resolving fundamental dualisms permeating traditional social science – all in favour of everyday, *mundane* activity as a focus for research (Reckwitz, 2002; Nicolini, 2013; Bain and Mueller, 2016). A practice approach, therefore, enables scholars to explore and understand the performance of organisational phenomena (e.g. leadership or strategy) as they unfold (Schatzki, 2006; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009).

My intention in this section is to elaborate on some of practice theory’s core assumptions and, following Nicolini’s (2009a, 2013) work, common threads of what would generically be called a ‘practice theory’ – a family resemblance so to speak. In this section, therefore, it is my aim to examine the general implications of the practice idea in social and organisational theory, particularly concentrating on outlining the commonalities of the various practice theories, as well as problematizing differences in order to establish how I use the concept in this thesis.

Although practice is commonly referred to as theory, I seek to avoid the term in light of its profound epistemological and ontological implications. As discussed below, the practice concept as it is used here is more in line with a research philosophy instead of a theory, leading me to perceive the notion of practice in its philosophical sense. This is why I follow Nicolini (2013) in using terms such as practice ‘idiom’, ‘idea’, ‘concept’, or practice-based ‘approach’ or ‘view’ in order to denote the principle of practice as a family resemblance concept as set out in this chapter.

To do so, this section is structured as follows. I begin my introduction of the practice concept by briefly elaborating on its heritage and applications in organisation studies, followed by problematizing the insight that no unified practice approach exists. In response, I subsequently outline the major commonalities generally associated with a practice-based view. Thereafter, I propose how the concept of practice informs the study of organisational phenomena, which is going to be featured throughout my chapter on leadership as well (2.2). Afterwards, I suggest how one may define ‘practice’, followed by problematizing the different usages of the concept in order to establish my understanding of the term, which is particularly centred around a *philosophical* perspective on practice.

### **2.1.1 The Practice Concept**

The origins of what would contemporarily be called a practice theory comprise diverse disciplines across the social science. Contributors to what some now call the ‘practice bandwagon’ (Corradi et al., 2010) write within the domains of sociology, e.g. Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) notion of habitus and fields or Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory; anthropology (e.g. Ortner, 1984), cultural studies (Foucault, 1980), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), or philosophy (Heidegger, 1962; Wittgenstein, 1967). Although Schatzki et al. (2001) recently proclaimed a *turn* to practice in social theory and consequentially organisation studies, the idea has been around in social science for much longer. Others, therefore, in fact suggest a *return* to the concept of practice (Miettinen et al., 2009). While most recent theories of practice, such as Schatzki’s (2001b, 2002, 2005; Nicolini, 2011; Endrissat and Arx, 2013), are underpinned by insights from Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and thereby develop the works of Giddens and Bourdieu further, a *return* is justified considering earlier scholars’ works, such as Karl Marx, Charles Pierce and John Dewey (Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini, 2013; Bain and Mueller, 2016). In that sense, while some of these contributors have not developed a coherent theory of practice of their own (e.g. Heidegger or Bourdieu), their work has helped others (e.g. Schatzki) to develop one and contributed significantly to our contemporary understanding of practice.

The fields of application of practice within management and organisation studies are equally diverse as the concept’s heritage. Most prominent, perhaps, is the study of

practice-based learning and knowledge, conceiving of learning as the participation in practices and knowledge as a form of mastery, a social and practical dynamics rather than a thing (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and Brown, 1999; Nicolini et al., 2003; Gherardi, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Roberts, 2006; Corradi et al., 2010; Mørk et al., 2010; Guzman, 2013). Aside from theories of knowing and learning, other applications of the practice concept in organisation studies include 'technology-as-practice', examining the emergent use of technologies (e.g. Suchman et al., 1999; Orlikowski, 2000, 2007, 2009), science and strategy-as-practice, both of which are concerned with what actors actually do in their respective field ('strategizing', inspired by the shift from organisation to 'organising') (e.g. Chia and Holt, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 1996, 2006; Rasche and Chia, 2009). Other minor areas that adopt a practice perspective include marketing (e.g. Araujo et al., 2008), human resource management (e.g. Vickers and Fox, 2010), and accounting (e.g. Ahrens and Chapman, 2008). Gaining ever more popularity, meanwhile, is the movement of leadership-as-practice (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani et al., 2010; Kempster and Stuart, 2010; Raelin, 2011a; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015; Crevani, 2015), which, as the focus of this thesis, I explore in detail in Chapter 2.2.

Considering both the diversity of contributors to our contemporary understanding of practice and its broad areas of application within organisation studies suggests that the (re)turn to practice has not been a consolidated intellectual manoeuvre. Quite the opposite, there is no unified theory of practice (Schatzki, 2001a; Blackler and Regan, 2009; Geiger, 2009; Gherardi, 2009a; Miettinen et al., 2009). In this sense, the practice 'bandwagon' can be described as a 'family resemblance concept' (Wittgenstein, 1967; Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013) in that while the various approaches differ in some aspects, they share substantial commonalities. In fact, because of its diversity, a practice approach is often defined by borrowing from different theoretical streams collecting common themes (see e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009).

Acknowledging that a practice approach is developed from a multiplicity of scholarly traditions that naturally exhibit different assumptions, Nicolini (2009a, 2013) proposes to study practice in terms of a 'toolkit approach' – rather than adopting a specific theory of practice – such as activity theory (e.g. Blackler and Regan, 2009;

Kempster et al., 2015), pragmatism (e.g. Simpson, 2009, 2015), or structuration theory (e.g. Orlikowski, 2000). A toolkit approach is deployed by ‘zooming in’ on several aspects of practice as highlighted by different theoretical traditions (e.g. activity theory, ethnomethodology, actor-network theory, Heideggerian philosophy). Nicolini proposes inquiry to begin by scrutinising activities, from where researchers may go on to attend to the role of the body as well as tools and materials, tensions between creativity and the bounded nature of practices, notions of normativity and legitimacy, processes of learning, as well as a practice’s concerned nature (i.e. what practitioners care for). Zooming out, meanwhile, is done in order to ‘trail’ practices and how they are inextricably connected to other practices in space and time, as well as to examine a practice’s effects. One such effect of enacting practices is indeed producing the conditions for other, future, practices. Practices, therefore, can never exist in complete isolation, but are inextricably connected to each other. When attending to practices as the unit of analysis, therefore, one does not examine *one* practice, but ‘bundles’, or ‘nexuses’ of *multiple* practices at once (e.g. Schatzki, 2001b, 2002, 2005; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2011, 2013; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). Practices, in that sense, are mutually constitutive (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Examples of practices include trading on the stock market (Schatzki, 2002), playing football (Reckwitz, 2002), skateboarding (Shove et al., 2011), or, more prevalent in this thesis, solving quality issues or satisfying customers.

It should be emphasised that Nicolini’s (2009a, 2013) toolbox should not be seen as all-exclusive, meaning that it might be expanded and contracted. Other aspects to ‘watch out’ for, hence, may include rules (Schatzki, 2012), how we as actors are entwined with the social world as a ‘relational whole’ (Heidegger, 1962; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), or, as this thesis shall demonstrate, the contested nature of practices (although contestation is implicit in some of Nicolini’s aspects).

Importantly, the idea of a toolkit approach is *not* to attempt a ‘grand synthesis’ of the diverse practice approaches into one overarching theory. Instead, made possible by complex but omnipresent similarities among different traditions, a toolkit approach is about carefully utilising the diverse perspectives of different practice approaches in combination (Nicolini, 2013) to appreciate nuances, possibly yielding a novel understanding of practices and ultimately organisational phenomena (Nicolini, 2009a).

It should also be noted that given pragmatic constraints it might not be possible to equally zoom in and out on all the tools in the researcher’s box in one single study (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

In this thesis, based on a review of the literature, I adopt a perspective that could be labelled a generic approach to practice, echoing the assumption of the toolkit approach that practice should best be approached as a plurality in order to harness similarities of a diverse field in combination (Nicolini, 2009a; 2013; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Aspects I zoom in on in particular, considering that power dynamics in leadership constitute the main focus of this thesis, are situated activities, the tension between creativity and ‘boundedness’ (a push and pull effect between ‘normal’ and ‘anomalous’ activity), and issues normativity, by which I mean acceptability and legitimacy (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a). To follow Nicolini’s metaphor further, I also zoom out on how different practices are connected and especially how practices produce *power effects*, discussed specifically in Chapter 2.3. Based on my review of the literature, in order to appreciate the themes common to most approaches to practices I offer the following table:

<b>Concepts in Organisation studies</b>	<b>The practice perspective...</b>
Triviality of social life	Foregrounds the role of <i>mundane</i> and contextually and historically <i>situated</i> activity in the constitution of social life (examined in relation to supposedly grandiose acts of leadership, Section 2.2) (Crevani et al., 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).
Embodiment and materiality	Emphasises role of the <i>body</i> and <i>materials</i> (Schatzki, 2001a; Reckwitz, 2002; Latour, 2005; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2013).
Positivism	Criticises and offers alternatives to <i>positivism</i> , <i>cognitivist</i> and <i>rational</i> views of social life. Cognition, for instance, emerges from practices rather than the mind (Reckwitz, 2002; Gherardi, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2009a; Geiger, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003; Nicolini, 2013).

Knowledge	Reconceptualises the nature of <i>knowledge</i> . Knowledge is conceptualised as a form of mastery acquired through participation in practices. It is thus inherently social and shared (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and Brown, 1999; Nicolini et al., 2003; Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini, 2013).
Social order	Defines <i>social order</i> (human co-existence) in a <i>productive</i> and <i>reproductive</i> way in the sense that social order, constituted in practices, is only kept in existence as long as the practices of which it is comprised are reproduced, i.e. kept being carried out (the same goes for an organisation, therefore) (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2013).
Dualisms	Resolves <i>dualisms</i> prevalent in social theory, such as Cartesian thinking of the mind being separated from the body (explored in relation to leadership in section 2.2) (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Shove et al., 2011).
Meaning and normativity	Highlights the production of <i>meaning</i> and <i>normativity</i> , because taking part in practices entails developing a sense for what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (Schatzki, 2001b; Reckwitz, 2002; Gherardi, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013).
Entwinement with the social world	Suggests actors and things to always be already <i>entwined</i> with the social world as a ‘relational whole’. This implies that things cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which they take place (Heidegger, 1967; Schatzki, 2001a, 2002; andberg and Tsoukas, 2011).
Power	Reaffirms the centrality of <i>interests</i> , and hence <i>conflict</i> and <i>power</i> – specifically discussed in Section 2.2 and 2.3 (Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 1984; Schatzki, 2002; Shove et al., 2011;

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Table 1 – Similarities among different theories of practice.

As this section and also the remainder of Chapter 2 demonstrate, these commonalities have profound implications for the study of organisational life. Indeed, a central contribution of the practice idea is that social life is contingent, emergent and *formed by* practices. In other words, a practice-based approach conceives of the world to come into being through everyday enactments of practices – the world is ‘filled out’ and reproduced through activity (Schatzki, 2002; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2013). Indeed, as discussed below (2.1.2 Defining Practice), all practice theories emphasise the centrality of activity in the production and perpetuation of social life. Practices, in this sense, are seen as the ‘site’ of sociality (Schatzki, 2002), considering that all social phenomena transpire in and through practices. Since organisations are seen as fundamentally social phenomena, a practice-based view suggests that organisations, too, are both the site and the result of work activities and thus social practices (Schatzki, 2005; Nicolini, 2009a, 2011, 2013). Organisations, in other words, *consist* of and are produced by ‘bundles’ of different practices (Schatzki, 2005; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2013). As I discuss in this section, such a perspective ascribes profound epistemic dimensions to the practice concept, leading scholars to argue that social phenomena such as queues, family, authority and indeed organisations are only kept in existence as long as the practices of which they are comprised are being carried out (Schatzki, 2006; Nicolini, 2013). When studying the social phenomena such as organisations, therefore, the ‘bundle’ of interconnected practices is the ontological *unit of analysis* (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002, 2005; Gherardi, 2006; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2009a, 2011 2013).

### **2.1.2 Defining Practice**

As mentioned above, common to all practice theories is the centrality of activities. Specifically, based on Schatzki, (2001a: 2) I define practices as *the organised, socially recognised, recurrent, and “materially mediated arrays of human*

*activity*” (Schatzki, 2001a: 2, 2012; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Nicolini, 2009a; my italics). They are thus essentially what people *say* and *do* – e.g. taking notes, conducting meetings, giving feedback, writing articles, or interviewing research participants (cf. Rasche and Chia, 2009). Importantly, as indicated in the beginning of this section and discussed further below, practices are principally socially instead of individually constituted. In one way or another multiple actors are involved in a practice (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009), despite the fact that many practices are subject to individual performances – such as solving quality issues, chasing customers, or manufacturing textiles, as I illustrate in Chapter 4. Individual actors, in this definition, are understood to be ‘carriers’ of practices (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Shove et al., 2011).

As indicated from the above definition and the examples provided, materials play a pivotal, albeit often neglected role in practices (Nicolini, 2013) – although some scholars do not incorporate materials at all in their studies (e.g. Giddens, 1984). What exactly this role of materials might be, meanwhile, is still a contested matter. Whilst there are ongoing debates about the philosophical importance granted to materials, and what exactly constitute ‘materials’ (from objects, things, to even our bodies, see Schatzki, 2012), it is neither the focus nor the purpose of this thesis to delve into settling these debates (for a comprehensive overview see Schatzki, 2010; Carlile et al., 2014). To map the field briefly, most practice accounts implicitly refer to materiality in the form of things or objects (see Engeström, 2000; Nicolini, 2009a; 2011). The role thereof, meanwhile, is more contested. At one end of the spectrum, particularly in the sphere of Actor-Network-Theory (e.g. Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) or ‘post-humanism’ (e.g. Pickering, 2001; Knorr Cetina, 2001; see Schatzki et al., 2001), scholars focus especially on the alleged agency of objects. They urge other scholars not to prioritise objects at the expense of human agency, since arguably objects and human actors participate in practice equally (see also Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Nicolini, 2013). At the other end, practice scholars such as Schatzki (e.g. 2002, 2010, 2012) maintain that only humans carry out practices. He acknowledges though that things have agential power, if such powers are defined in terms of ‘making a difference’ (Schatzki, 2002; Latour, 2005) and not intentionality. In that sense, materials do exert a direct impact on human activity (Nicolini, 2013).

In that sense, unless stated otherwise, most practice theorists implicitly take the stance that materials – in the form of things or objects – *mediate* human activity. Although my study does not focus on materials, this is also the view I advocate in this thesis. Materials, thereby, are seen as constituent parts of practice, as most, if not any, practice could not be accomplished without the use of materials. As my data show, the practice of solving quality issues, for instance, could not be accomplished without sample materials, whiteboards and pens to brainstorm possible causes, or computers and phones to keep the customer informed (for other examples see Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2013). In that sense, neither materials nor practice could exist in the absence of each other (Schatzki, 2012), which is why scholars speak of ‘sociomaterial practices’ (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007, 2009). In fact, as Nicolini (2013) contends, failure to consider materials in one’s account of practice equals a failure to call oneself a ‘practice theorist’.

The term ‘organised’ in the above definition, meanwhile, indicates that there is more to practices than merely the activities of which they are comprised. As Schatzki (2002) suggests, practices are governed by clearly formulated rules (e.g. smoking bans in offices), understandings of how to do things (e.g. how to fill out a form properly), and, as a critical component, ‘teleo-affective’ structures. These structures refer to the normative and moral dimensions of practices (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Gherardi, 2011; Nicolini, 2009b, 2013), guiding how a practice should be carried out and hence what is commonly considered ‘good practice’ – they are a practice’s standards of excellence (MacIntyre, 1985, as cited in Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), which constitute an elemental idea for this thesis.

Through these three mechanisms, practices ‘prefigure’, i.e. *guide* what, how, and why activities are performed, ruling in certain ways of thinking, acting and talking while ruling out others (Schatzki, 2002; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). In this sense, practices are seen to carry and sustain normativity “because they are social and constituted in terms of mutual accountability” (Nicolini, 2013: 176; see also Rouse, 2001). Such mutual accountability establishes appropriate conduct, which is learned through socialisation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Nicolini, 2009a) and is possibly sanctioned if not complied with (Rouse, 2001; Nicolini, 2013). Practices, therefore, are by definition inherently social, even if some activities are in

fact performed individually as suggested above – rendering the phrase ‘social practice’ a tautology (Reckwitz, 2002).

As I am going to explore more deeply towards the end of this thesis, normativity ties practices to power dynamics (Rouse, 2001; Schatzki, 2002). It is vital to point out, therefore, that practices, and hence notions like meaning or normativity, are inherently contested, disputed and continuously negotiated, keeping practices in a continuous state of tension and change (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Mørk et al., 2010; Benn et al., 2013; Nicolini, 2013). Although practices as socially recognisable, shared, and recurrent (social) institutions (see Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Gherardi, 2009a) are relatively stable ways to perform activities, this is not to suggest that there principally exists agreement about these ways. In other words, in any practice, naturally, there are multiple interpretations of what constitutes the ‘right’, or the ‘appropriate’ and ‘legitimate’ way to practice (Nicolini, 2009a). There is thus a push and pull effect between enacting practices as commonly deemed correct and appropriate, and performing more anomalous activities that may transcend and possibly re-establish the practice’s social order (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Geiger, 2009; Nicolini, 2009a; Mørk et al., 2010; Benn et al., 2013; Contu, 2014).

### **2.1.3 Problematizing The Practice Concept**

As noted in the beginning of this section, there is no unified theory of practice (Schatzki, 2001a). Consequentially, aside from the different fields of application as outlined above, the *ways* in which the practice concept is used vary. Different scholars have varying understandings of ‘practice’, and especially varying preferences about how a practice-based approach is useful for them, which is why it is important to make the assumptions of a practice-based approach explicit. In other words, what is meant by it and how it is used? In order to do so, several scholars offer typologies of the different ways in which the practice concept is deployed, such as Feldman and Orlikowski’s (2011) distinction between practice with an *empirical*, *theoretical*, and *philosophical* focus (see also Geiger, 2009; Corradi et al., 2010).

As an *empirical* focus, practice is taken as the object of study regarding actors’ activities within organisations – answering the ‘what’ of a practice lens (an expression indebted to Orlikowski, 2000). In other words, practice is taken in an actor-centred

approach to study *what people do* (Geiger, 2009; Corradi et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2013), especially popular within the domain of early strategy-as-practice research (e.g. Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2004; see Nicolini, 2013), and as argued in Chapter 2.2 some scholars adopt this focus for studying leadership (e.g. Denis et al., 2010). Taking such an approach is what Nicolini (2013) calls a ‘weak programme’ of practice research, since it reduces practices to the micro activities of actors (e.g. Goss et al., 2011; see Pickering, 1995; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).) In other words, already stabilised patterns of actions of entities in a pre-given context within which these actions take place. For the study of leadership, for instance, this entails studying it as situated doings mobilised by and inter-actions among individuals (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

Aside from an empirical focus, practice can be taken as a *theory*. This also includes daily activities, but aspires to offer an explanation of these. This focus answers the ‘how’ of a practice lens, articulating “particular theoretical relationships that explain everyday activity” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011: 1241). The aim here is to develop practice theories which can subsequently be used to study organisational activity. It is a means to take practice as a lens to study social reality (Kempster et al., 2015).

Lastly, practice can be used as a *philosophy*, subtly different from a theoretical focus. A philosophical focus addresses the ontological and epistemological aspects of practices, taking practice as a ‘way of seeing’ (Corradi et al., 2010). In essence, this view assumes social reality to be ‘made up’ of practices (Schatzki, 2001b, 2002; Reckwitz, 2002; Nicolini, 2011). In other words, the social world is brought into being *through* everyday activity, answering the ‘why’ of the practice lens. Practice, then, is used to question the phenomenon under study – such as learning or knowledge as mentioned above, or indeed leadership (Schatzki, 2002; Gherardi, 2006; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015). In contrast to a ‘weak’ research programme, a philosophical focus is reflected in what Nicolini (2013) calls a ‘strong’ research programme.

A strong programme does examine situated accomplishment of practices (i.e. ‘micro’ activities), but, as stated previously, takes as its point of departure the inquiry of how actors are *entwined with the world* (discussed in more detail in section 2.2 vis-à-vis leadership) as a relational whole of practices (Heidegger, 1962; Sandberg and Tsoukas,

2011; Simpson, 2015). As part of such entwinement, things or actors are intelligible as something and acquire meaning only against the *background of practices* in which they occur. In other words, phenomena cannot be made sense of in isolation from the practices as part of which they occur (Schatzki, 2001b; 2002; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013). In that sense, viewing practice as a philosophy indeed suggests it is both ontology *and* epistemology (discussed also in Chapter 3.1, Methodology). Practice is an ontology because, as indicated, it views the social world to consist of practices; whilst it is also an epistemology because the world can only be known from ‘within’, through knowing-in-practice (Cook and Brown, 1999; Schatzki, 2002; Gherardi, 2006; 2009a; Corradi et al., 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2011, 2013). From such a philosophical perspective, which I discuss further in Chapter 3, other aspects of practice may be illuminated, for instance the role and meanings of materials (e.g. Orlikowski, 2002; Carlile et al., 2014), the body (e.g. Ladkin, 2008), or issues of agency, meaning and normativity (e.g. Schatzki, 2002).

As transpires from the discussion thus far, therefore, a practice perspective offers much more than what actors, such as ‘leaders’, *actually* do. In fact, several scholars consider adopting a practice perspective in order to merely scrutinise micro activities of actors a ‘betrayal’ to the actual promise of the practice lens (Gherardi, 2006; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2011, 2013; Gherardi and Perrota, 2014). Thus, instead of zooming in uncritically on the mere enactments of practices, a strong programme enquires why things are the way they are, and how practices enable and constrain the production of organisational life (Gherardi, 2011; Nicolini, 2013, Gherardi and Perrota, 2014). In other words, not only does the practice approach attend to social life as a practical accomplishment (what people do as part of their everyday practices), it primarily considers the accomplishment’s effects, asking ‘what does doing the practice do’ (Gherardi, 2009a) – such as producing meaning and normativity, which in turn guide future instances of practicing.

#### **2.1.4 Summary**

In this section, I have introduced the concept of practice, which constitutes the theoretical backbone of my thesis. This section’s purpose was threefold. First, to illustrate the commonalities of different theories of practice and outline its distinct

vocabulary; second, to provide an overview of the key contributions made by a practice approach to the study of organisations; and third, to establish the ways I use the concept and the rationale for using it in this thesis. I thereby followed Nicolini (2009a, 2013) in adopting a plurality approach that recognises that there is no unified theory of practice, and that similarities and differences of the various research traditions can be utilised in combination rather than attempting a synthesis. I hence first outlined the diverse heritage of the practice concept and illustrated its equally varied applications in contemporary organisational studies. Thereafter, I specifically problematized the absence of a unified practice approach, simultaneously eliciting the benefits of utilising the practice concept's diversity – as mentioned earlier. In order to do so, I outlined the major commonalities generally associated with a practice-based view, and how the concept of practice informs the study of organisational phenomena. I then went on to define what is meant by the term 'practice', and concluded the section by problematizing the different usages of the concept (empirical, theoretical, philosophical) in order to establish my understanding of the term, which is particularly centred around a philosophical perspective on practice.

As also illustrated in the introduction to this thesis (Chapter 1), this section established the rationale for using the practice concept, particularly with a philosophical focus, as the backbone of this thesis. The main argument I proposed is that the notion of practice fundamentally redefines how we may perceive social and thus organisational phenomena, which translates into potentially novel ways to understand these very phenomena. The practice concept does so by focusing on hitherto neglected aspects of social life, decentring cognitive, rational and positivistic views in favour of *mundane*, i.e. *everyday* activity. Thereby, as a plethora of studies demonstrate (e.g. Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Kempster and Stuart, 2010; Nicolini, 2011; Contu, 2014; Crevani, 2015), a practice approach succeeds at getting closer to the 'lived experience' of how organisations are socially *accomplished* (Garfinkel, 1967; Schatzki, 2006; Fairhurst, 2009; Carroll, 2015; Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). Social phenomena such as power, leadership, or knowledge are now conceived as inherently fluid processes, rather than static and concrete 'things', thus affording richer and more complex insight rather than simplifying the social world (Schatzki 2002; Nicolini, 2013).

However, I also echoed several scholars that a practice approach offers more than getting closer to said ‘lived experience’ of what actors *actually* do, which is why in this thesis I adopt a philosophical view on practice. Such a perspective questions the underlying assumptions of the phenomena it attends to, and underscores notions such as meaning and normativity. A philosophical view hence asks *why* the social life is produced and reproduced in the ways it is, therefore also foregrounding the inherently contested nature of said notions. Methodologically, this highlights the importance of paying attention to multiple accounts and the use of multiple modes of inquiry, such as interviews *and* observations. As I argue in this thesis, such an approach is particularly offered by ethnography (see Chapter 3). Moreover, as several leadership scholars (e.g. Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Simpson, 2015) observe, a philosophical view on practice has not been brought to bear on the study of leadership to a large extent.

The key argument of this section is that the practice approach in general terms, and a philosophical focus in particular, promises to offer distinctly nuanced insights vis-à-vis organisational life by questioning other social phenomena under study (cf. Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). The following chapters, therefore, are strongly influenced by a practice approach. In Chapter 2.2, I discuss how the practice concept is brought to bear on the study of leadership, and how this affects the way leadership is understood as an inherently social and processual phenomenon. In Section 2.3 the notion of practice and its contested nature is demonstrated to be vital to my understanding of power; whereas in Chapter 2.4, the practice concept is shown to affect the specifics of how and what kind of research question this thesis asks. In Chapter 3, moreover, the practice concept impacts on the methodological choices being made, particularly stressing the need for ethnographic approaches to the study of the social and hence leadership. In presenting my findings in Chapter 4, thereafter, the practice concept transpires especially in the writing style in terms of vignettes, considering the need to get as close as possible to the ‘lived experience’ of actors in the empirical setting. Chapter 5, finally, develops further the ideas presented in the findings, and connects them to various aspects and debates of the practice family.

## 2.2 Literature Review: Leadership-as-Practice

As Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) note, the leadership literature is so enormous there is little point in attempting a ‘grand review’ (for reviews see Bryman, 2004; Parry and Bryman, 2006; Denis et al., 2012). The field of leadership studies may appear to the reader as an utterly perplexing labyrinth of definitions, concepts, and perspectives. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there is little consensus about what leadership actually is, and how to define – let alone study – it (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Burns (1978: 2) summarises astutely but paradoxically that “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”

Although almost 40 years ago, little it seems has changed. Barker (2001), for example, asks whether leadership is an art, a discipline, a study, a theoretical construct or perhaps an industry? Much like practice (Schatzki et al., 2001) and power (Lukes, 1974), leadership is an essentially contested concept (Grint, 2005b). While the notion of influence may be common to nearly all approaches to leadership (Drath et al., 2008), consensus on an all-encompassing definition, arguably, is yet “forlorn and unnecessary” (Grint, 2005b: 1). To bring order into seeming chaos, however, Collinson (2005) identifies two major and competing discourses in leadership studies: heroic and post-heroic approaches.

Heroic approaches, a term coined by its critics (see Murrell, 1997; Yukl, 1999), centre on the grandiose deeds of particular individuals that occupy positions high in the organisational hierarchy (Wood, 2005). These leaders are argued to exert unidirectional influence to inspire their followers (Yukl, 1999). ‘Mainstream’ approaches (Collinson, 2011) include the trait approach (Stodgill, 1948), transformational and transactional leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972), strategic leadership (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), situational leadership and contingency theories (see Graeff, 1997), authentic leadership (e.g. Avolio and Gardner, 2005), or behavioural theories (see Northouse, 2013 for a thorough overview).

Broadly construed, whilst obviously these approaches examine leadership from different angles, they primarily focus on what makes an effective leader (Collinson, 2011). Further, according to Collinson, mainstream approaches share three major characteristics. First, these approaches are *essentialist* since they assume that there is an ‘essence’ to leadership (e.g. particular traits or behaviours). Second, they treat

leadership in a *dichotomous* fashion, such as leaders/context and leaders/followers, and portray leadership as a disembodied phenomenon (Raelin, 2011a). Third, mainstream approaches arguably are *romanticised*, which refers to the obsession with ‘heroic leaders’ that, for instance, are credited for high organisational performance (Collinson, 2011).

Despite their wide popularity, it is precisely the notion of heroic leaders that has caused an increasing wealth of critique from scholars situating themselves in post-heroic approaches to leadership. These critics argue that individualistic approaches are too static, neglect the social conditions that constitute leadership and how it is enacted, disentangle it from context completely, exhibit an ubiquity of competences, and ignore how a number of actors might actually be involved in leadership (Meindl et al., 1985; Yukl, 1999; Barker, 2001; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Wood, 2005; Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Carroll et al., 2008; Ladkin, 2008; Gronn, 2009; Crevani et al., 2010).

Instead of the grandiose acts of individual leaders and inherently hierarchical conceptions of leadership, these writers seek to foreground that leadership is better understood as a social and collective accomplishment (Draft, 2001; Fletcher, 2004). From this perspective, raising interesting ontological issues discussed in this review, leadership ‘stretches’ over a variety of actors (Raelin, 2014). Whilst this idea unites post-heroic approaches, they are nonetheless a dispersed movement comprising a diversity of related yet distinct theories. Examples include shared leadership (e.g. Pearce and Conger, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Ensley et al., 2006; Pearce et al., 2009, 2011; Muethel and Hoegl, 2013), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), hybrid (Gronn, 2009) and blended leadership (Collinson and Collinson, 2009), integrative leadership (Ospina and Foldy, 2009), empowering leadership (Vecchio et al., 2010), collective leadership (Contractor et al., 2012), discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2009), or relational leadership (e.g. Uhl-bien, 2006; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011).

A further development gaining momentum in the post-heroic movement is the notion of Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani et al., 2010; Denis et al., 2010; Raelin, 2011a, 2014; 2015; Crevani, 2015), which is inspired by the ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki et al. 2001) in organisation studies. As this chapter is going to discuss, practice-based approaches suggest a radically different understanding of

leadership compared to more commonplace theories as outlined above – which also constitutes the rationale for taking an LAP approach in this thesis.

That is, as discussed in the previous section (2.1), practice-based approaches direct attention to hitherto neglected aspects of social and thus organisational life. For instance, for practice scholars the mundane is equally important as the sublime, meaning that leadership may occur as part of the most unlikely encounters (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010). At the same time, this means that no matter how individual an activity may seem, according to the practice concept it is principally social, meaning that leadership is seen as a collective endeavour (Reckwitz, 2002; Raelin, 2011a, 2014; Simpson, 2015; Sergi, 2015). Practice also conceives of social life as highly situated, i.e. contextually dependent, which means leadership can be studied in its ‘lived experience’ rather than in an abstract fashion. A final example that makes practice-based inquiry worthwhile particularly for this thesis is the idea that social phenomena such as leadership, as situated activities, are inherently contingent and contested, bringing to the fore the role of power dynamics in social life and thus leadership (e.g. Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Nicolini, 2007, 2011, 2013; Contu, 2014). Taken together, seeing leadership as possibly taking place anywhere and through anyone, and considering its highly contextualised and contested fashion, affords different, if not greater, insight than previous approaches that see leadership as individually centred, abstract, and static. Over the course of this review, I explore these aspects in more detail.

Apprehending the post-heroic enterprise of decentring individual leaders and eschewing leadership as a static ‘thing’, LAP builds on Pettigrew’s (1992) call for a more processual and contextualist perspective. Specifically, LAP proposes leadership as an emergent, mundane, embodied and collective accomplishment that is situated in local contexts (i.e. practices) and mediated by material arrangements (Schatzki, 2001b, 2002; Ladkin, 2008; Denis et al., 2010; Crevani et al., 2010; Raelin, 2011a; Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Nicolini, 2013; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Sergi, 2015). In this way, the practice view illuminates how the *work of leadership*, rather than the deeds of leaders, is collectively accomplished in situ (Sergi, 2015). It is precisely the notion of ‘*work of leadership*’ and how it is achieved that I examine in this thesis, which is a central question when a practice perspective is adopted (Crevani, 2015).

In order to shed light on this question theoretically, the section is structured as follows. First, I review the key debates of the LAP movement, which includes problematizing ‘as-practice’ approaches, the mundane and collective character of leadership, resolving dualisms and the importance of context in the practice of leadership. Thereafter, I attend to the question of how we may or may not define the construct of leadership. I then conclude the chapter by offering a critical perspective on leadership, highlighting in particular issues of power in the production of leadership work that so far have not received a wealth of attention in the literature.

### **2.2.1 The Work of Leadership**

LAP, or any ‘as-practice’ approach for that matter, implies a unified approach to studying leadership. However, just as there is no unified theory of practice (see Chapter 2.1), LAP is a rather dispersed movement. As such, some emphasise the role of the body (e.g. Fisher and Reiser Robbins, 2013; Küpers, 2013), context (Endrissat and Arx, 2013), or materiality (e.g. Sergi, 2015), whereas others consider the actual *doing* of leadership (e.g. Denis et al., 2010) and how leadership practice is actually achieved (Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2015). Moreover, scholars have varying understandings of what practice means and how it is useful for them. In the previous section (2.1), therefore, I explained the subtleties of studying practice, and hence when researching ‘as-practice’ concepts such as leadership. To reiterate, I differentiated between an empirical, theoretical, and philosophical focus. In that sense, some LAP studies take an empirical focus in order to study the situated deeds of individuals, sometimes leaders (e.g. Denis et al., 2010), whereas others adopt a theoretical approach (e.g. Endrissat and Arx, 2013), whilst still others concentrate on practice and its philosophical assumptions (e.g. Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

I have established in the previous section that in this thesis, I adopt a philosophical view. It suggests that practices are better understood as more than what people do, and that as actors we are always already entwined with the world as a relational whole (Heidegger, 1967; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), and that constituent parts of this world only acquire meaning against the background of practices in which they occur (Schatzki, 2001b; 2002; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Shove et al., 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013). For

the study of leadership, this means that it is impossible to make sense of specific parts, such as leaders and their doings, isolated from the practices from which they emerge (Nicolini, 2011; Carroll, 2015; Simpson, 2015). Therefore, instead of taking individuals and their doings as an analytical point of departure, this inquiry begins by examining the production of the *work of leadership* (Raelin, 2011a; Crevani, 2015), which I define more specifically below in Section 2.2.4. Specifically, how is it socially accomplished, negotiated, and sustained? – a question rarely considered by empirical LAP studies (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

This is not to suggest, however, that *doing* leadership is unimportant. On the contrary, as argued in Chapter 2.1, practices are still seen as socially recognisable and recurrent ‘arrays of activity’ (Schatzki, 2001a; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Nicolini, 2009a), which is why LAP conceives of leadership not as a thing, a trait or behaviour, leadership, but a practical and situated accomplishment (Crevani et al., 2010; Raelin, 2011a; Denis et al., 2010; Fisher and Reiser-Robins, 2014; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). Without enactments, in fact, the relational whole of leadership practice would not exist to begin with (Shove et al., 2011). However, doings of individuals are an effect of practices (Schatzki, 2001a; Nicolini, 2011) and merely treated as an empirical ‘entry point’ (Carroll, 2015). Individuals, therefore, are seen as ‘carriers of practice’ (Shove et al., 2011).

As determined in Chapter 2.1, a practice perspective directs attention to the mundane enactments of activities that produce, re-produce and possibly gradually transform organisational daily life (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Nicolini, 2011, 2013). As such, *part of* what the practice concept allows for is getting closer to the ‘lived experience’ of what people actually do (Carroll, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015), in this case, the work of leadership. Rather than grandiose, as heroic views would have it, leading from a practice-based angle appears to be an everyday and improvisational doing (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Crevani et al., 2010; Küpers, 2013). LAP, therefore, examines “how leadership emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experiences” (Raelin, 2014: 4).

Based on a Heideggerian (1962) philosophy, a practice approach suggests everyday experience to be “about primordial, non-deliberate ways of being and doing” (Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015: 56). Chia and Holt (2006), for example, argue that

strategy, seen through a practice lens, occurs via ‘everyday practical coping actions’. Applied to leadership this means that instead of leading being rational and intentional, a practice approach argues the work of leadership is accomplished through ‘everyday practical coping’. In other words, “because we are preoccupied with our everyday practices, with getting on with whatever we are doing, be it leading, nursing, driving..., we don’t notice or think about them” (Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015: 56).

Heidegger (1962) describes this as a ‘dwelling mode’, in which actions unfold through responding, feeling and coping with the day-to-day. For Heidegger, a dwelling mode follows “an internalised predisposition: a *modus operandi* rather than any deliberate conscious intent” (Chia and MacKay, 2007: 236). It is thus immanent and rather mindless (Chia and Holt, 2006, 2007; Carroll et al., 2008; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015) – an ‘absorbed coping’ (Dreyfus, 1991, as cited in Carroll, 2015), through which actors are “immersed and embodied in a whole interconnected world” (Carroll, 2015: 96). Leadership, therefore, may occur in any social situation, which means that acts of leadership are seemingly *trivial* (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Crevani et al., 2010; Denis et al., 2010; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013; Carroll, 2015).

Mundane acts of leadership, however, need not imply a focus on the deeds of individuals, let alone those we commonly call ‘leaders’. Since practices, as the outcome of collective meaning-making (Schatzki, 2001a; Reckwitz, 2002; Ospina and Foldy, 2010), are inherently social phenomena, leadership work is seen as a collective accomplishment rather than the privilege of elite actors occupying high level authority positions (Carroll et al., 2008; Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Raelin, 2014). In other words, instead of exclusively focusing on actors that carry the signifier ‘leader’, ontologically, I echo the view that any actor may contribute to the ‘work of leadership’ in any situation in one way or another (Parry and Bryman, 2006; Denis et al., 2010; Raelin, 2011a, 2014; 2015; Crevani et al., 2010; Kelly, 2014; Crevani, 2015; Ramsey, 2015; Sergi, 2015). As I argue below, it is a focus on leadership *regardless* of formal authority, yet not *dismissive* thereof. However, the shift away from ‘methodological individualism’ (Chia and Holt, 2006) has not been entirely completed. Some LAP studies (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Denis et al., 2010) still concentrate on individual actors, mostly formal leaders, and grant these actors a degree of intentionality in the sense that they choose which practices to ‘deploy’ to achieve certain outcomes (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).

### **2.2.2 Resolving Dualisms in Leadership Studies**

Giving primacy to individual agents (Carroll et al., 2008) is problematic in practice-based theorising. Inherent in focusing on individual leaders and their practices, rather than practices per se, is a dichotomy of leaders (subject) and followers (object). In fact, as Harter (2006, as cited in Collinson, 2014: 39) for instance observes, dichotomies pop up seemingly everywhere in leadership research. Examples include leadership/management, leaders/followers, or autocratic/participative practice. These dualisms are increasingly seen to have negative effects on the study of leadership, since dichotomisation falsely simplifies complex and interconnected phenomena under study, and foregrounds some phenomena at the expense of others (e.g. leaders over followers, or vice versa) (Gronn, 2002; Collinson, 2005, 2014). As indicated in Chapter 2.1, the practice concept echoes this concern with its profound critique of Cartesian thought that permeates contemporary organisation studies. Dualisms such as mind/body, agency/structure or indeed subject/object are thus principally rejected and resolved (Heidegger, 1962; Giddens, 1984; Gherardi, 2000, 2006; Raelin, 2011a; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

In conventional studies of leadership, the subject/object dualism is reflected in the assumption that some actors are thought to be more adept, or more powerful than their 'ordinary' counterparts, and are thus granted the term 'leader'. In other words, powerful actors (subjects, i.e. leaders) act on passive and powerless and passive actors (objects, i.e. followers) (Gronn, 2002; Raelin, 2003, 2011a; Collinson, 2005, 2006; Prince, 2005; Küpers, 2007; Crevani et al., 2010; Fisher and Reiser Robbins, 2014; Simpson, 2015). Studying leadership, therefore, is a matter of analysing traits, behaviours etc. of those arguably 'special' individuals (Raelin, 2011a).

A practice approach resolves the subject/object dualism by advocating a dialectical approach, underlining the relation rather than the separateness of the phenomenon (Collinson, 2005, 2014; Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Specifically, leadership, from this perspective, is produced via interactions in the participation in practices, allowing for the understanding that multiple actors engage in leadership practice, not only 'leaders' per se (Raelin, 2011a, 2015; Crevani et al., 2010). Influence thus may both be informal as well as

hierarchically formal (Cox et al., 2003; Denis et al., 2010). It is thus leadership regardless of formal positions, yet not dismissive thereof. Moreover, these traditional approaches to leadership begin their inquiry with a priori defined actors, or relations between them (as in relational leadership, see Uhl-bien, 2006) (Simpson, 2015). LAP, by contrast, subscribes to a view in which the social (and hence organisational) world is constituted in practices, which is why the practice, not the actors, is what ‘comes first’ in the study of leadership (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Simpson, 2015). As I argued earlier based on Heidegger’s (1962) notion of entwinement (Chapter 2.1), the world consists of practices that give meaning to things we encounter in that world; i.e. things are intelligible *as* something only against the background of practices in which they occur. This in turn implies that the social world does not come in preconceived levels or entities such as ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001b, 2002; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).

In this view, leadership cannot be understood by singling out constituent parts. Instead, leadership needs to be analysed as an emergent, relational whole unfolding from the accomplishment of practices, which is why actors are defined within, rather than prior to practices (Schatzki, 2002, 2005; Carroll, 2015; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Simpson, 2015). Leadership is an ongoing engagement with, rather than an objective separation from the world in which we live (Simpson, 2015). Instead of active subjects acting on passive subjects, this thesis sees leadership as a mutual process, where those interacting play one role or another in the production of the work of leadership, which is why I contend leadership to be the *product of collective action* (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Sergi, 2015).

A further dualism often reported in mainstream leadership research is that of leadership and its context (Collinson, 2014), subject of the following section.

### **2.2.3 Leadership and Context**

Challenging dichotomies in conventional leadership studies, or highlighting the mundane and hence collective character of leadership, are not the only contributions made by a practice approach. In fact, studying what ‘leaders really do’ is not an invention of the practice movement (see Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani and Endrissat,

2015): Style and contingency/situational approaches have already considered the doing of leadership (see Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). While a practice approach does have an edge over these studies by attending to the fine-grained and mundane of the everyday, a practice study, as suggested earlier, does not, or should not, stop at the mere doing of leadership. Indeed, early strategy-as-practice research, to which leadership scholars often draw parallels (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015), has been criticised for following a ‘weak programme’ of practice research.

Doing a practice, in simple terms, has a consequence: re-producing the practice (Shove et al., 2011), which in turn implicitly points to the notion of *context*. Surprisingly though, while context is of fundamental relevance for practice scholars, LAP studies so far have missed the opportunity to address issues of context more explicitly. Aside from Denis et al. (2010) and Endrissat and Arx (2013), empirical LAP studies that examine issues of context are virtually non-existent. Yet, acknowledging the importance of context is, just as looking at leadership activity, not an entirely novel contribution made by practice studies. It is again contingency and situational theories of leadership (see Northouse, 2013) that have already explicitly addressed issues of context. These studies provide normative accounts offering guidance how leaders *should* act in certain situations, delineating which behaviours would be effective (e.g. Osborn et al., 2002; see Grint, 2005a; Wood, 2005; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).

Context, in these studies, is defined in essentialist terms: it is objective and can be made transparent via scientific analysis; it is a pre-given, static ‘container’ of social activity (Fox, 2000; Grint, 2005a; Nicolini, 2011). Inherent in such dichotomous conceptualisation is a dualism between micro activities occurring within a macro context, where the latter unilaterally influences the former (Drath et al., 2008; Gherardi, 2009a; Collinson, 2014). A naïve, if not fundamentally flawed assumption, practice theory would contend (Schatzki, 2002, 2005; Grint, 2005a; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2011, 2013), since it profoundly underestimates the extent to which context is created and shaped by actors (‘leaders’, Grint (2005a) says).

To solve this, Grint puts forward a subtle yet striking idea: “we might begin to consider not what is the *situation*, but how it is *situated*” he writes, (2005a: 1471, emphasis original), foregrounding the pro-active rather than passive role of leadership in the construction of context (see also Osborn et al., 2013). On the other hand, however,

Grint does not seek to suggest that leaders, or any actors for that matter if we want to do away with labels such as leader or follower, are free to do whatever they want. Instead, he insinuates a dialectical interplay between agency and structure that reflects Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. By 'inserting' the concept of practice, Giddens highlights the reciprocity between agency and structure. Put another way, agents are influenced by the structure within which they act, and concurrently shape (and re-shape) this very structure through their actions (see Nicolini, 2013: 44-53 for a comprehensive overview). Otherwise put, practices "unite the micro ('the situated doings of individual human beings') and the macro ('different socially defined practices')" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 7).

For leadership, this means that it is not only inherently situated (Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Kempster, 2009; Kempster and Stuart, 2010), i.e. produced by the context within which it occurs, but also that leadership activity produces the context of which it is part. Leadership practice and context are co-constitutive – they are two sides of the same coin (Schatzki, 2002, 2005; Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Collinson, 2014). As Endrissat and Arx (2013: 294) put it, "leadership practices and context constitute, reinforce, and limit each other. Neither leadership nor context is essentially given; both are 'products' of social interactions." Context is thus actively created and negotiated via everyday practicing (cf. Fairhurst, 2009; Grint, 2005a; Oborn et al., 2013). Therefore, what doing the practice does, as suggested in Section 2.1, is producing its own context.

#### **2.2.4 What is leadership, then?**

Throughout this section I have elaborated on many aspects of the practice turn in leadership studies. This section now examines the critical question of what actually is leadership. I make the argument that 'leadership' is in fact a *signifier* for social activity, which also indicates that leadership's demarcation lines to other practical accomplishments (e.g. strategy) are blurred. Leadership, I suggest, is a *variation of organising*. At the same time, this calls for a means to delimit and distinguish leadership from other social phenomena in order to study it in a meaningful way. This section, therefore, concludes with a way to do so.

The previous sections of the chapter have already provided some clues for answering the 'what' of leadership from the vantage point of practice-based studies.

Accordingly, at its base, leadership is simply a *practice*. That is, leadership is a mundane practical accomplishment, performed by actors in organisations. I have also established that not only those we would conventionally call ‘leaders’ perform leadership but also any actor may do so in any situation (Crevani et al., 2010). In other words, any seemingly trivial act could be *labelled* ‘leadership’. This hardly helps narrowing down the phenomenon, and enables critics to contend that if supposedly everything is leadership, then nothing really is (Grint, 2010; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Leadership’s mystique suddenly evaporates, or, as even more sceptical scholars proclaim, perhaps leadership as a distinct theoretical construct does not exist to begin with (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b).

Indeed, is what we observe as mundane everyday doings *really* ‘leadership’, or perhaps rather, say, ‘strategy’? Alvesson (1996) as well as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003b) in fact demonstrate that in prominent definitions (e.g. Yukl, 1989: 253) the term leadership may well be substituted with the term ‘strategy’ or ‘culture’, and it would still mean the same thing. This may be due to leadership being an elusive concept, with demarcation lines to other aspects of organising being fundamentally blurred (Kelly, 2008; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Carroll, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015; Sergi, 2015). As I argue in this section, a practice-based approach to leadership helps to draw out these demarcation lines.

An activity that is said to be leadership (e.g. setting direction) may also be part of strategy work and occur simultaneously. In this sense, as actors principally engage in multiple practices at the same time (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015), I suggest leadership to be a ‘meta-practice’ that is enacted while other practices are being accomplished at the same time (cf. Carroll, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). Indeed, in empirical settings aspects of practices do not appear as a separate and abstract entity, such as leadership, but as a meaningful and unfolding totality (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Carroll, 2015). Bundles of practices are studied to understand processes of *organising*, which implies that categories such as ‘leadership’ or ‘strategy’ might actually collapse. These categories, as mundane doings, are not separate from but simply are *variations of* organising (Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). If we look at everyday practices, actors pursue certain activities, such as analysing quality issues, hosting meetings, launching new products, talking to customers, preparing sales pitches and so

forth. All these activities *are* not necessarily leadership per se, yet they may *involve* coordinating, strategizing, learning, and *leading*.

Such line of thinking posits that there might not be a concrete phenomenon such as leadership to begin with (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b). What Alvesson and Sveningsson propose, though, is not that leadership does not exist per se, merely that its existence is in *discourse* (see also Kelly, 2008; Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). As I have insinuated throughout this chapter, leadership is a *signifier* for practical activity we encounter in situ (Alvesson, 1996; Drath, 2001; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Crevani et al., 2010; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Kelly, 2014). “Only thoughts, words, and actions that are *recognized* as leadership can *constitute* leadership”, Drath (2001: 6, my italics) writes. It is thus “a matter of abstractive thinking and *not* a property of the underlying thing itself” (Wood, 2005: 1104). Leadership is a ‘surface effect’, one we “employ to give substantiality to our experience” (ibid.). Leadership, to put it another way, is a product of abstractive thinking of scholars and practitioners alike. Labelling mundane activities leadership is a heuristic means to understand what is going on in an empirical setting (Alvesson, 1996; Carroll, 2015). Maintaining blurred boundaries between concepts, therefore, is helpful for making a meaningful impact on theory and practice regarding the specific phenomenon studied (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).

Capturing a phenomenon as elusive as leadership, however, is difficult (Kelly, 2008; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Carroll, 2015; Sergi, 2015). Nonetheless, in order to make a meaningful contribution, it is vital for empirical study of leadership to begin by deciding what leadership is and what it is not (Alvesson, 1996; Crevani et al., 2010; Carroll, 2015; Kempster et al., 2015; Ramsey, 2015). Although practice is indeed the unit of analysis for empirical inquiry, not all enactments of practice may materialise as leadership, suggesting that a mere focus on practice is not enough to anchor leadership as a variation of organising. Leadership, therefore, needs to be delimited and its diversity restricted (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b).

In practice-based studies, however, this needs to be done with caution. A heuristic is required that remains open to the proposal that any activity by any actor possibly constitutes leadership (Crevani et al., 2010). Furthermore, if we are to take the notion of context seriously it is inadvisable to pursue an *a priori* conceived, theory

driven definition aspiring to once and for all define leadership (Alvesson, 1996). In ethnographic research tradition, the most popular means to study practice and hence LAP (see methodology chapter; Raelin, 2011a; Carroll, 2015; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015; Kempster et al., 2015; Kempster and Stuart, 2010), theory, in fact, plays a less prominent role (Van Maanen, 1988). Instead of a once and for all, valid over time and space definition, standardised meanings and general categories, *local* meanings are taken seriously so that data has the chance to ‘kick back’ (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Kelly, 2008; Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). With a ‘situational focus’, it is, in this sense, a move from “grand theory to local theory” (Alvesson, 1996: 473) in order to avoid the “artificial separation of theory and data” (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b: 364). This is not to suggest being non-theoretical, merely that notions pertaining to local contexts take precedence (Alvesson, 1996). Nevertheless, there is a need for pragmatism (Crevani et al., 2010). Instead of outlining specific activities that arguably constitute leadership, it is more advisable to set out *broad parameters* as to how one understands leadership (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Kempster et al., 2015; Sergi, 2015).

Whilst the literature is indeed fond of proposing certain categories of ‘leadership activities’ (e.g. Gronn, 2002; Raelin, 2003, 2014, 2015; Ramsey, 2015), I take a different route to account for the possibility that any activity may constitute leadership, but at the same time delimit the phenomenon. To do so, I focus on the idea that accomplishing practices has *effects* (see also Drath et al., 2008; Crevani et al., 2010). Indeed, as suggested earlier, leadership is a *product of collective action*. Based on the etymology of leadership (see Harper, 2015, referring to the activity ‘guiding’ and the notion of ‘shape’), Sergi considers “products that not only propel and drive the continuation of action, but specifically those (that) have directing, shaping, and/or ordering effects on the endeavours in which the actors are involved” (2015: 118).

Directing, shaping and ordering effects as described by Sergi (2015), hence, may not only drive the continuation of action, but also, more profoundly, may alter or change direction of the flow of action. In other words, I perceive leadership as a continuous social flow in which “it is the situated, *moment by moment, construction of direction* that becomes interesting” (Crevani et al., 2010: 81, my italics). Indeed, leadership is about changing and setting courses of action (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Grint,

2005b; Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). Based on American pragmatist Herbert Mead, Simpson (2015) refers to this direction setting in terms of ‘turning points’, or ‘leadership moments’. These points or moments, she argues, “re-orient the flow of practice towards new, or at least different, directions. Without leadership, the flow of practice would continue unchanged” (Simpson, 2015: 170; Crevani et al., 2010). When studying leadership, therefore, we should concentrate on “moments that stimulate change or reinforce stability, the moments that make a difference (...) in organizing” (Ramsey, 2015: 216; Latour, 2005). Direction, however, need not mean ‘one direction’ in the sense of agreement – as leadership in its collective fashion may imply (see following section). On the contrary, the production of direction needs to consider debate and negotiation as well as diverging views and unresolved conflicts (Crevani et al., 2010; Küpers, 2013; Crevani, 2015).

In this thesis, therefore, I take the work of leadership to be about *producing direction* (Crevani, 2015), in terms of a course of action *changed* or *actively reinforced*; and about *making a difference* to organising (Ramsey, 2015), i.e. changing the ways practices are performed. In this way, a diversity of activities, emanating from a diversity of actors, may constitute leadership. At the same time, however, focusing on such ‘turning points’ is a means to delimit leadership and to differentiate it from other ordinary doings that, according to this perspective, do not constitute leadership. If practices are always enacted, and if leadership is a form of organising as I have argued, then merely some enactments of practice materialise as leadership – in the present case when *direction has been produced*.

Importantly, although producing direction is presented here as theory-driven construct, it should be noted that ‘direction setting’ appears as an omnipresent theme in my empirical analysis. My definition of the work of leadership, therefore, was developed from an interplay of my data and existing theory. This approach hence gives primacy to the meanings of leadership in the local context of the empirical setting of this study while taking seriously results of previous research (see Chapter 3; for a similar approach see Crevani, 2015). Moreover, advocating local instead of grand theory, the proposed conception of leadership to materialise in turning points is free of any normative statements about the activities by which they are produced – which, as the next section critically examines, remains a fundamental problem in much of the

LAP literature. Instead, it reflects what Latour (2005) would call an ‘infra-language, also recommended by Nicolini’s (2009a) toolkit approach to studying practice, which strikes a balance between making a phenomenon empirically discernible yet leaving it meaningless enough for *local meanings* to transpire (cf. Alvesson, 1996).

### **2.2.5 A Critical Perspective on LAP**

As the preceding discussion underlines, leadership *is* nothing per se. There is no essence to leadership (Sergi, 2015). If leadership in general is only a signifier, LAP, too, is a heuristic to perceive the multiplicities of empirical reality. Data about the same empirical episode, thus, might be interpreted from a different angle. In other words, which perspective of leadership is adopted is a question of theoretical framing and data interpretation (Crevani and Endrissat, 2015).

At the same time, leadership might vary drastically from one organisation to the next. Leadership in a military organisation may have significantly different connotations compared to leadership in, say, a Silicon Valley start-up (cf. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b). Not only do organisations differ, practices principally do, too. “How could two or more sets of leadership practices have the same histories, have the same actors, have the same materialities, or the same sense of meanings associated with being, doing, and knowing within a specific context?” Kempster et al. (2015: 243) perceptively observe. Consequently, as I mentioned before, this echoes calls for research that understands local meanings and offers comparable findings rather than attempting to generalise (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Kempster et al., 2015).

Yet, many LAP studies are rife with normative assumptions (e.g. Raelin, 2003; 2011a; 2012, 2014; Woods, 2015), particularly about leadership being inherently democratic, free of constraint, and hence good (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Woods, 2015). Although the notion of practice directs our attention to the *work of leadership* being a collective enterprise, this need not mean that leadership is *principally* democratic. Some actors, in fact, may occupy a particularly influential position when it comes to turning points (which is why in conventional leadership studies they are labelled ‘leaders’) (Cox et al., 2003; Gronn, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Carroll, 2015; Ramsey, 2015).

Raelin (2012), for instance, acknowledges this and suggests that instead of dictators, contemporary managers are facilitators, or weavers that support and sustain work groups. While certainly an interesting idea that may be reflective of some empirical settings, this, too, implies a particular normative view on how leadership in organisations *should be* practiced. On the contrary, leadership may not be democratic at all (Denis et al., 2010; Woods, 2015), or in some organisations it might involve a ‘hybrid’ form of leading (Gronn, 2009). Normative templates such as ‘servant’, ‘authentic’, ‘autocratic’, or ‘democratic’ – carrying the positivistic notion of claiming an ‘essence’ of leadership (Collinson, 2011) – are of little value if they are taken as general and valid over time and space (cf. Gronn, 2009). Whether leadership is authentic or democratic, or what is ‘good leadership’, is not established in the library, but by the lived experience of how leadership is produced and enacted in local contexts (Garfinkel, 1967; Fairhurst, 2009; Carroll, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). In that sense, consent might actually turn out to be coercion.

Many studies paint a picture of leadership in its collective, concertive and collaborative ways (Raelin, 2003) – it is leadership in an ideal world. However, organisations may not be ideal, and they may indeed differ from the perceptions implied by normative statements. A basic idea of the practice approach suggests that practices, in fact, are inherently contested, negotiated and disputed (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Mørk et al., 2010; Raelin, 2011a; Benn et al., 2013; Woods, 2015). Even though the notion of collective may imply that agreement and consent prevail, this need not be the case (Collinson, 2011). Crevani (2015), for instance, addresses this point by suggesting leadership to be interactive, rather than collective.

Telling an unreflective story about leadership principally being democratic is problematic in another way. Similar to the heroic perspective they aim to critique, such collective accounts, too, can be accused of portraying a romanticised view of leadership, underestimating effects of hierarchies and neglecting fundamental relations of power (Fletcher, 2004; Collinson, 2011, 2014; Simpson, 2015). Indeed, as Western (2008: 24) notes, there is “no leadership without power”. In order to understand how leadership is accomplished, therefore, I adopt the view that one may need to appreciate local hierarchies, diverging perspectives about what constitutes leadership in an organisation, as well as issues of interests and inclusion and exclusion regarding the practice of

leadership (Denis et al., 2010; Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Nicolini, 2011; Yammarino et al., 2012; Küpers, 2013; Woods, 2015).

Issues of power in the leadership literature generally and LAP specifically, however, are mostly addressed in passing, if at all (Woods, 2015).

Building on Critical Management Studies, *Critical Leadership Studies* (CLS) back away from attempts to ‘optimise’ leadership (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012), and express an explicit interest in issues of context, gender, identity and indeed power in regard to leadership (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Collinson, 2005, 2011, 2014; Western, 2008; Ospina and Foldy, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Ford, 2015). Although CLS is used as a collective term, it does not offer a unified approach to the study of leadership (Collinson, 2011; Ford, 2015). Yet CLS do share a focus “on the situated power relations and identity dynamics through which leadership discursive practices are socially constructed, frequently rationalized, sometimes resisted, and occasionally transformed” (Collinson, 2014: 37). In other words, CLS views leadership as imbued with power relations, brought to bear by societal differences, resource imbalances and hierarchy (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Western, 2008; Fairhurst, 2009; Carroll, 2015; Ramsey, 2015).

In mainstream leadership studies it is typically ‘leaders’ that exert control over decision-making, rewards, resources, rules, norms, culture or strategies (Collinson, 2014). “Leaders lust after power”, Grint (2005a: 1469) adds, “partly it is because they are corrupted by power.” There is hence a top-down power imbalance in conventional, leader-centric theories, between active and powerful leaders compared to their powerless counterpart, followers (Burns, 1978; Gronn, 2002; Collinson, 2011). Leadership, at its base, Harter et al. (2006) contend, is characterised by inequality. In that sense, leaders are often argued to be capable of managing meaning and framing the realities of their followers (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Grint, 2010; Raelin, 2014), or to have the capacity to create the context of action for others (Grint, 2005a; Fairhurst, 2009). Critical scholars thus often deem leadership as a mechanism of domination (Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010), reflecting a classic hierarchy (Harter et al., 2006). However, emerging contemporary organisational modes of governance may differ from this traditional practice. Raelin (2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014), for instance, builds on notions of ‘post-bureaucracy’ and Mintzberg’s (1980) ‘adhocracy’ to describe

that in contemporary organisations work might be performed in team or project-based structures, and it may be more autonomous and self-organising. It is thus a move away from command and control modes of governance, in which control is distributed and mutual rather than linear as in asymmetrical relations. Aside from maintaining what practice theorists argue to be an artificial separation between ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’, the conventional view hence might not be entirely reflective of more contemporary organisational forms.

Similar to LAP, however, CLS recognise a priority accredited to leaders at the expense of followers (Collinson, 2005; Ford, 2015), and thus advance more dialectical approaches in order to appreciate that followers, too, have agency and the capacity to ‘make a difference’ (Giddens, 1984; Collinson, 2005, 2011). Leadership relations are not necessarily completely asymmetrical and top-down in the sense of being one-way and all-determining (Collinson, 2014). Instead, CLS build on Foucault’s (1978: 95) claim that “where there is power there is resistance”, and argue that control and resistance are mutually reinforcing (Collinson, 2011; Raelin, 2011b).

As evident from my discussion, CLS mostly perceive leadership in terms of ‘bad’ things such as elitism, domination and asymmetrical relations (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012), and thus fail to recognise that power may well be positive. In this sense, CLS privilege ‘power over’ at the expense of ‘power to’ or ‘power with’ (discussed in section 2.4; see Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Follett, 1996; Lukes, 2005; Simpson, 2015). Similarly, CLS offer a promising start to resolve prevalent dualisms in mainstream leadership research (see my discussion earlier in the chapter) by not marginalising one entity at the expense of the other. Yet, CLS maintain an *a priori* determined distinction between leaders and followers. Power and control, for example, is associated with leaders, whereas resistance is reserved for followers, albeit in a dialectical, mutually reinforcing way (see Collinson, 2005). An *a priori* determined distinction between ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’, however, does not hold if leadership is argued to emerge from locally achieved contexts (Carroll, 2015). In fact, the chapter has argued practice approaches do away entirely with dichotomous conceptions of leaders/followers and instead consider practice as a means of appreciating how every participant contributes to the emergent *production of leadership work* (ibid.).

Although CLS and LAP have not yet corresponded much with each other, scholars of the LAP variety, too, acknowledge the importance of power. Raelin (2015: 9), for instance, contends that “participatory spaces are imbued with power relations that in some cases cause suppression of voices and self-muting among those disenfranchised from the dominant discourse”. Similarly, Ford (2010) asks to pay attention to who is in- and who is excluded from dynamic leadership exchanges, while in a later piece she suggests power elites possibly being capable of intervening in organisational discourse and advancing what she calls ‘best practices’ (Ford, 2015). Ospina and Foldy (2009), too, highlight that institutionalised inequalities may result in privileging some perspectives at the expense of others. What is more, Ospina and Foldy add, interrogations of leadership and power allow for questioning how actors may resist or transform such inequalities. Relations of power, therefore, fundamentally influence the way leadership, in terms of turning points, is produced (cf. Collinson, 2014; Simpson, 2015).

Whilst I concur with Crevani and colleagues (2010: 84), who suggest that LAP has the potential to offer “far more detailed accounts of how people produce and reproduce power relations in organizations when ‘doing leadership’”, I also propose that power dynamics can be used to critically interrogate the when, what, and *how* of leadership in the workplace (cf. Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Instead of *critiquing* power relations as part of leadership (Collinson, 2011), I use power as a means to understand in practice-based terms how the work of leadership is accomplished and how it is negotiated. In the following section, specifically, I address this in terms of my research questions that guide this study, before I develop said practice-based understanding of power in the final part of my theory chapter (2.3).

### **2.2.6 Summary**

In summary, this section has reviewed and synthesised the field of LAP, which builds on the ‘practice turn’ in the wider field of organisation studies described in Section 2.1, and critiques the heroic and individually centred approaches that dominate the field of leadership. At the same time, I re-emphasised the benefits of and thus rationale for using the practice concept to study leadership in organisations. For instance, through providing for highly contextualised and mundane accounts, the

practice concept has the potential to afford novel and deep insights into the ways leadership gets accomplished.

I then proceeded to draw on two ideas from the practice concept in particular; namely, that practices are more than what people do, and that constituent parts of practices, such as deeds, cannot be completely understood in isolation from the wider practices of which they are part. The implication of this is that although LAP posits leadership to be an activity, this is not what the focus should be. Instead, I proposed to focus on the *work of leadership*, which means that to take into account the totality of practice of which actions that can be labelled leadership are part. The work of leadership, however, is not to suggest that activities are unimportant. On the contrary, I suggested activities to serve as an empirical ‘entry point’, and that based on the practice concept’s privilege of the mundane, acts of leadership are in fact overly quotidian rather than heroic. In other words, I argued that the work of leadership indicates it to occur at any moment involving any kind of actor. Indeed, the position that I took in this section stipulates that leadership may emerge *regardless* but *not dismissive* of formal authority.

After having discussed the concept of work of leadership and the seeming everydayness of leadership, I moved on to discuss a further vital contribution to leadership studies made by the practice concept; namely, the resolution of dualisms that not only permeate social science in general but leadership in particular. Specifically, I focused on the dichotomy of leaders/followers, which traditionally portrays leaders as dominant actors whereas followers are seen as largely powerless, which explains the hitherto focus on individuals’ behaviours, deeds, and traits. I argued that the practice concept, in contrast, not only advocates a dialectical approach to resolving dualisms, but in relation to leadership refrains from *a priori* labelling actors as ‘leaders’ or ‘followers’ altogether. Doing so would mean three things. First, it would single out certain aspects (e.g. leaders) of practice, which as argued above are incomprehensible from the relational whole. Second, retaining such dualism would mean putting the actors first in the analysis, instead of the practice; and, third, it would bring predetermined power relations into a highly contextualised setting. In contrast, I suggested a practice approach to highlight that things are intelligible *as* something only against the background of practices in which they occur, which implies that the social world does not come in preconceived levels or entities such as ‘leader’ and ‘follower’. Actors are

thus defined within and not prior to the accomplishment of practices. Instead of active subjects acting on passive followers, I advocated the view that leadership is a mutual process, where those interacting play one role or another in accomplishing the work of leadership, which I perceive as the product of collective action.

Thereafter, I went on to elaborate on a further significant dualism in leadership studies; namely leadership/context. I stressed context as indeed an important aspect of leadership, which has conventionally been conceptualised by contingency theories as defining the ways in which leadership should be carried out in order to be effective. Context is thus the ‘container’ of social activity – clearly not chiming well with the practice concept. A practice approach again proposes to circumvent this dichotomy dialectically. Inspired by Giddens’ (1984) structuration and Schatzki’s (2002) notion of site, LAP studies highlight that not only does context affect the ways in which activities are being performed, the very performance of activities at the same time shapes and re-shapes context.

Subsequently, in the penultimate section, I returned to the work of leadership to actually *define it*. Critical issues I elaborated upon include the notion of leadership being a mere signifier for social activity, which in other words means that it is merely a variation of organising with demarcation lines to other social phenomena (e.g. knowing, strategy) being fundamentally blurred. I therefore argued leadership to be a ‘meta-practice’, which occurs simultaneous to other practices, for instance dealing with customer complaints. This in turn makes a criterion to delimit leadership all the more important. Such criterion, however, is delicate when theorising in practice-based terms. On the one hand, I suggested a means is required that lets us identify leadership and distinguish it from other phenomena empirically, whilst at the same time it is advisable not to restrain the richness and contextually emergent properties of leadership, but taking local meanings seriously. Based on an interplay of theory and data, I argued leadership to be about so-called ‘turning points’. That is, leadership materialises when the flow of action of practices, i.e. their direction, has either changed or actively been reinforced, or when a difference to the ways practices are being performed has been made. This heuristic lets me discern leadership empirically while leaving room for the particulars of the local setting to define how direction might be changed or reinforced. I also stressed that direction need not mean single direction. Quite the opposite,

leadership from a practice perspective ultimately is a highly contingent and contested phenomenon – so much so that the final section of this review was devoted to discussing a critical view on LAP.

As part of such a view I highlighted that in the present LAP literature scholars tend to adopt a ‘normative bias’ which for instance posits that leadership is a democratic and collective phenomenon. Not only did I critique the principal of prescribing an ‘essence’ to leadership regardless of context, as argued above; I also highlighted that leadership, in fact, is imbued power relations. I therefore drew particularly on how Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) as well as LAP perceive power. These views foreground power dynamics being brought to bear by societal differences, resource imbalances and hierarchy; indicating that power dynamics fundamentally influence the way leadership, in terms of turning points, is produced. I concluded the section by proposing power dynamics to be useful in order to critically interrogate how leadership is produced as part of everyday organisational life. In this thesis I thus use power as a means to understand in practice-based terms how the work of leadership is accomplished and how it is negotiated. The particulars of such a practice-based understanding of power, meanwhile, are discussed in detail in the following section, 2.3.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework (II): Power Dynamics

Although power is a central concept in the social sciences (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009), issues of power are often pushed to the sidelines in organisation studies. In relation to practice-based studies in particular, power is argued to be a pivotal issue on the one hand, but conveniently “tucked away in the footnotes” (Nicolini, 2013: 92) on the other. Indeed, several scholars are fond of pointing out that power is either a significantly under-conceptualised or an entirely absent notion in the field (e.g. Blackler and McDonald, 2000; Fox, 2000; Contu and Willmott, 2003; Ferdinand, 2004; Handley et al., 2006; Roberts, 2006; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Mork et al., 2010; Heizmann, 2011; Contu, 2013). Although references to power are made abundantly, these largely remain indicative suggestions whereas conceptual – let alone empirical – accounts remain scarce. This combination of underscored significance and simultaneous neglect render power dynamics a fruitful area of research. Therefore, one might say, attending to power in practices, and indeed in relation to other phenomena such as leadership, constitutes in itself a contribution; considering that examining power remains a major ‘research gap’ (Heizmann, 2011; Contu, 2014).

By drawing from and contributing to existing conversations interested in the conjunction of practice and power, this section’s purpose, therefore, is to illustrate a way to bring power dynamics to the study of practice in general, and, as argued in Chapter 2.2, to the *work of leadership* in particular. As mentioned in my review of LAP, “through exploring a power lens on L-A-P we can better acknowledge the significance of social inequalities and potential injustices in the workplace” (Ford, 2015: 234).

This is not a straightforward theoretical manoeuvre, however. Indeed, like practice, there is no unified theory of power. Quite the opposite, as Lukes (1974) concluded nearly 40 years ago, power is an ‘essentially contested concept’. And as a contemporary review of the literature reveals, not much seems to have changed. Akin to practice theory once more, because there is no unified ‘essence’, scholars have suggested to abandon the quest for a ‘grand theory’ and instead proposed the idea of power being a ‘family resemblance concept’ (Wittgenstein, 1967; Clegg and Haugaard, 2009; Haugaard, 2010). Characterised by a constellation of concepts exhibiting overlapping similarities, power “covers a cluster of social phenomena” (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009: 4). As with practice (Chapter 2.1), this constitutes the approach I take in

this thesis, since, as I explain in this section and elsewhere (Mueller et al., 2016), it chimes well with the assumptions of a practice-based approach.

Like family members, different concepts of power are related to each other, but the family tree is twisted, knotted and complicated. The family members include, for example, the interconnected notions of ‘power to’ (e.g., Arendt 1970; Parsons 1967) and ‘power over’ (e.g., Weber 1978); power as domination (e.g. Lukes 2005); coercive or repressive (e.g., Dahl 1957), and productive connotations of power (e.g. Parsons, 1967; Arendt, 1970; Foucault, 1980); resource-dependency views (e.g. Pfeffer 1981; Giddens, 1984; Clegg *et al.* 2006: 126; Simon and Oakes, 2006); Foucault’s ideas, including power and truth, discourse, knowledge, resistance, and disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977, 1978, 1980); Lukes’ (2005) three ‘faces’ of power; possessive and performative views (e.g. Dahl, 1957; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Latour, 1984; Huzzard, 2004); and episodic agency, dispositional and systemic power (e.g. Clegg, 1989) (for excellent comprehensive reviews see Clegg, 1989; Haugaard, 2003; Clegg et al., 2006; Haugaard and Clegg, 2009; Mueller et al., 2016).

In this section, I focus on *performative* views on power in particular, considering that these correspond well with a practice approach and thus ultimately are most useful for developing a practice-based view on power. To do so, however, it is necessary for explanatory purposes to first refer to and critique ‘conventional’ theories of power in the beginning and throughout this section, albeit briefly. Notions I touch upon, therefore, include possessive views, asking whether power is an inherently *restrictive* or *productive* phenomenon, and whether it is a *capacity* or merely exists in its *exercise*. Thereafter, I discuss assumptions of a performative view on power – mainly that power is a property of the ‘social system’ (i.e. practices) and that it simultaneously needs to be enacted. Theorising a practice-based view on power ultimately leads to my theoretical framework, which I utilise as a heuristic to study my research questions set out in Chapter 2.4. Inspired by Nicolini’s (2013) toolkit approach to practice (Chapter 2.1), the framework builds on a variety of insights from across the power literature, mostly but not exclusively drawing on performative assumptions, and uses these in combination, thus being a testimony to the fruitfulness of viewing power as a family resemblance of ideas.

Before delving into the section at this point, it is important to clarify my use of terminology. By ‘power dynamics’, I refer to the mutual interplay of systemic, dispositional and episodic power based on practices, as discussed in this section; whereas by ‘power relations’, I mean to denote that power is inherently relational, since the exercise of power always involves multiple actors (Foucault, 1982).

### 2.3.1 ‘Conventional’ Views on Power

As discussed below, ‘performative’ views on power, to borrow an expression from the practice literature, developed out of dissatisfaction with what I call ‘conventional’ views, which conceive of power as inherently *restrictive*, *repressive* and *coercive*, thus *negative* as well as *concentrated* in the hands of ‘powerful’ individuals (Foucault, 1980; Clegg et al., 2006; Hardy and Clegg, 2006; Simon and Oakes, 2006; Greve and Mitsuhashi, 2007; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). In other words, allegedly powerful actors have the ability to exert control and influence towards their subordinates; they have ‘power *over*’ – a concept that gained particular traction in the literature – the powerless (Huzzard, 2004; Lukes, 2005). This is commonly regarded as the concept of *domination* (Simon and Oakes, 2006), which is conceived of as coercing others to comply, and as the ability to constrain others in their decision-making. Stated otherwise, actors are impeded to live “as their own nature and judgement dictate” (Lukes, 2005: 85; see also Weber, 1954; Hardy and Clegg, 2006). For these scholars, individuals *possess* power which they wield over others if need be (Simon and Oakes, 2006; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Power, in other words, is conceptualised as a “commodity that can be divided up like salami” (McGabe, 2009: 154) – a statement that practice theorists would frown upon (discussed below; see Chapter 2.1).

While these negative views of power have “almost become second nature for contemporary theorists” (Clegg et al., 2006: 208), several writers have sought to highlight the positive and productive nature of power, mostly distilled in notions of ‘power to’ instead of ‘over’ (e.g. Parsons, 1967; Arendt, 1970; 1980; Barnes, 1988; Fox, 2000). Arendt (1970), for example, conceives of power as the “capacity to act in concert” (1970: 44), while Parsons (1967) argues that power is indeed a positive phenomenon equal to the capacity to achieve goals (Clegg, 1989). For these writers,

power is more than the force that simply says ‘no’. It is not a zero-sum game in which one actor ‘wins’ at the expense of the other (Clegg, 1989; Haugaard, 2012).

Considering productive views on power, Foucault’s work in particular has gained traction in the literature (e.g. Fox, 2000; Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008; McGabe, 2000, 2010; Balogun et al., 2013; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Power “produces things”, Foucault asserts, “it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (1980: 119). Indeed, perhaps his most famous concept is Power/Knowledge (1980), claiming the two phenomena to directly imply one another, being mutually constitutive. The notion of discourse, moreover, constitutes another vital concern throughout Foucault’s career. As such, discourse is seen as both an effect and instrument of power (Foucault, 1978); power resides in discourse (Foucault, 1980; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). According to Foucault (1980), there cannot be any exercise of power without what he calls ‘discourses of truth’, which determine our understandings of things. These discourses of truth are subject to any society or community; that is, the “discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1980: 131). It is hence a mechanism that distinguishes between ‘true’ and ‘false’. From Foucault’s appreciation of truth (and discourses thereof), it emerges that discourse produces particular meanings, and defines a legitimate perspective of knowledge. Discourse lays down the conditions of possibility, determining what can be said, when and by whom; in other words, it determines what is seen as a credible contribution and what is acceptable (Hardy and Clegg, 2006; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Interestingly, as I argued in Chapter 2.1, a practice perspective makes the same argument. In fact, for Foucault, discourse cannot possibly be reduced to language and its mundane use. Instead, discourse is itself a sociomaterial practice (Nicolini, 2013; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). This leads me to argue below that, in effect, power may not merely reside in discourse, but in both discursive and non-discursive *practices* instead.

Before moving on to the assumptions of a performative view that particularly emerged from Foucault’s work, however, it is important to note a major demarcation that can be identified in the above theories. Implicit in the discussion so far are two different conceptions of power: one that sees power as evident, or even *only existent*, in its doing, i.e. in the exercise of power (e.g. Dahl, 1957), whereas the other conception suggests power as a capacity that exists outside of action, meaning that actors have

power even when they are not ‘using’ it (Clegg, 1989; Lukes, 2005; Haugaard, 2010). In the literature, these two views are called ‘episodic power’ and ‘dispositional power’, respectively (see Clegg 1989; Haugaard, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2012). Dispositional power, as suggested, can thereby be distinguished in terms of power being a coercive or productive capacity. Although some assert the two ‘versions’ of power to be connected to each other (e.g. Clegg, 1989; Hardy, 1996; Lawrence et al., 2001, 2005), dispositional and episodic power so far largely exist in isolation (see Lawrence et al., 2012). The following tables offer several definitions of power according to this demarcation.

Table 2 – Power as a coercive capacity (dispositional power)

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<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Weber (1954: 323)	Power is “the possibility of imposing one’s own will upon the behavior of other persons.”
Salancik and Pfeffer (1977: 14)	Power is “the ability to get things done the way one wants them to be done.”
Huzzard (2004: 353)	Power is “the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others.”
Lukes (2005: 85)	“Power as domination is the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate.”

Table 3 - Power as a productive capacity (dispositional power)

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<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Arendt (1970: 44)	Power is the “capacity to act in concert.”
Foucault (1978: 94)	“Relations of power are... the immediate effects of (the) divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums... they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.”
Lukes (2005: 63)	“Power refers to an ability or capacity of an agent or agents, which they may or may not exercise.”

Giddens (1984: 257)	Power is “the capacity to achieve outcomes.”
Schatzki (2005: 478)	“Power is one person’s actions structuring other people’s possible actions.”

Table 4 - Power as doing (episodic power)

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<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Dahl (1957)	A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do
Foucault (1977: 26 & 27)	“Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.”

### 2.3.2 Towards a Practice-based View on Power

As illustrated above, most ‘conventional’ accounts of power take rationalistic and individualistic point of views, supposing power to be in the hands of certain individuals – heads of state, CEOs, managers, or kings, as Foucault (1980) would say. In other words, power is concentrated in the sphere of certain individuals who ‘possess’ power. Performative views, meanwhile (e.g. Latour, 1986; Clegg, 1989; Law, 1992; Fox, 2000; Clegg et al., 2006; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Heizmann, 2011; Contu, 2014), profoundly disagree with such a conception of power. “We need to cut off the King’s head”, said Foucault (1980: 121) famously in order to decentre the individual and its alleged possession of power. Instead, these scholars argue power to be the property of *society* rather than the individual capacity to achieve desired outcomes (see also Giddens, 1984; Hardy and Clegg, 2006).

As a property of society, power is a circulating phenomenon, something that is never “here or there” (Foucault, 1980: 98), and thus neither in a specific individual’s hands nor an appropriated commodity. Power is “everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere”, Foucault (1978: 94) writes. Individuals, in that regard, are by definition seen as always simultaneously exercising and undergoing power (Foucault, 1980); they are its target and its articulation. In other words, chiming well with the mundane perspective offered by practice, power dynamics

find their way into the capillaries of social life – they are involved in everything we do (Schatzki, 2002; Huzzard, 2004), and thus also rendering its analysis in the work of leadership a potentially fruitful endeavour.

Simultaneously to being an inherent property of society, this also means that power is first and foremost a *practical* rather than a static phenomenon. Similar to conventional perspectives, power is always exercised (Giddens, 1984), meaning that it is *practiced* and therefore an *activity*. Clegg and colleagues (2006) label this a ‘constitutive’ view of power, denoting that supposedly power does not exist apart from its constitution, and that it is inseparable from and only visible in its effects. Unlike conventional, this view shifts the analysis from exploring *who has* power towards *how* it is exercised (McGabe, 2009). Conceiving of power as an activity, however, need not imply episodic acts ‘located’ in the actor as discussed in section 2.3.1 (see Lawrence et al., 2012; Foucault, 1980). Instead, since power is in effect practiced and considering individuals as being the ‘carriers of practices’ (Nicolini, 2011; Shove et al., 2011), they are also seen as the ‘vehicles of power’ (Foucault, 1980). Given that power is seen as an activity, it also follows that it emerges from and is embedded in practices (Schatzki, 2002; Contu and Willmott, 2003; Nicolini, 2007; Gordon et al., 2009; Contu, 2014). Indeed, while Foucault suggests power to be a property of society, practice theorists (e.g. Schatzki, 2002, 2005) would contend that society, in turn, is ‘made up’ of *practices*. As with all social phenomena, practices become the fundamental unit of analysis when studying power (see Chapter 2.1).

While the link to practice theory has not yet been made by the power literature, for power theorists, social practices are indeed a form of power by themselves, a further sibling of dispositional and episodic power; namely, ‘*systemic power*’ (Lawrence et al., 2008, 2012; Nicolini, 2013). In order to understand how power is exercised, therefore, one has to appreciate that all actors operate within an existing ‘structure of dominancy’; that is, practices as prevailing webs of power relations (Hardy and Clegg, 2006). These relations are the effect of divisions, inequalities, or disequilibriums (Nicolini, 2011), regarding to who can do and say what, and whose views get privileged. In other words, practices exhibit unequally empowered *social positions* actors may occupy, which, according to Nicolini (2007), are based on different *status claims*.

Instead of exclusively focusing on status claims in relation to differently empowered social positions, however, I propose to also draw on the resource-dependency view on power (Giddens, 1984; Clegg et al., 2006; Simon and Oakes, 2006) in general, in order to understand how practices produce said positions and thus power relations. Traditionally, the power literature suggests that actors may exert power over others as they have access to or control over resources. For Giddens, (1984), for example, resources are the media through which power is exercised, and through resource *asymmetries* structures of domination occur (see also Brocklehurst, 2001). What is critical about this ‘conventional’ view on resources, however, is the underlying assumption that the more resources ‘held in store’ the greater an individual’s autonomy and the less its dependence (Clegg et al., 2006). Whilst in this thesis I adopt the view that the exercise of power draws on a set of resources, the static and possessive portrayal by the conventional literature does not work well with the assumptions of a practice philosophy.

Feldman’s (2004) work on the matter, therefore, provides useful assistance. Her research on ‘resourcing’ asks “whether we can call something a resource before it has been used in some way” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011: 1246). Feldman is thus criticising that resources have too often been understood as being static, a thing ‘out there’ possibly acquired and deployed by individuals; or as I have pointed out, a commodity (a salami in McGabe’s terms). From a practice-based point of view, indeed, a resource does not become such until it is *used*. Shifting emphasis to the process of enactment, Feldman argues resources to be “created and recreated through action, neither can they be defined independent of context nor are they static” (2004: 307). Similar to Orlikowski’s (2000) ‘technologies as practice’, theorising resources through a practice lens suggests that it is the *thing and its use* that make it an actual resource (Latour, 1986; Clegg et al., 2006; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

It is hence my argument that practices provide for unequally empowered social positions, based on a variety of resources *accessed, enacted and reproduced through practices*. These resources may include information and knowledge, money, norms, tenure, expertise and skill, access and relationships to organisational members higher up the hierarchy, or hierarchy and authority itself (French and Raven, 1959; Parsons, 1967; Weber, 1978; Giddens, 1984; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Blackler and McDonald, 2000;

Schatzki, 2002; Lukes, 2005; Clegg et al., 2006; Nicolini, 2011, 2013; Contu, 2014). This list of possible resources to power, meanwhile, is not all exhaustive. Firstly because, as argued previously (e.g. Chapter 2.2), practices are utterly contextually dependent meaning that certain settings exhibit different resources of power than other settings; and secondly, because “anything (...) can serve as a source of power in social interactions” (Sewell, 1992: 9).

In this sense, through providing differently empowered social positions through a variety of resources (systemic power), practices serve certain interests at the expense of others. In other words, practices confer “differentials of *dispositional power* on agents, thus structuring the possibilities for actions” (Haugaard, 2010: 425, my italics; see also 2003, 2012). Practices, therefore, are the *source* of power in that they disposition actors to ‘make things happen’ as outlined in Table 2 and 3 (cf. Giddens, 1984; Lawrence et al., 2012). This disposition, or ability, ultimately translates into acts of *episodic power* (Table 3), which in turn keeps dispositional power in place through recurrent enactments (Nicolini, 2013).

Importantly, as mentioned in this section (2.3.1), the conventional literature argues that an actor may *have* dispositional power *regardless* of whether this power is exercised; it exists ‘outside’ of action (e.g. Haugaard, 2010). Advocates of episodic power, at the same time, maintain power to only occur when its exercise can be *witnessed* (e.g. Dahl, 1957). As stated previously, the different ‘versions’ of power (systemic, dispositional, and episodic) have mostly been treated in a separate fashion, since different studies attend to just one of the three (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2012). This approach, however, does not work well in a practice-based philosophy.

Firstly, as I have argued in Chapter 2.1, a practice approach conceives of the world in a productive and reproductive sense. This means that the social world and its phenomena, such as meaning, organisations, or indeed power, only exist as long as the practices of which they are part and through which they transpire keep being performed (Wenger, 1998; Schatzki, 2006; Nicolini, 2013). Power, in other words, needs to be exercised in order to exist (cf. Giddens, 1984). This is what I discussed earlier in terms of a ‘constitutive view’ of power (e.g. Foucault, 1982; Clegg et al., 2006), and that power resources always need to be enacted to become such (Feldman, 2004). Secondly, however, a practice philosophy also tells us that practices are more than what people

‘actually do’, and that treating the notion of practice in terms of an actor-centred micro analysis of daily activity misses the ‘promise’ of the practice lens (Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini, 2011; Gherardi and Perrota, 2014). To take practice up on that promise, I adopted a philosophical view (see Chapter 2.1) that, amongst other things, suggests actors to be entwined with the world as a relational totality. Objects, actors and activities, or in this case power relations, cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which they take place and through which they acquire meaning (Schatzki, 2001a, 2002; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Gherardi 2011; Nicolini, 2013). Vis-à-vis power dynamics, this means that episodic acts need to be analysed not only in their enactment, but also in terms of how these enactments are made possible in the first place; i.e. systemic and dispositional power. In that sense, attending to one version of power is insufficient. Based on a philosophical practice approach, I argue that systemic, episodic and dispositional power build a ‘relational totality’, which requires to be analysed as such when attending to power dynamics in a particular context. A practice approach, therefore, connects *all three* versions of power – in other words, all three versions form a triangular relationship and are mutually dependent.

So far I have established a practice approach for anchoring my conceptual understanding of power. What is finally needed in order to study power empirically, however, is a ‘working definition’ in order to identify the phenomenon in a local setting. To do so, I adopt the definition of power, based on Foucault (1982), that *one actor (or a group of actors) structures the possible actions of another actor (or a group of actors)* (see also Schatzki, 2005). Akin to my approach to defining what constitutes leadership (Chapter 2.2), this definition is particularly helpful again as it also reflects an ‘infra-language’ (Latour, 2005; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013). This is also where perceiving power as a family resemblance is a fruitful exercise, because it allows for appreciating that power is neither inherently repressive nor coercive, nor need it be inherently productive or positive. Just like leadership (see 2.2), power *is* nothing per se and at the same time might indeed be *anything* – all depending on the local setting under study, given that any practice-based phenomena is *situated*. This is why the above definition I chose is *neutral*; i.e. it allows for various facets of the power family.

In summary, this section’s purpose was to develop a practice-based understanding of power, and ultimately encapsulate this understanding in a theoretical

framework that is used as a heuristic to study power dynamics empirically. To recap, the framework begins with the premise that practices, based on a variety of resources (e.g. tenure, expertise, capital, social position, relations, rules, information, authority), provide for certain power relations in the form of distinctly empowered social positions – ‘regimes of empowerment’ in Nicolini’s (2011) terms (i.e. ‘systemic power’). Systemic power then translates into certain dispositions (dispositional power) in the sense that actors are enabled and constrained to do certain things. Dispositions, ultimately, need to be enacted to be meaningful and to be kept in place, thus suggesting an inherent connection to *episodic power*, which, as an enactment of practice, in turn *reproduces* existing dispositions and hence systemic power.

I should note here that the framework developed in this section, displayed below in Figure 1, is not supposed to denote a uni-directional perspective of power that dichotomously distinguishes between rulers and ruled, but that any actor is dispositioned in *some* way to make things happen – which Foucault (1978) would describe as the possibility of resistance, intrinsic to relations of power. Resistance, in that sense, I perceive to be in itself an act of power. As the data is going to illustrate in Chapter 4, and picked up in Chapter 5, this is situationally-dependent. That is, in some cases authority may prevail whereas in others expertise might be a ‘more powerful’ resource to structure somebody else’s possible actions. As such, my framework accounts for fundamental asymmetries of power in organisations.

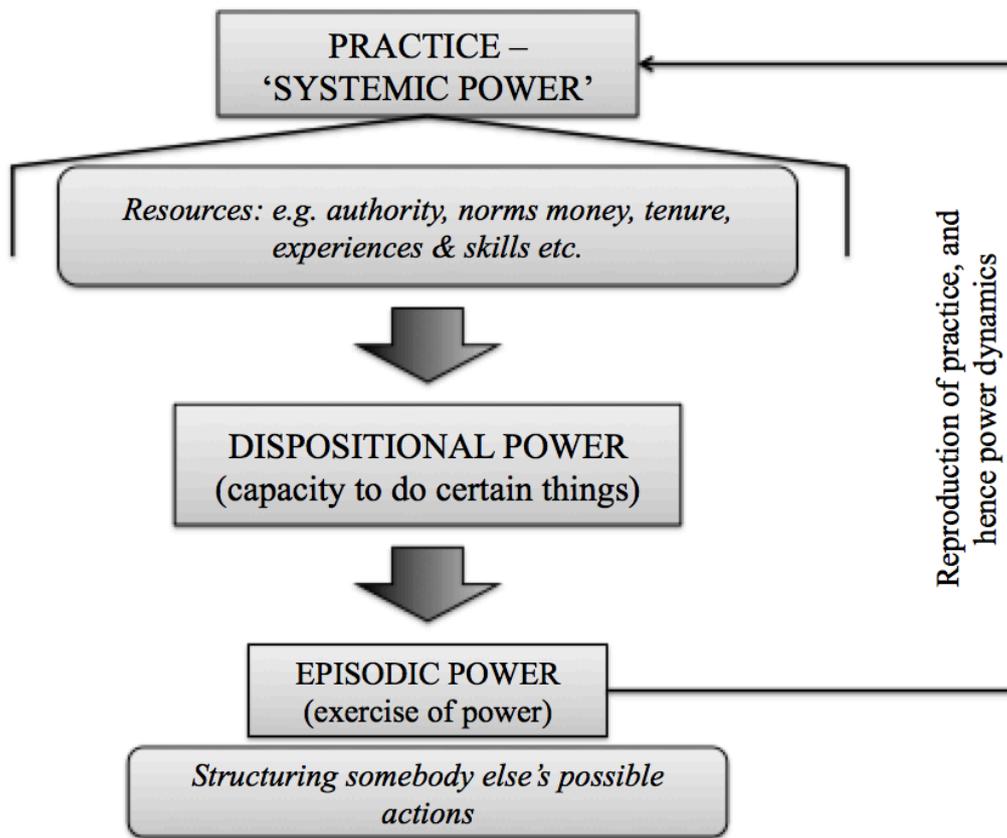


Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework; practice-based understanding of power.

In order to develop this framework, I first illustrated the knotted and twisted tree of the power family, and discussed briefly the core ideas from ‘conventional’ theories of power, including power as a static and *possessed* thing, concentrated in the hands of certain ‘powerful’ individuals that mostly wield their power repressively. I also pointed out the positive connotations of power some scholars emphasise, explained systemic, dispositional, and episodic power as three versions, which have largely been treated separately by the literature. These ideas, in turn, provide fertile ground for performative views to develop alternative conceptions. A performative conception, in contrast, assumes power to be found everywhere, i.e. in the capillaries of social life. Power is thus a societal and ‘systemic’ property, which in turn means that it is practiced (i.e. an activity) rather than possessed. This reflects a practice-based view, since it argues power to reside in practices, and allows for appreciating power as mundane, instead of grandiose and majestic. Based on key assumptions of a practice philosophy as outlined in Chapter 2.1, I then went on to connect said three versions of power, in order to build

an understanding of the phenomenon that not only centres on *either* its exercise *or* its systemic properties, but one that also attends to power as it transpires through practices in their relational totality. This idea builds the core of my theoretical framework illustrated above, which I use in Chapter 5 to explore the ways in which power dynamics are brought to bear on the work of leadership.

After concluding the theoretical chapter, in the next chapter of the thesis I outline my methodology to investigate my research questions empirically.

## 2.4 Summary & Research Questions

The foregoing chapter constitutes the theoretical bedrock of this thesis. In this last section, I conclude my theory chapter by briefly summarising the chapter, and by offering two interrelated research questions. In the first section, 2.1, I engaged in a thorough discussion of the ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki et al., 2001) in social theory and organisation studies, arguing that the practice concept redefines the ways in which we conceive of social life through focusing on hitherto neglected aspects (e.g. abstract structures, dualisms), all in favour of everyday, *mundane*, activity as a focus for research. To adopt a practice approach, I firstly adopted Nicolini’s (2009a, 2013) toolkit approach for studying practice, embracing differences and commonalities, using them in combination based on the idea of a ‘family resemblance’ (Wittgenstein, 1967). Secondly, I outlined how the practice concept might be used, and established my understanding of it as a philosophy; i.e. both as an ontology and epistemology. A critical aspect I stressed in Section 2.1 was the *contingent* character of practices. That is, practices naturally provide for multiple interpretations about what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’. Practices, in other words, are inherently and continuously debated, negotiated, and disputed – rendering power dynamics an integral aspect of everyday practicing.

I then moved on to discussing the ‘thematic core’ of this thesis, Leadership-as-Practice, LAP for short. Here, too, I explored the origins of LAP, particularly focusing on its critique of ‘conventional’, heroic, studies of leadership. At the same time, I re-emphasised the benefits of and thus rationale for using the practice concept to study leadership in organisations. Through providing for highly contextualised and mundane accounts, the practice concept has the potential to afford novel and deep insights into the ways leadership gets accomplished; and, through emphasising the contingency of social life, allows for appreciating how leadership is negotiated. A critical notion for this thesis discussed in Section 2.2 constitutes the *work of leadership*, which avoids a focus on individuals practicing leadership, concentrating instead on the totality of actions and interactions that lead leadership to materialise. Specifically, I argued leadership to be about so-called ‘turning points’. That is, leadership materialises when the flow of action of practices, i.e. their direction, has either changed or actively been

reinforced, or when a difference to the ways practices are being performed has been made (Crevani, 2015; Ramsey, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

This means, of course, that leadership *activity* is still important – serving as an empirical ‘entry point’. Indeed, as I argued in Section 2.1, activities are the backbone of any practice. In fact, considering the practice concept’s emphasis on the mundane, I argued the work of leadership to suggest that it may occur at any moment and involving any kind of actor – rendering leadership to emerge *regardless* but *not dismissive* of formal authority. This also entails resolving fundamental dualisms, such as subject/object, i.e. leaders/followers. I argued that the practice concept not only advocates a dialectical approach to resolving dualisms, but in relation to leadership refrains from *a priori* labelling of actors as ‘leaders’ or ‘followers’ altogether. Instead, a practice approach stipulates actors to be defined within, not prior, to the accomplishment of practices.

Importantly, by ‘direction’, I did not necessarily mean ‘one direction’. On the contrary, I concluded Section 2.2 by examining the ways in which *power* has been discussed in relation to leadership – for instance by utilising insights from Critical Leadership Studies. Doing so led me to propose power dynamics to be particularly useful in order to critically interrogate how leadership is produced as part of everyday organisational life. I stressed, however, that power dynamics play a marginal role in leadership studies generally, and in LAP specifically, although both practice and LAP scholars frequently claim that power dynamics are a vital aspect to leadership. In order to contribute to conversations that do highlight said importance, I ask the following two questions:

1) *How is the work of leadership implicated with power dynamics?*

The insights developed from examining this question empirically, meanwhile, are brought to bear on the second question I ask in this thesis:

2) *How is the work of leadership accomplished?*

It is worthwhile to point out that although the second question may appear to be a ‘more fundamental’ one, I deliberately consider how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership first, since these implications are then brought to bear on the

way leadership is accomplished. Regarding the specific terminology, I use the term ‘implicated’, because it is open and neutral, thus not making any assumptions vis-à-vis how leadership and power might be related (e.g. that leadership is produced by power dynamics, or vice versa), other than that the two concepts are related in *some way* (e.g. Collinson, 2011; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Following the extant literature, the question merely assumes that power has *something* to do with leadership. Moreover, given that the two concepts appear to be closely related, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, ‘implicated’ leaves room for discussing power as an inherent rather than a separate component of leadership. ‘The work of leadership’, as a key concept, meanwhile, suggests the inherently social aspect of leadership and its collective production. As for the second question, I have chosen the term ‘accomplished’, as it connotes both the collective and performative sense of leadership work – leadership is indeed a *product of collective action*.

As a basis to answer these questions, I discussed the second part of my theoretical framework, power dynamics, in Section 2.3. I briefly elaborated upon what I called ‘conventional views’, which conceive of power as individually-oriented, concentrated, and in static and possessive terms – fundamentally at odds with the ideas stipulated in Section 2.1. I therefore developed a practice-based understanding of power, inspired largely by Foucault’s ideas. This conception of power sees it as an activity which is not the property of any one individual, but of the ‘social system’ of practices. Power, as Foucault argues, is thus not in anybody’s hands at any given time, but is instead everywhere and involved in everything we do – thus chiming well the concept of the ‘work of leadership’. However, as I also pointed out, although power dynamics are highlighted as pivotal frequently, they do not constitute the major focus of most LAP or practice studies (e.g. Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Nicolini, 2013; Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

In other words, as some suggest (e.g. Heizmann, 2011; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Ford, 2015), examining power dynamics in relation to practices in general and vis-à-vis leadership specifically constitutes a research gap. This thesis thus builds on existing conversations that point towards power dynamics underlying the social accomplishment of practice, and hence the work of leadership (e.g. Gherardi, 2006; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Mørk et al., 2010; Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Contu, 2014;

Raelin, 2015; Simpson, 2015). At the same time, however, the questions set out below are not merely developed out of classical ‘gap spotting’. Instead, as established in this Theoretical Chapter, in this thesis I use power dynamics as a tool to *problematize* (see Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) the ways in which leadership is socially accomplished – by highlighting notions of negotiation, disputation, and contestation (see Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

In the following chapter, I delineate the methodological approach I adopt in order to research the above questions empirically, taking forward the ideas of ‘work of leadership’ as the production of direction, as well as my practice-based theoretical framework of power. Thereafter, I present my findings in Chapter 4, followed by an in-depths discussion of these in Chapter 5.

### 3. Methodology

After having addressed the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis – practice as the way to view leadership as the issue of inquiry, and power dynamics as a conceptual means – in this section I now delineate in detail my research design developed to answer my research questions (Chapter 2.4). To do so, the section consists of four main parts, as well as a brief summary at the end. In the first part, 3.1, I make explicit the philosophical assumptions guiding this thesis, which emerge from the theoretical background (2.1) of the study and the research questions (2.4). To recap, the questions I ask are:

- 1) *How is the work of leadership implicated with power dynamics?*
- 2) *How is the work of leadership accomplished?*

My research philosophy, meanwhile, is of a view that conceives of the social world and reality to be made up of and constituted in practices, which are in turn *socially constructed* (e.g. Cunliffe, 2008; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2011). From this follows an *interpretivist* epistemology, foregrounding the subjectivity of reality and with an interest in the possible meanings of social phenomena (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2011; Yanow, 2012; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). After establishing my research philosophy and how it is brought to bear on my study, I continue to outline the specific, *qualitative* methodology applied. That is, in Section 3.2 I thoroughly explain the journey of data collection – a journey indeed since I adopted an *ethnographic* approach (e.g. Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Emerson et al., 1995; Neyland, 2008; Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 2011, 2012). In this section, therefore, I acknowledge that there is no singular way to conduct and write an ethnographic study, and highlight commonplace characteristics associated with most, if not all, approaches. By outlining these key characteristics (e.g. immersion for prolonged period of time, observations, interest in local culture and practice), I simultaneously delineate how these pertain to my particular study – which ultimately culminates in my research methodology. Thereafter, in Section 3.3, I explain the specific steps taken in order to *analyse* my gathered data. Namely, for reasons of flexibility and independence of theory (i.e. working well with an ethnographic approach), I conducted a *thematic analysis* that consisted of 7 iterative steps (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Howitt and Cramer, 2014).

Outlining these steps, from coding the data to defining themes and interrogating their relationships and ultimately writing up findings, builds the structure of the section. This ensures a clear audit of the way the data was processed. In the final section before my summary, 3.4, I discuss issues of validity and reliability, which constitute important criteria to evaluate knowledge generated by our research. However, as many scholars argue, these criteria should not simply be imported to qualitative and particularly interpretive approaches, given their assumptions of objectivity of knowledge and truth (e.g. Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Guest et al., 2012). Based on Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Sandberg (2005) I therefore propose ways suited to interpretivism to assess the knowledge claims this thesis has been produced.

As such, this chapter displays five fundamental and interlocking choices made: the *ontology* and *epistemology* (constructionist-interpretivist), the *methodology* chosen to conduct the study (qualitative), the specific *methods* applied (observations and interviews), and the *analytical approach* taken (inductive thematic analysis) (see Figure 2 in Section 3.1; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015).

### **3.1 Research Paradigm/Philosophy**

As several scholars advise (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2011; Neyland, 2008; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015), it is fruitful to begin a discussion of research design by outlining specifically the philosophical assumptions pertaining to the research tradition one situates oneself in. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, the philosophical choices made have profound implications vis-à-vis the methods adopted and analytical steps taken. Throughout Chapter 2, particularly 2.1, I already discussed in detail the implications of a practice approach, which ultimately are brought to bear on the philosophical views I advocate in this thesis. These implications, therefore, warrant some further discussion and reiteration in relation to the *ontological* (assumptions about the world and reality) and *epistemological* (assumptions about how the world and reality is known) (see e.g. Neyland, 2008) views underpinning this thesis.

In fact, I suggested in Chapter 2 that the notion of practice, if taken as a philosophy, itself constitutes both ontology and epistemology. In terms of practice as an

ontology, I argued to perceive the social world to consist of practices, rendering them the fundamental *unit of analysis* when studying social phenomena (e.g. Schatzki, 2005; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2011, 2013) – which in terms of the ‘work of leadership’, this thesis indeed does. As such, I perceive the social world and reality, consisting of and constituted in practices, as *socially constructed* (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Cunliffe, 2008; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011); particularly considering the assumption of the practice idea that the world comes into being via *everyday practicing*, meaning that the world is *emergent* rather than pre-given (see Chapter 2.1; Schatzki, 2002, 2005; Nicolini, 2009b; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). It should be noted though that some constructionist approaches locate the process of construction within the mind of individuals (e.g. Weick, 1995; see both Cunliffe (2008) and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2011) for overviews), which constitutes a view practice scholars are highly suspicious towards. By contrast, as suggested, in a practice approach social reality is constructed through ongoing and recurrent engagement with the world in sociomaterial practices (e.g. Latour, 2005; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011).

Moreover, as O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) suggest, ontologies can broadly be distinguished in terms of being objective (reality existing independent of actors, can be measured and tested) and subjective (reality made up of perceptions and interactions of actors). Given the views suggested by practice that I advocate in this thesis, it follows that a social constructionist ontology to study practice is clearly *subjective*. A subjective ontology sees facts as culturally and historically situated, indicating that there are *multiple interpretations* about the nature of social realities. Indeed, as argued in Chapter 2.1, practices are inherently contingent and thus afford multiple ‘truths’. As researchers, therefore, our experience of the practices we research is contested as well (cf. Sandberg, 2005). At the same time, this has profound implications for the knowledge we may develop about this socially constructed world – i.e. epistemology. Indeed, as suggested in Chapter 2.1, the concept of practice may also be regarded as an epistemology itself (see Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi, 2000; Geiger, 2009; Corradi et al., 2010).

As Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011) note, in traditional social science, the subject/object dichotomy is seen as the basic form of developing knowledge about the world. Because this dichotomy insinuates actors are detached from the world before

they begin to engage with it, however, a practice approach eschews this dualism. As I discussed in Chapter 2.1, by contrast, based on Heidegger's (1962) 'being-in-the-world' a practice approach argues that as actors we are always already *entwined with the world* as a relational whole of practice. As part of such entwinement, things become intelligible as something only against the background of practices in which they occur (Schatzki, 2001b; 2002; Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013).

From a practice approach and a constructionist ontology, it thus follows that instead of abstract, objective and absolute knowledge, it is situated and inextricably tied to practice (Gergen, 1978, 2004; Nicolini et al., 2003; Gherardi, 2001, 2006, 2009b; Nicolini, 2011; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Not only does it come into being through practice, but that it is also *known* through practice (Nicolini et al., 2003; Nicolini, 2011), which also means that actors cannot exist in isolation from their practices, and hence the social world (Gherardi, 2009a; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). This also pertains to the researcher, who in some form is a participant in the practices he or she seeks to study (reflected in my methodological approach chosen and degree of participation, discussed later). In fact, as Nicolini (2009b) reminds us, as researchers we are always participating in at least two practices at the same time: the ones we study, and the practice of representing what we study through our research techniques (see also Schatzki, 2005). As such, "research is the inevitable product of the researchers' engagement in the world" (Neyland, 2008: 42; Yanow, 2012) – which in turn requires a reflexive approach (discussed in Section 3.2) given the active role of the researcher (Nicolini, 2009b; Rasche and Chia, 2009).

Regarding the inherently subjective stance required when studying practices, and the assumption of actors and world being intimately connected (Sandberg, 2005), I follow authors such as Nicolini (2009a, 2011) or Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) and position myself according to an *interpretivist* epistemology.

Antithetical to positivism, this term subsumes the views of scholars who are critical towards applying the scientific model of the natural science (positivism) to the study of social phenomena (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Sandberg, 2005; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011; O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). Its ideas are mostly based on Weber's work (his '*verstehen*', but also on Schütz's phenomenology), who

acknowledged the profound subjectivity involved when studying humans. Weber suggested, “while physical systems cannot react to predictions made about them, social systems can”, thus insinuating a close relationship between researcher and researched (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015: 65; Bryman and Bell, 2011) – akin to my argument about practice above.

An interpretivist epistemology also corresponds both with a constructionist and subjective ontology (Sandberg, 2005; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). In terms of constructionism, interpretivists assume social reality to be constructed through ongoing negotiation between people about the nature of this very reality (Sandberg, 2005; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). In correspondence with a subjective ontology, the interpretivist research tradition rejects notions of an objectively knowledgeable social reality and instead stipulates knowledge to be constituted through lived experience of reality (Sandberg, 2005; Neyland, 2008) – although, in my approach, not in the human mind but experiences developed through practice. The aim, therefore, is to grasp the local and subjective rather than standardised and objectified meanings of social phenomena; in terms of *understandings* and *trends*, rather than explanations and laws as would be the case in a positivistic approach (Alvesson, 1996; Klein and Myers, 1999; Bryman and Bell, 2011; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). Focus is thus not on what social reality *is*, because there is no one essential reality, but rather on *how* meaning is shaped socially and thus how this reality is *constructed* (Cunliffe, 2008), assuming the construction itself to be social (cf. Latour, 2005).

In relation to leadership, Alvesson and Spicer (2012), meanwhile, provide a good synopsis of the different interpretative studies in the leadership domain. Echoing my discussion in this section, the authors stipulate that given interpretive assumptions leadership is considered socially constructed since in a local setting certain activities are ‘seen’ as leadership, and that leadership continuously emerges (see also Wood, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Kelly, 2008, 2014; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). The concept of leadership, therefore, can only be achieved through appreciating the meaning of the concept for those involved in this type of social action (Grint, 2000). This reflects nicely in the approach I took in Chapter 2.2, and also my conceptual understanding of power in Chapter 2.3, as I sought to avoid developing a pre-determined and ‘closed’ definition of leadership that would subsequently be ‘applied’ to an empirical setting. Instead, my

definitions of leadership and power provide a heuristic to identify the phenomenon empirically, but remain open to the meaning of them in their particular contexts.

In summary, there are a myriad of further implications derived from the combination of a subjective constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology that I advocate in this thesis as my philosophical research stance (see also Yanow, 2012). In the following I signpost these implications briefly, and discuss them in detail subsequently throughout this chapter. Firstly, although the two are not synonymous, from an interpretive stance a *qualitative methodology* ultimately follows, since the focus is on understanding relationships and meanings rather than explaining principles as in a positivistic approach (Alvesson, 1996; Klein and Myers, 1999; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). A qualitative approach also follows from the research questions I asked earlier (Chapter 2.4), which are interested in understanding relationships between the two utterly social concepts of leadership and power, and how leadership is accomplished in everyday practices. I am thus interested in the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of leadership and power instead of the ‘what’ and ‘ifs’.

A qualitative methodology offers a wide range of further choices facing the researcher, vis-à-vis the investigative techniques applied. Given that my philosophical approach stipulates that we are inherently entwined with the world and the people we study, and that our ‘research knowledge’ is developed through and in the practices we seek to understand, a methodological approach is required that gives primacy to understanding local knowledge, practice, and culture, and allows to purposefully ‘violate’ the key positivist idea of ontological objectivity – externality and detachment. One such methodological approach is *ethnography* (Emerson et al., 1995; Alvesson, 1996; Van Maanen, 2011; Neyland, 2008; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Yanow, 2012), which I adopt in this thesis, since it puts the researcher directly in the setting studied, and lets him or her become a participant and learn the practices of those studied (Van Maanen, 1988; Schatzki, 2005). Also, since my philosophy suggests there is no essentialist version of reality but embraces the idea of multiple truths instead, it is advisable to apply a multiplicity of methods (Nicolini, 2009b, 2013). Here, ethnography is once more handy, given that it allows for great flexibility regarding the specific investigative techniques deployed and to follow ideas in the field as they emerge. While

the bedrock method is observations, a further frequently used method is various forms of interviews (e.g. Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979, 1988, 2015; Davis, 2008). It is no wonder, hence, that practice scholars are especially fond of ethnographic approaches as the ‘go-to’ methodology, given that they urge researchers to get as close as possible to the real-time accomplishment of practices (e.g. Schatzki, 2005; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Kempster and Stuart, 2010; Nicolini, 2011; Contu, 2014; Crevani, 2015; Carroll, 2015; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015). What is more, especially considering the study of leadership as a collective accomplishment, an ethnographic approach is particularly fruitful because it allows for studying practices as the unit of analysis rather than focusing on pre-determined actors.

At the same time, as indicated, given the subjective stance stipulated here I approach both analysis and gathering of data in a *reflexive* fashion (Cunliffe 2003; Nadin and Cassell, 2006; Alvesson et al., 2008; Nicolini, 2009b; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011), which is also a prevalent aspect debated among ethnographers (Davies, 2008; Neyland, 2008). Interpretivists argue that our descriptions and interpretations are always influenced by our specific cultural, historical, and ideological understandings of reality (Sandberg, 2005; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015); and since not only our ‘subjects’ are entwined with the world of practice, but we as researchers just as much, there is a need for us to question how we engage in constructing meaning (Cunliffe, 2003).

In terms of data analysis, my research philosophy leads me to advocate an *inductive* rather than deductive approach. Going along with ethnographic research traditions as well, my approach is hence *data* rather than theory driven in both gathering and analysis (Van Maanen, 1988; Emerson et al., 1995; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Sandberg, 2005; Van Maanen et al., 2007; Neyland, 2008; Yanow, 2012; O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015), which is also reflected in the way I define concepts such as leadership or power (see above). With respect to analysis, such a data driven approach lends itself to conducting a *thematic analysis* (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Howitt and Cramer, 2014) that seeks to explanatorily identify common themes and an overarching narrative within the data – which is particularly compatible with ethnographic research (e.g. Emerson et al., 1995).

Ultimately, the themes identified require to be presented in some form, indeed, as Nicolini (2009a, 2009b) comments, representing practice is a vital aspect to the study thereof. Scholars in the ethnographic realm, too, highlight ‘textwork’ as a, if not the, crucial aspect of ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988; Watson, 2012). As I discuss in section 3.2, the research philosophy I adopt here, therefore, is also brought to bear on the ways in which this thesis, as an ‘ethnographically-inspired’ text, is written (see e.g. Neyland, 2008; Watson, 2012). For instance, are the findings presented as a ‘mirror-image’ of the setting studied that the researcher observed; or is the writing in itself some form of ‘world-making’, “drawing on sense-making that has been co-generated with organizational members” (Yanow, 2012: 34; Van Maanen 1988; Neyland, 2008)?

Finally, given the subjectivity of my constructionist-interpretivist research stance, notions such as validity and reliability require to be seen in a different light. Indeed, often these notions stemming from positivism are inadequately forced upon interpretive studies, ignoring the own particular ways of interpretivism to deal with these undoubtedly important factors (e.g. Sandberg, 2005; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2014).

These implications elaborated upon here result in my ‘methods map’ (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015), which ensures a ‘methodological fit’ (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). I discuss the specific aspects of the map in detail throughout this chapter, continuing with my approach to data gathering in the following section:

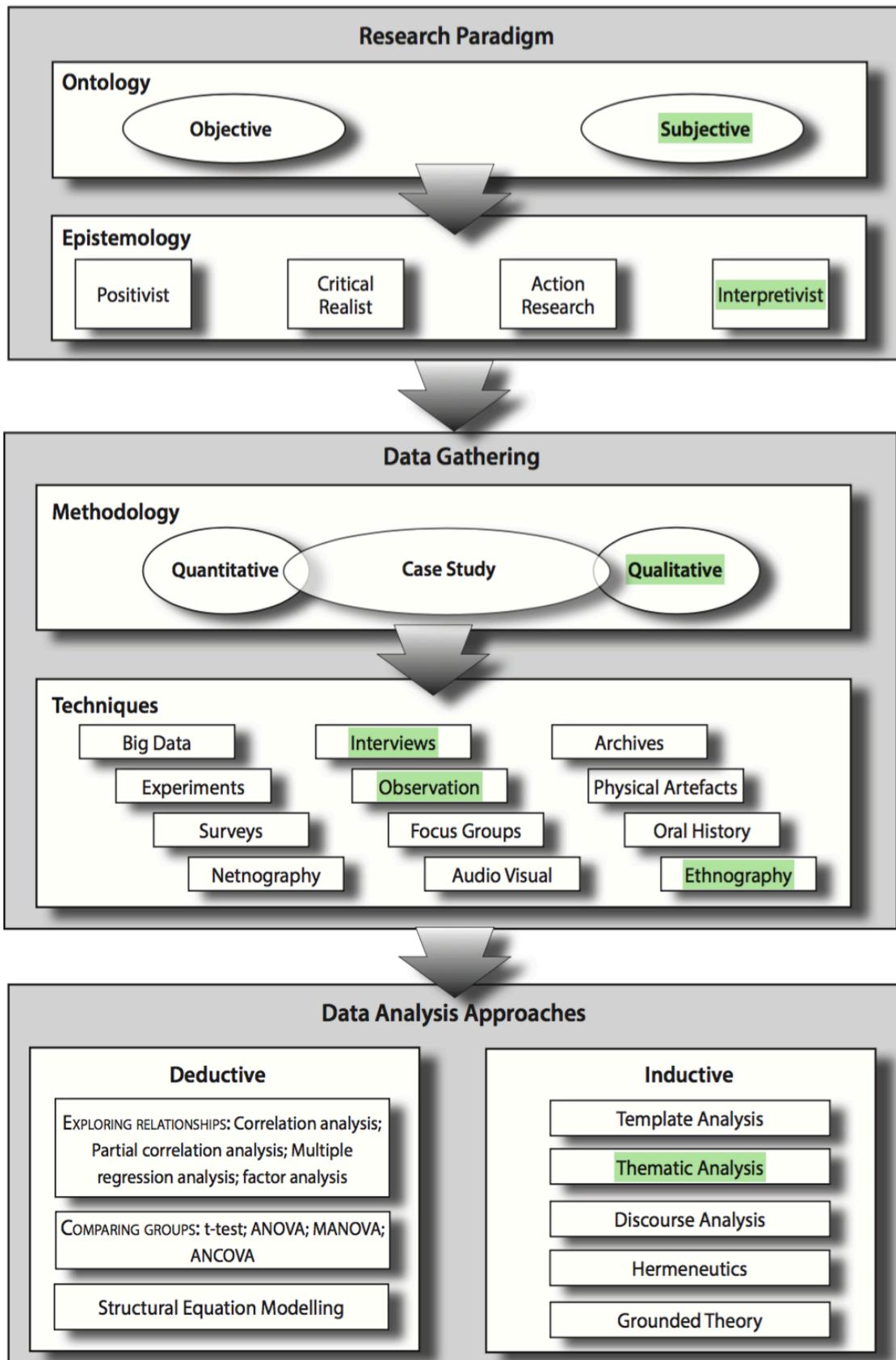


Figure 2 – My ‘methods map’, based on O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015).

## **3.2 Data Collection**

After having specified the philosophical assumptions I make in this thesis and how they affect subsequent methodological and analytical choices, this section attends to the second cornerstone of my research design; my efforts to *collect data*. This section, thereby, describes two aspects. First, I outline the *research setting* in which the ethnographic work was conducted, including the degree of my *access*; and, secondly, I outline the specific ways in which I adopted an *ethnographic approach*. As I point out, there are many ways to conduct and write an ethnographic study. As ethnographers commonly concur, there is no right or wrong way to do it, merely certain guidelines and key characteristics required for an ethnography to qualify as such. This mirrors my approach in this section. Namely, I define and outline said characteristics based on the relevant literature, and, in order to ensure reliability of the study (as far as this can be achieved in an interpretive paradigm, discussed in section 3.4), emphasise in detail how they affected the ways in which *I* conducted my research.

### **3.2.1 Research Setting and Access**

The research setting of this thesis is a British, 150 year-old organisation I call ‘TexCo’, which employs approximately 100 people and manufactures textiles for industrial use. The markets they operate in, therefore, include automotive, aviation, building and infrastructure, marine, or sports (e.g. insulating Formula-1 racing helmets or tennis rackets). Although TexCo operate internationally, production is based in Britain. Recently, before I started data collection however, TexCo had a complete and disruptive changeover, which as shall transpire throughout Chapter 4, was still implemented and engendered whilst I conducted my research. The main rationale for this, allegedly radical, change was the tough economic climate and possible bankruptcy of the organisation if things went on as they did. This changeover firstly included ownership change, moving from being a traditional family business to full employee ownership. It also involved installing completely new management, including a new

chief executive, and a new organisational structure that is based on cross-functional teams instead of rigid departments.

A significant, and for this thesis particularly interesting, part was an extensive change initiative that was aimed at engendering a new organisational culture and ultimately to change the ways in which TexCo operate – i.e. their *practices*. New ways of doing things (which, as shall be seen are still fragile) rest on notions such as collaboration, empowerment, and innovation. Regarding to the latter, for instance, the organisation has moved from making four major products to countless new ones and variations of old ones. During my first meeting to negotiate my access, Jack, the organisation's CEO, said that TexCo may not be an ideal organisation to study, because of the very unique and at times overly chaotic ways in which things are done. I was thrilled, and said to him that, quite the opposite, this makes it a tremendously interesting organisation in which to do research. My study began two weeks later, and was agreed to last for about five months.

To specify my access, I should note that the organisation could be 'divided' into two main parts; namely the office, i.e. commercial part, and the shop floor, the manufacturing part. Although I had unrestricted access to the entire organisation (in the sense that I could go anywhere or talk to anyone freely), it was agreed beforehand with the CEO that my study mainly focuses on the office side due to safety reasons. That is, my observations took place in a large open-plan office as well as the 'Innovation Space', a large open-plan meeting area (all of which is illustrated in Chapter 4), as well as in several other meeting rooms in and around the office. I only occasionally wandered across the shop floor, for example when getting a tour of the premises (or, incidentally, when using the only bathroom close to the office). Moreover, I developed a close relationship with the CEO. When he was not out of the office on business trips, he normally gave me a lift to and from work, which was a superb opportunity for gaining deep insight about the company (which is at the same time problematized below vis-à-vis reflexivity).

In the following, I thoroughly delineate my ethnographic approach to studying not only about, but *in* TexCo.

### 3.2.2 An Ethnographic Approach

As some observe, ethnography, with its roots in mostly anthropology but also sociology (see Van Maanen, 1988; Neyland, 2008), is growing increasingly popular in organisation studies (e.g. Yanow, 2009; Cunliffe, 2010), whilst practice-based studies are said to have given ethnography a new ‘breath of life’ (Rouleau, 2014). Indeed, as I pointed out in Section 3.1 and as this section shall also demonstrate, ethnography appears to be a tremendously fruitful approach when studying sociomaterial practices, since at its core ethnography is a “written representation of culture” (Van Maanen, 1988: 1), with an interest in notions such as rules, norms, *practices*, language, beliefs, traditions etc. In other words, corresponding well with my philosophical research stance and research questions, ethnography is a means of understanding *how* and *why* things are done the way they are in a particular place (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011). Ethnographers thus not only study organisations, they study *in* organisations (Van Maanen, 2011).

Ethnography thereby I perceive as a *methodological approach* (Neyland, 2008; Van Maanen, 2011); a practice, in fact, considering that it is an inherently active enterprise (Emerson et al., 1995; Van Maanen, 2006, 2010, 2015). It should be acknowledged though that traditionally an ethnography is defined rather as a *written text*, a cultural account of the organisation, community or tribe of interest; i.e. the *product* of the methodological approach of fieldwork (Watson, 2011, 2012; Yanow, 2012). As I stress towards the end of this section, ethnography thus is a style of social science writing. In other words, many studies (e.g. Nicolini, 2011; Contu, 2014) use ethnographic methodologies, such as fieldwork, but do not necessarily have an ethnography as their final *product* (Czarniawska, 2007). This reflects in the way I treat ethnography in this thesis. The final product (the thesis) therefore is not an ethnography as such, yet the approach taken in order to arrive at the product borrows from fundamentally ethnographic ways of doing social science research (see e.g. Orr, 2014) – hence I follow the authors above calling ethnography a methodological approach, or an ‘ethnographically-inspired’ approach. As such, ethnography involves ‘fieldwork’, describing the efforts of gathering data in the field (discussed next); ‘headwork’, analysing and interpreting data (Section 3.3); and ‘textwork’, i.e. writing up the ethnography (this section) (Van Maanen, 1988).

Fieldwork describes the core method of ethnography (Cunliffe, 2010). Yet what exactly constitutes fieldwork is diffuse, diverse and mostly undefined, which affords ethnography a great deal of flexibility regarding the tools that the researcher may deploy (Van Maanen, 1988, 2006; Yanow, 2009; Watson, 2012). According to Emerson et al. (1995), ethnography involves two main things. First, it is about studying people as they go about their daily lives; and, secondly, taking notes in a systematic way based on one's *observations*. Indeed, as is commonly agreed, *observations* are the bedrock of ethnography – although interviews, as discussed below, are an overly common technique as well (e.g. Van Maanen, 1979; 1988, 2011; Agar, 1980; Emerson et al., 1995; Davis, 2008; Neyland, 2008; Down, 2012; Watson, 2011, 2012). I therefore followed these scholars in adopting observations as the primary mode of inquiry. Fieldnotes, which describe a record of observations, conversations, and interpretations, hence are the primary data used in my study (see Agar, 1980; Emerson et al., 1995). Over the course of my time in the field, I accumulated 250 pages of notes in a Word Document. As a guideline I took the notion of *banality*. That is, I noted down anything I heard or saw, following the idea that fieldwork, and hence ethnography, should be grounded in everydayness (Yanow, 2012). Indeed, as Van Maanen urges, “the universal seems to be found in the particular” (2011: 227; Neyland, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009; Down, 2012). Here, an ethnographic approach works particularly well with the practice concept, since the mundane and seemingly trivial are at the core of activities and hence the site for social aspects such as leadership or power (see Chapter 2). Taking notes, then, was largely intuitive (Emerson et al., 1995).

In order to do fieldwork and develop a sense for the particular rather than general, however, my *immersion* in the local setting was pivotal. Fieldwork, derived from the anthropological tradition, in fact, means living with and like those studied. In other words, the fieldworker continuously *participates* (discussed below), interacts, and socialises with his ‘participants’ in ‘their natural habitat’, over a prolonged period of time. Since immersion in the local and at best unfamiliar setting is necessary to understand ‘what is really going on’ and ‘how things work’ in an organisation (Miettinen et al., 2009; Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011), it constitutes an unsubstitutable, if not defining, element of ethnography (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988, 2011, 2015; Neyland, 2008, Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 2011, 2012). This

perspective of ethnography follows particularly from the engaged rather than detached philosophical view I maintained in Section 3.1. As the researcher, I hence made an effort to not be a ‘fly on the wall’ (Emerson et al., 1995) – reflected in the *degree of my participation*.

The ways in which a researcher may participate indeed varies. In the ethnographic literature, most scholars (e.g. Van Maanen, 1979; Emerson et al., 1995; Watson, 2011) simply refer to the term ‘participant observations’ as the standard type, though not necessarily specifying the meaning and extent thereof. Bryman and Bell (2011) offer four different types of observations:

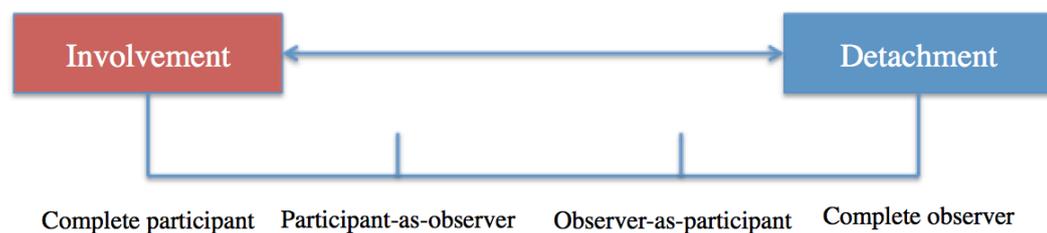


Figure 3 – Degree of participation (adapted from Byman and Bell, 2011: 437).

On a scale from being a complete participant or being a complete observer, my role as a researcher at TexCo, thereby, is best described as ‘participant-as-observer’, i.e. participant observation. Watson (2011), for example, defines participant observation in terms of the researcher *joining* a community as a partial or full member, observing and participating in daily activities, asking questions and partaking in conversation. Participation, as a pivotal element of ethnography, in fact cannot be avoided since “ones mere physical presence and human decency requires participation” (Czarniawska, 2007: 55). I hence participated and immersed myself in the working lives of the ‘natives’, overtly observing their daily affairs and continuously interacting with them (as described above), in order to “learn from them their view of reality” (Agar, 1980: 114; Van Maanen, 1979; Watson, 2011). In meetings, moreover, my role is more adequately described in terms of an observer-as-participant, since in these instances I acted rather as silent observer, though occasionally commenting or being asked for my opinion on matters – reflecting more in what Czarniawska (2007) describes as shadowing.

The time spent in the field, meanwhile, is not necessarily specified (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988) – although the general rule is the longer the better (Czarniawska,

2007). While some scholars tend to look for ‘theoretical saturation’ (e.g. Nicolini, 2011), others suggest that ethnography is characterised by the idea that one could spend time in the field indefinitely and would still learn new things (Czarniawska, 2007). Yet, ethnographers do concur that the fieldworker’s learning curve ultimately declines after a certain amount of time spent in the field, and that observations and interviews become narrower given the focus of the study (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Emerson et al., 1995). I therefore started at TexCo in the beginning of November 2014, and ceased fieldwork after five and half months in mid-March 2015.

Although exit is largely arbitrary (Van Maanen, 2011), the reasons for leaving the field were threefold. Firstly, towards the end of my time in the organisational ‘bush’ I noticed the amount of notes I took daily to decline steadily from about 12-15 pages a day in the beginning to about 3-5 eventually – indeed reflecting a declining learning curve. Secondly, as I discuss in this section vis-à-vis the role of theory in ethnography, because I worked iteratively whilst in the field utilising Nicolini’s (2013) toolkit approach to go back and forth between theory and data, I determined that I had gathered a sufficient amount of data to have something interesting to say about my research questions (see Nicolini, 2011 for a similar approach). Thirdly and importantly, pragmatic reasons prompted me to exit the field, considering the time constraints of the PhD and since my access was initially negotiated to be for five months.

As indicated earlier in this section, I supplemented my daily observations with semi-structured interviews ( $n=24$ ), with a cross-section of employees; from the CEO, managers, to technicians and assistants. These interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were subsequently transcribed verbatim. I also conducted unstructured, ethnographic interviews ( $n=15$ ) resembling ‘naturally occurring conversations’ that were not recorded but documented by taking notes, as common practice in ethnography (Van Maanen, 1979; Davis, 2008; Yanow, 2009; Nicolini, 2011; Endrissat and Arx, 2013). Particularly in the beginning of my fieldwork, I asked participants to talk to me about their remits and daily working lives in order to get an overview of the organisation. Over time then, through said deep immersion, fieldworkers normally make friends in the field, so-called ‘key informants’ (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988). Building long-term relationships is indeed critical for conducting a successful ethnography; and interviews benefit from such relationships in particular (Emerson et

al., 1995; Watson, 2011). This is why I conducted my semi-structured interviews after having been in the field for several weeks, so that participants were accustomed to me as a researcher and perceived me as reasonably trustworthy, hence increasing the likelihood of interviewees talking more openly (see Van Maanen, 1988, 2011; Czarniawska, 2007; Davies, 2008; Neyland, 2008).

As Davies (2008) recommends, the quality of observations is likely to be increased if one has previously discussed meanings and interpretations with research participants. I thus used these observations and interviews in an *integrated fashion*, for three particular reasons: firstly, in order to enhance the richness of the data, considering that at times what actors say might differ from what they do (Agar, 1980); secondly, since, as I established in my research philosophy (section 3.1), there is no one truth, utilising multiple methods helps to get a more nuanced understanding of organisational life (Van Maanen, 1988, 2011); thirdly, observations and interviews may guide each other in the sense that observations and interpretations of events can be clarified and discussed further in interviews, whilst interviews in turn possibly highlight aspects the researcher was not aware of before to then further investigate observationally (Nicolini, 2009a, 2009b).

Importantly, however, through interviews, as representational or ‘manufactured’ data, one learns not how things are but how they are accounted for (Van Maanen, 1988; Czarniawska, 2007). Whilst this can, or in fact should be seen as an important limitation (after all, observations constitute the primary method), this at the same time creates an opportunity. That is, considering sociomaterial practices, foregrounding how and what needs to be accounted for can be a useful endeavour to shed light on moral and normative dimensions of practices (Nicolini, 2009a). A particular interview technique I utilised ( $n=3$ ) to shed light on these dimensions, therefore, was the ‘interview to the double’ (ITTD), which is associated, although still rather uncommon, with practice-based studies (Nicolini, 2009b) instead of ethnography. The ITTD requires the interviewee to imagine a *doppelgänger*, preferably the interviewer, to come into work the next day instead of the interviewee herself. For the ‘ploy’ not to be unmasked, the interviewee has to give as detailed as possible instructions to the double, resulting in an articulation and representation of her practices – particularly in regards to concerns and norms.

While this interview technique is derived from theoretical interests, the researcher is generally faced with a critical choice when conducting fieldwork that pertains to the role of theory. As the ethnographic literature advises, theory normally does not play a very prominent role (see Van Maanen, 1988, 2011; Watson, 2012; Yanow, 2012). An ethnographic approach, in fact, derives its flexibility not only from the incorporation of multiple investigative techniques, but also from being *emergent* rather than rigid. That is, as a researcher one should be adjusting to ‘what comes up in the field’ rather than merely looking for aspects prescribed by a particular theory (Gherardi, 2011; Watson, 2012; Yanow, 2012). At the same time, this is not to suggest that ethnography can or should be theoretically irrelevant. In other words, there needs to be a *balance* in the sense that one should neither work exclusively deductively nor inductively, but *iteratively* instead (Watson, 2012; see e.g. Nicolini, 2011). Theory becomes a “resource for guiding fieldwork and as an outcome of the thinking process which is stimulated by the interplay in the researcher’s mind of theory and field experience” (Watson, 2012: 19). This constitutes the way I approached my fieldwork. In line with ethnographic tradition, I embraced a commitment to exploration (Neyland, 2008) and hence took a largely *inductive* approach to data gathering. Simultaneously though I began reading transcripts of observations and interviews whilst still in the field, going back and forth between data and theory, in order to ensure relevance to my research questions and to guide exit from the field – particularly using Nicolini’s (2013) toolkit approach as a heuristic (see Nicolini, 2011 for a similar approach). Importantly, I worked iteratively not to *determine* the direction my fieldwork, but to work *reflexively*. I worked reflexively in order to make myself aware of my own assumptions, beliefs and theoretical convictions that ultimately affect the ways in which ethnographic research, including analysis and writing, is conducted (Cunliffe, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Yanow, 2012).

Assuming reality to be socially constructed through participation in practices, my philosophical positions (Section 3.1) suggest me to partake in making sense of and constructing the world of which this thesis is a product (Alvesson et al., 2008; see Yanow, 2012, world making through writing ethnography). Therefore, said aspects that may affect the researcher’s interpretations need to be identified and understood. In that sense, doing research reflexively may increase *quality* and *trustworthiness* of data

(Cunliffe, 2003; Nadin and Cassell, 2006; Alvesson et al., 2008), and given the subjectivity of ethnographic research it is stressed as a vital element frequently (e.g. Davis, 2008; Neyland, 2008; Cunliffe, 2010; Rouleau et al., 2014).

It should be noted that there is no all-encompassing definition of reflexivity, whilst in quite general terms it may be defined as “research that turns its back upon itself” (Alvesson et al., 2008: 480). Moreover, there are multiple ways the concept can be approached – Cunliffe (2003), for instance, suggests three: reflexivity as a philosophy, method, or technique. I utilised the idea of reflexivity in terms of the latter, and *practiced* it in terms of two different but related ways. Following Cunliffe’s (2003) insightful paper, I engaged in ‘radical reflexivity’, which means critically assessing and questioning *my own* assumptions and how they may affect the research conducted – a type of reflexivity stressed frequently by the literature (e.g. Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe and Jun, 2005; Nadin and Cassell, 2006; Alvesson et al., 2008; Hibbert et al., 2010; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011). Moreover, I also engaged in ‘endogenous reflexivity’, which means critically questioning the taken for granted assumptions of the ones studied (Cunliffe, 2003), which is particularly helpful for bringing to the fore the often unspoken and barely noticeable aspects of practices (cf. Nicolini, 2009a). For instance, practicing reflexivity led me to question discourses of empowerment that permeated everyday life at TexCo. Reflexive practice, thereby, benefited all three major aspects of ethnography, my fieldwork, primarily discussed here, but also my analysis (headwork), discussed in Section 3.3 in terms of my *sensitizing framework*, as well as my textual presentation of findings (textwork), also indicated in this section (see also Alvesson et al., 2008).

In order to assess my own research practice critically, I kept a *reflexive diary*, which aids the process of self-reflection, noting down and making explicit feelings, impressions, ideas for methodological and theoretical implications, contradictions and tensions, or dominant themes – all of which may impact my interpretations (Nadin and Cassell, 2006; Hibbert et al., 2010). In order to avoid a self-absorbed and never-ending cycle of reflection; I followed Cunliffe’s (2003) advice of one loop of self-inspection. Critically assessing and altering my own practice as a researcher, for instance, helped me to be aware of and minimise the influence of theory that, as mentioned, ultimately affects research. It also led me to realise that the less I prepared and structured

interviews in advance, the more interesting I found the interview to turn out. I thus made an effort to let interview conversations flow more freely to get ‘better’ results in the sense of more interesting insights vis-à-vis how things work in the organisation, or for instance power dynamics that were not easily accessible by deliberately talking about them.

Moreover, as I indicated in Section 3.2.1, I had a close relationship to TexCo’s chief executive, Jack. In our regular car rides, therefore, I discussed possible meanings and my interpretations of events with him in order to learn about his perspective – which, as it turned out, was often very different from that of ‘ordinary staff’ who had different views and certainly were concerned about different things (e.g. machinery that staff found too old, whilst Jack was more concerned about the company’s financial situation). My relationship to Jack, therefore, can be seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand he offered valuable insight, whilst on the other it was at the same time important for me to reflexively assess how my own interpretations of meanings were influenced by my close access to him. To deal with the possibility of being ‘biased’ through Jack, in the field and analysis I made an effort to listen to other voices. In other words, I embraced the fragility of ‘truth’, and thus followed the reflexive guideline of evaluating things from multiple angles, and that no account is privileged over another (Latour, 1988; Cunliffe, 2003; Alvesson et al., 2008). Moreover, regarding analysis, I had to be careful not to develop themes based solely on the insights of particular actors, or a group of actors that exhibit similar characteristics (such as all being managers).

At the same time, this highlights that practicing radical goes hand in hand with practicing endogenous reflexivity; i.e. not only questioning my own interpretations and taken for granted assumptions, but those of all other participants involved as well. I did so for example through ‘otherness’ (Cunliffe, 2003). That is, meaning is not only created through what is said, but also through what is *not* said. Doing so particularly influenced interpretations of data in terms of my analysis, as the concept, Cunliffe adds, may reveal contradictions and tensions. For instance, together with incorporating multiple perspectives, this led me to evaluate suspiciously the notions of staff empowerment and inclusion – two fundamental themes of my analysis that revealed inherent contradictions. According to a reflexive stance, such tensions and

contradictions, meanwhile, should not be sought to be removed, but to be embraced instead so that deeper insight might be achieved (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Finally, as mentioned, practicing reflexivity also translates into textwork. Namely, given the subjectivity stipulated by my research philosophy and embraced by reflexivity, *my* experiences and interpretations are clearly present in the writing. As indicated previously in this section, writing is a, if not the, vital aspect of ethnography, which is why I outline the ways in which I wrote this thesis to conclude this section.

In order to invoke a sense of immersion and participation I used notions such as Geertz's (1973) 'thick description' or Van Maanen's (1988) tales (see Miettinen et al., 2009; Contu, 2014; Orr, 2014). Considering Van Maanen's tales specifically, I situate my writing within his 'impressionist' style. Impressionist tales are a "representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker's way of knowing it so that both can be jointly examined" (p. 102), and "reconstruct in dramatic form those periods the author regards as especially notable and hence reportable" (ibid.). These tales are mostly written in the form of vignettes (see e.g. Orr, 1996) based on observations mainly and recollections of events, whilst I regularly supplement these with interview materials particularly in-between vignettes to offer further insights and interpretations. Thereby, the vignettes show "a tightly focused, vibrant, exact, but necessarily imaginative rendering of fieldwork" (Van Maanen, 1988: 102), and offer a 'situational focus' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Contu, 2014).

To summarise my 'ethnographically-inspired' approach, Table 5 shows critical aspects of ethnographic practice as discussed in this section, and how these aspects pertain to my research.

<b>Element of ethnographic work...</b>	<b>...Brought to bear on this thesis</b>
Research setting	TexCo, a 150 year-old British manufacturer of textiles of industrial use. Employee-owned, comprising approx. 100 employees. Access focused on the 'commercial' side of the organisation, i.e. the office.
Immersion in the field	I immersed myself on a full-time basis for five and a half months, from November 2014 until March 2015.

Methods of inquiry	My core methods were observations (250 pages in a word document), semi-structured ( <i>n=24</i> ) and unstructured interviews ( <i>n=15</i> ), shadowing ( <i>n=42</i> ) and recording ( <i>n=19</i> ) meetings. Recordings were transcribed verbatim.
Degree of participation	Participant observations; i.e. not taking up work in the organisation, but participating continuously in everyday practices through interactions, socialisation, and conversations.
Banality	I focused observations on everydayness, particularly in the beginning of fieldwork noting down <i>everything</i> I heard or saw.
Role of theory	Inductive approach to data gathering, although I worked iteratively using theory as a heuristic to guide relevancy and exit from the field.
Reflexivity	To be aware of my impact on the research, and to make myself aware of own assumptions, values and convictions, I utilised the notion of reflexivity as a technique, e.g. by keeping a regular diary, in terms of radical and endogenous reflexivity. Applying the concept thereby affected fieldwork, headwork, and textwork.
Textwork	Telling my findings in terms of impressionistic tales, conveying a sense of being there and thick description; with me as the author and my interpretations clearly present (see Chapter 4). Vignettes are built from observations mainly but supplemented by interview material and recollections of events.

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Table 5 – Elements of ethnographic research in this thesis.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data gathered ethnographically, as delineated in the previous section, I conducted a *thematic analysis* (e.g. Tuckett, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Clarke and Braun, 2013; Howitt and Cramer, 2014). I define thematic analysis according to Ayres (2008: 3), as “a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set.” In other words, thematic analysis identifies and sorts data to thematic patterns identified in a whole data set. By data set, meanwhile, I refer to all transcripts of interviews, observations (my field diary), meetings, and other encounters I had in the field. Moreover, I echo scholars such as Braun and Clarke (2006) and Gavin (2008) in adding to the above definition the ongoing interpretations made by the analyst throughout the process, rendering transparency and thus reliability and validity (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Guest et al., 2012) especially difficult to achieve – which constitutes the purpose of this section.

As Howitt and Cramer (2014) note, there is no specific theory underpinning thematic analysis, and, as often in this thesis, there is no unified approach of how to conduct one (Tuckett, 2005; Guest et al., 2012). In fact, detailed descriptions of how the analysis has been conducted are often omitted altogether (Howitt and Cramer, 2014) – which is not the approach I support in this thesis. Instead, I advocate a view that suggests thematic analysis consists of identifiable and processual steps. It is important to point out, however, that this is not to suggest thematic analysis unfolds in a rigid and linear way. On the contrary, it is non-linear and iterative, different steps may indeed overlap (Ayres, 2008; Clarke and Braun, 2013) – thus working well with the ethnographic approach I proposed in Section 3.2. There are indeed several reasons as to why adopting thematic analysis, as a method of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013; Howitt and Cramer, 2014), is compelling. For instance, it is praised particularly for its *flexibility* due to its *independence from theory*, hence working well with the inductive research approach I take in this thesis (e.g. Wilson and MacLean, 2011; Clarke and Braun, 2013).

I largely followed the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006; see also Clarke and Braun, 2013; Howitt and Cramer, 2014), which arguably is the most

developed and systematic in the literature – hence ensuring rigour in the analysis process (Yanow and Scharz-Shea, 2012). A process model of thematic analysis thereby helps to appreciate the ways in which the analysis has been conducted. The process consists of six interdependent steps, on display in Figure 4, and I discuss my analysis accordingly in this section:

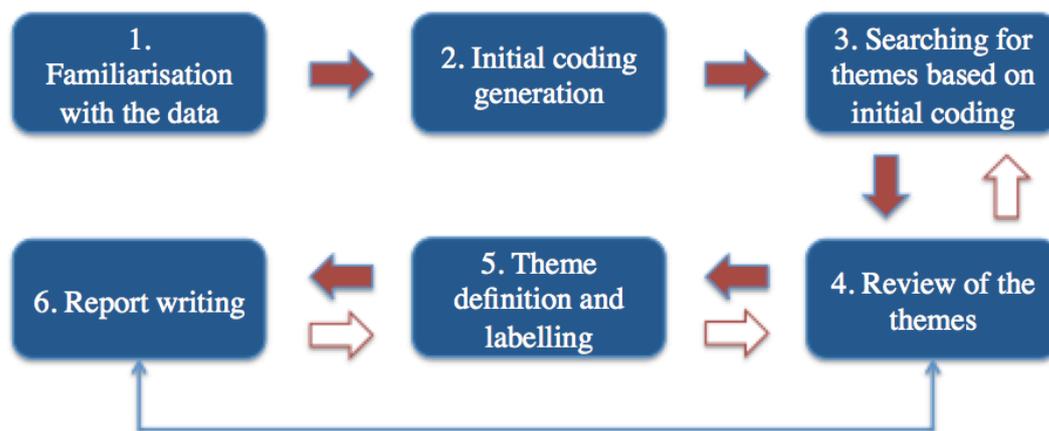


Figure 4 – The thematic analysis process (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006).

*(1) Familiarisation with the data*

An important first step is familiarising oneself with the data, which I already did during its collection. For instance, through collecting the data itself one may notice patterns and themes emerging in interviews or meetings, which I regularly noted down in memos and my diary (see Section 3.2). I also transcribed data whilst still in the field, which constitutes another important way to familiarise oneself with the data set (Howitt and Cramer, 2014). Also, as mentioned in the previous section, I began reading transcripts of interviews and observations whilst still in the field, and worked iteratively between theory and data to ensure relevance of the study. Through these techniques, I had good but broad understanding of the different themes emerging from my data set.

*(2) Initial coding generation*

Secondly, I coded the entire data set (Bran and Clarke, 2006), developing a long list of ‘bottom line codes’. This means I decontextualized chunks of text from their original context, and assigned to these a particular word, or selection of words, that describe the ‘essence’ of what is going on in said text chunk (Ayres, 2008). The length

of text chunks varied from single sentences to entire paragraphs. Importantly, ‘essence’ did allow for *multiple interpretations*, which means that at times I assigned multiple codes to the same piece of text. Although I did use computer software to aid my analysis process (NVivo, see below), I first coded the data set manually (Barbour, 2008). To guide my analysis along the way, I regularly wrote memos (Emerson et al., 1995; Tuckett, 2005) to reflect on the possible meanings of codes and how different codes may relate. This way I could fathom what exactly is meant by a particular code so that other text chunks may or may not belong to a certain category (see my discussion of reflexivity in Section, 3.2; Nadin and Cassell, 2006). This also helped me particularly later on to develop groupings of similar and related codes into themes (see step 3, below). To do so, I also coded ‘close to the data’; i.e. not just labelling a text chunk as ‘activity’, for instance, but describing clearly what kind of activity it is, such as ‘communicating tasks’. Concurrently this helped me to account for the mundane character of practices (see Chapter 2.1).

At this stage the coding may either be latent or semantic (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as well as data or theory-led, i.e. inductive or deductive (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Wilson and MacLean, 2011). As for the first choice, semantic coding refers to simply coding what is being said or done in the data, whereas latent coding reads between the lines and includes possible meanings of what is going on in the data. Being an interpretive researcher interested in how things work and the possible meanings of them (see Section 3.1 and 3.2; Guest et al., 2012), I chose to code in a *latent* fashion, rendering codes and eventually themes to be largely about interpretations rather than objective statements of what is being said.

Regarding coding theory or data driven, although one may work deductively or inductively in relation to ethnographic approaches (Neyland, 2008), I did follow the suggestion not to privilege theory in either data gathering or analysis (e.g. Van Maanen, 1988; Yanow, 2012), in order to ensure a ‘situational focus’ (see Chapter 2.2; Alvesson 1996), and fit between the two phases of doing research (Guest et al., 2012). Therefore, instead of drafting a pre-conceived set of codes according to which data is approached and subsequently allocated to themes based on theory (step 3, below) (see Miles and Huberman, 1994), I opted for ‘open coding’. This meant attempting to approach the data inductively, letting it ‘speak for itself’ (Emerson et al., 1995; Alvesson 1996), for

instance accounting for practices being highly contextualised (i.e. situated, see Chapter 2.1). Moreover, as pointed out earlier, ethnographic work is especially praised for its richness, and I found I would risk reducing this richness if pre-conceived and largely set in stone ‘coding schemes’ were applied.

At the same time, however, I indicated in Section 3.2 that even though we may opt for an inductive approach, it is difficult if not impossible to entirely cast off frames of reference, such as research questions or our disciplinary and theoretical context – which in fact constitutes a major criticism of grounded theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Barbour, 2008; Yanow, 2012). Inevitably, theory “gives direction to what we examine and how we examine it” (Guest et al., 2012: 8) as to what is important or interesting to study, regardless of whether we work inductively or deductively. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) are adamant to maintain that codes and themes do not simply ‘emerge’ from the data as if they would suddenly appear to the analyst through inductive exploration. Instead, “codings and themes are synthesised actively from the data by the researcher; they are not located in the data as such but are created by the minds and imaginations of researchers” (Howitt and Cramer, 2014: 383). In other words this reaffirms that as researchers *we* develop themes, codes and meanings through our interpretations of data; whilst these interpretations, as mentioned in Section 3.2, are invariably influenced, wittingly or unwittingly, by certain convictions and assumptions (Cunliffe, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Ayres, 2008; Yanow, 2012).

Being a reflexive researcher (Section 3.2), it is therefore important to make oneself aware of these influences (e.g. Yanow, 2012) – particularly considering the intuitive character of open coding. Through keeping a reflexive diary (Nadin and Cassell, 2006) and writing memos (Emerson et al., 1995) I was able to reflectively articulate and hence be aware of several ways in which *my* coding was influenced – ultimately resulting in a ‘sensitizing framework’. Importantly, however, this framework is not intended as a determinate list supposed to delineate *all* possible influences. Moreover, it evolved throughout and indeed through analysis, meaning that the framework constitutes a fluid and continuous ‘reflective loop’. That is, similar to Schatzki’s (2006) practice-based conception of time, present coding might be influenced by past coding and concurrently shapes future coding.

Above, I have already indicated the ways in my coding was affected by my theoretical convictions, as I for instance coded openly and close to the data to maintain the mundane and situated character of practices as well as the richness of ethnographic data. Figure 5 presents further aspects of the framework that I noticed through reflection to be brought to bear intuitively on my analysis:

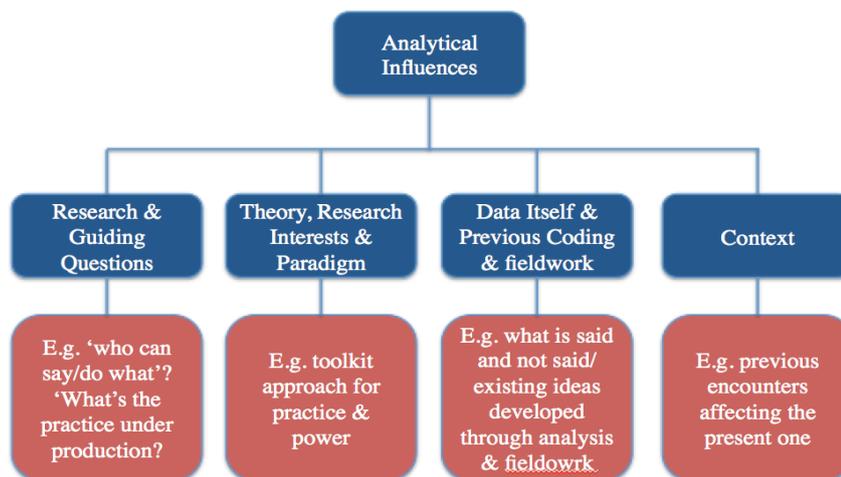


Figure 5 – ‘Sensitizing framework’, articulating possible factors influencing my thematic analysis.

While some scholars refer to ‘hunches’ as to what is interesting or might constitute promising areas for further investigation (e.g. Nicolini, 2011), this sensitizing framework is an attempt to question and articulate the basis of such hunches for purposes of transparency and thus reliability (see Guest et al., 2012; Yanow, 2012). That said, however, a researcher with possibly a different sensitizing framework might develop a different coding scheme and hence thematic map, and might ultimately draw different conclusions. As the framework shows, both the analysis process itself as well as theory and concepts engaged with prior to or during analysis may impact the ways in which codes are assigned and thus ultimately how themes are crafted. Some codes, therefore, might be traced back to theory, whilst others are ‘purely’ data driven. As for the latter, in fact, fieldwork itself can be seen as an inspiration for coding (cf. Brown and Clarke, 2006). The entire notion of empowerment, for instance, popped up repeatedly in both observations and interviews, and was subsequently brought to bear on the codes I developed for certain text chunks.

Since the factors presented as part of my sensitizing framework affected the coding conducted, these ultimately impacted also upon the first preliminary thematic map developed in step 3 out of all the bottom line codes in step 2.

*(3) Searching for themes based on initial coding*

To develop themes, I transferred all the manually developed codes into NVivo, which served as a double checking mechanism regarding the various codes, because I re-read them multiple times before putting them into the software to ensure that they are meaningful and telling. NVivo, thereby, I used as a data management tool to allocate codes to themes and for data security reasons – facilitating the analysis process and increases its efficiency (see Guest et al., 2012). However, as Barbour (2008: 195) points out, “whether doing manual or computer analysis, the conceptual journey you have to make is the same.” In other words, the software does not do the analysis for you (Guest et al., 2012).

After having implemented all bottom line codes into NVivo, I started Step 3 proper by reviewing the codes for similarities and patterns, to then allocate them to different preliminary but overarching themes and sub-themes. As mentioned in Step 2, keeping a diary and writing memos about the particular meanings of codes and how they may relate to each other was a helpful technique to do so. The process is illustrated in Figure 6:

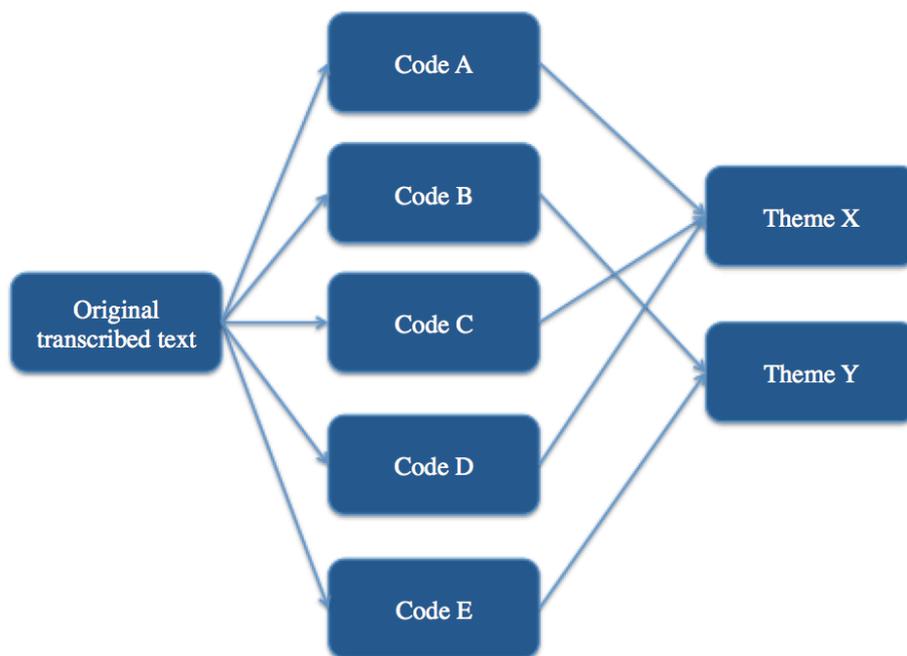


Figure 6 – Relationship between text, codes, and themes (Howitt and Cramer, 2014)

Doing so then resulted in a first preliminary ‘thematic map’, whereby blue represents the main theme and red the sub-theme:

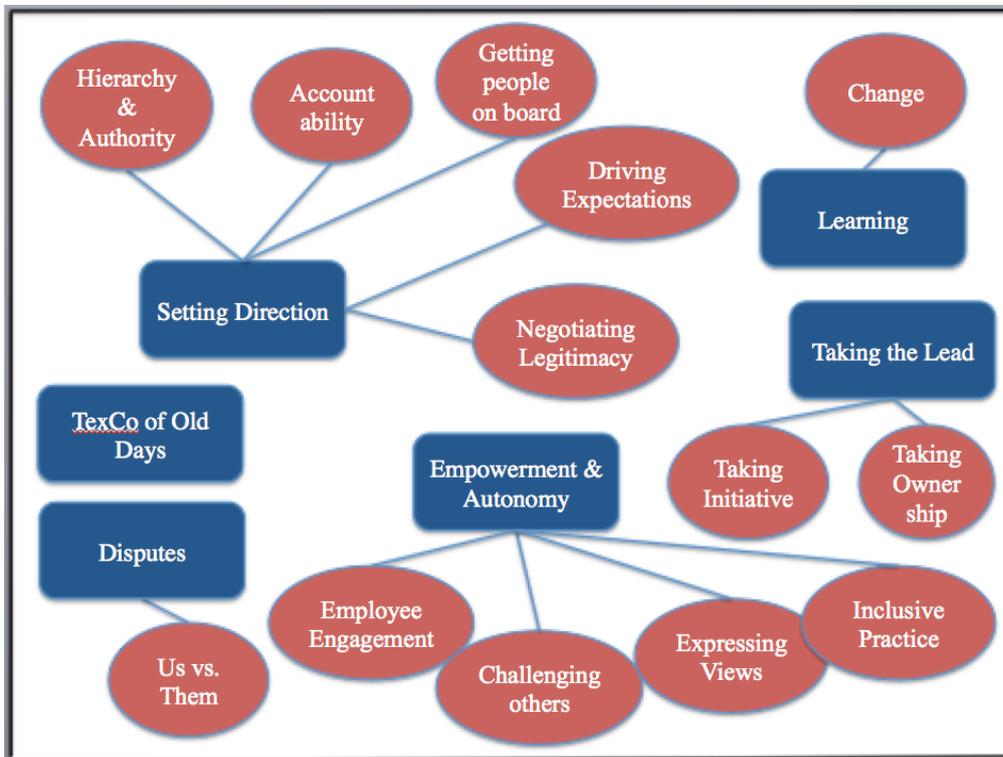


Figure 7 – First preliminary thematic map developed as part of Step 3.

To illustrate the themes briefly, ‘TexCo of Old Days’ referred to codes dealing with illustrations of the organisation in its days gone by, when it was still family-owned and exhibited a different culture – which I particularly debate in Findings Chapter 4.1. The theme ‘Disputes’ refers to conflicts, frustrations, diverging views, and conflicting agendas, which turned out to be insightful for the role of power dynamics and notions such as normativity. It also involved an apparent ‘us vs. them’ culture I encountered whilst in the field. The ‘Learning’ theme, moreover, comprises codes that illustrate how individuals become competent practitioners through socialisation endeavours, formal trainings such as personal development courses, being taught things by colleagues, as well as illustrating how the organisation has changed and evolved including actors’ mechanisms to cope with said changed environment (in relation to the old days) – to which the sub-theme ‘Change’ pays particular attention. ‘Empowerment & Autonomy’, meanwhile, is representative of how people are empowered to make things happen and

to work autonomously, in order to ‘make a meaningful impact’ to the organisation. Finally, both ‘Taking the Lead’ and ‘Setting Direction’ warrant some further elaboration vis-à-vis their relation to existing theory that I discussed in Chapter 2.2 in particular.

Although ‘Setting Direction’ was presented earlier as a theory-driven construct to define leadership (Chapter 2.2), the theme was nevertheless developed inductively. My definitions, in fact, were developed *after* my initial analysis, and thus based on an interplay of theory and data, to ensure fit between the two (cf. Crevani, 2015). That is, as I discuss below as part of Step 6, I went back to the literature to develop a heuristic to study both phenomena, and subsequently approached the data with said heuristic. The rationale for doing so only towards the end of my analysis was to ensure my exploratory capacity in spite of invariable theoretical preconceptions, and, as explained earlier, to not reduce the richness of the data, letting the empirical setting ‘kick back’ (see Alvesson, 1996). In that sense, although many data pieces in this theme can indeed be labelled leadership according to my definition set out in Chapter 2.2, it also comprises elements that do not directly speak to leadership as such, as not all codes allocated to ‘Setting Direction’ described a *change in the flow of practice*. Also, as the sub-themes demonstrate especially, much of the data within this theme can in fact be seen in relation to power dynamics rather than leadership (e.g. hierarchy and authority).

Similarly, as for the ‘Taking the Lead’, it describes people doing leadership with no particular reference to a specific definition. Instead, this theme was also developed inductively (e.g. how leadership was described by participants), albeit with a clear influence of existing literature read prior to fieldwork and analysis (thus my sensitizing framework above). The two sub-themes, ‘Taking Ownership’ and ‘Taking Initiative’, for example, were two omnipresent discourses I witnessed during my time in the field and ultimately in the data. The theme therefore involves ways of being (e.g. pro-activity, supportive), normative statements of how leadership should be practiced according to the research participants, such as avoiding dictatorship, ensuring things get accomplished (e.g. quality issues resolved), setting other people up for leadership (this is also overly apparent in the theme ‘Direction Setting’ – see below).

#### *(4) Reviewing Themes*

After having developed a broad thematic overview of the data set, I then proceeded to reviewing the themes for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This meant that certain themes possibly were not substantiated by the amount of data in them, or that themes (or sub-themes) were split into two, or two themes were collapsed into one – in order to further sort, tidy up, and summarise the data set according to the process set out by Braun and Clarke (2006; see also Ayres, 2008; Howitt and Cramer, 2014). As a consequence the thematic map presented above evolved and its complexity was reduced (Ayres, 2008).

A further, important issue at this stage was determining *prevalence* of themes – in other words, establishing with a reasonable amount of confidence that the themes are in fact reflective of the data set as a whole and thus credible (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Howitt and Cramer, 2014). Being an interpretive process, the researcher's judgement is a necessary guiding criterion here (Sandberg, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). Once more, regularly writing memos (Emerson et al., 1995; Tuckett, 2005; Nadin and Cassell, 2006) to keep track of how themes developed and related to the data set was a helpful reflexive practice, which I did throughout all phases of my analysis and also during fieldwork. Also, Step 4 itself served as a mechanism to establish whether prevalence can convincingly be argued, since themes are refined and rearranged, so that some themes may become stronger whilst others might pale or evaporate entirely if they were not powerful enough. In that sense, step 4 rectifies potential 'mistakes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Yet not only is the researcher's judgement of use, but that of our peers as well. Peers, thereby, may either mean academic peers, or the research participants themselves. Not only did I discuss my analysis and themes with fellow students and supervisors, went through reflective loops in terms of draft productions and subsequent discussions to guide further analysis; I also returned to the research site six months after data collection, meeting several of my 'key informants' (such as Patrick and Michelle, both Managers) in order to discuss and evaluate whether themes reflect in my participants view of reality – a technique referred to as 'respondent validation' (Silverman, 2011; see also Armstrong et al., 1997; Sandberg, 2005; Guest et al., 2012). This helped me to refine themes further on the one hand, and to confirm interpretations and thematic maps on the other (e.g. empowerment being a salient notion at TexCo).

(5) *Theme definition and labelling*

In this penultimate step, themes were further refined, and the researcher has to decide on what the theme in fact covers. This then may result in further refinement of themes, re-allocating codes or sub-themes, splitting up or collapsing themes to polish the map further. Based on Step 4, it is important that themes are clearly distinguishable (Howitt and Cramer, 2014). This resulted in my (almost) ‘final’ thematic map:

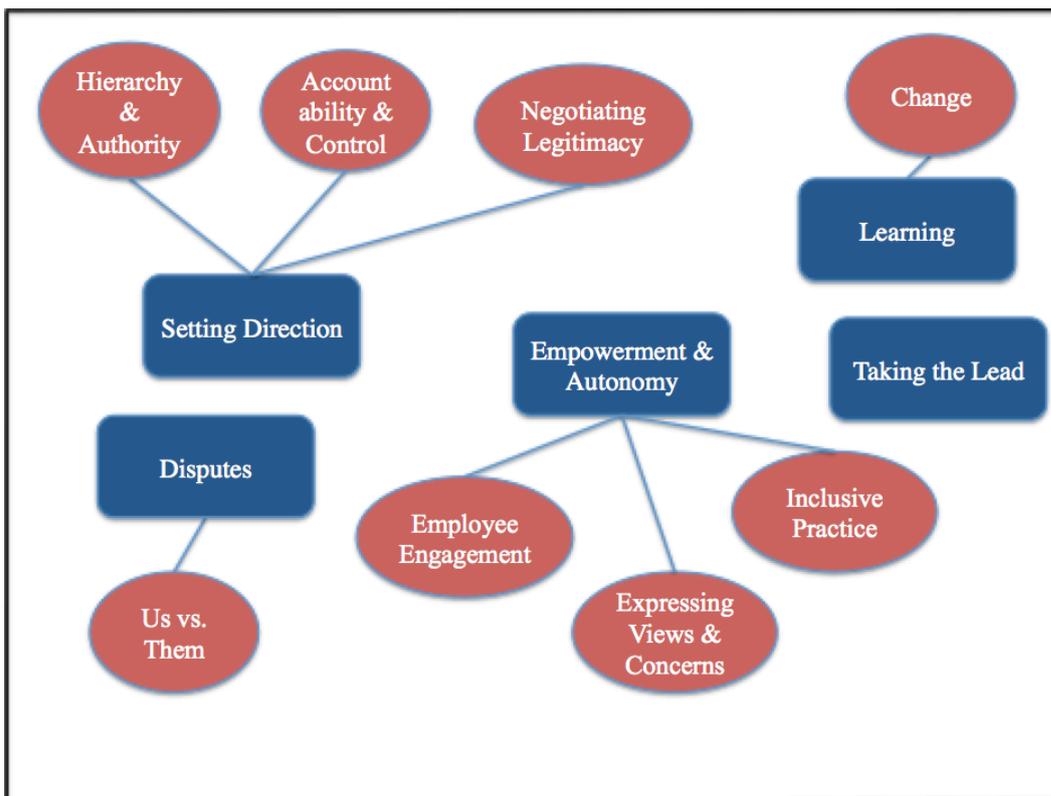


Figure 8 – (Almost) Final thematic map.

At this point, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest writing up the report – Step 6 in Figure 4. However, being not quite satisfied with the analysis yet, I added a *further step*. Inspired by Attride-Sterling (2001), I treated the above thematic map as a *network*, rather than viewing the themes in isolation. In other words, I operated on the hunch of investigating the relationship between the themes. To do so, I converted the existing map into a new thematic map that highlights the theme in a specific colour, and puts its sub-themes and ‘umbrella codes’ (i.e. a grouping of similar codes under an umbrella phrase, which is not substantial enough to be a sub-theme on its own; hence not in the above thematic maps) to *other* themes in order to highlight how they are related. This



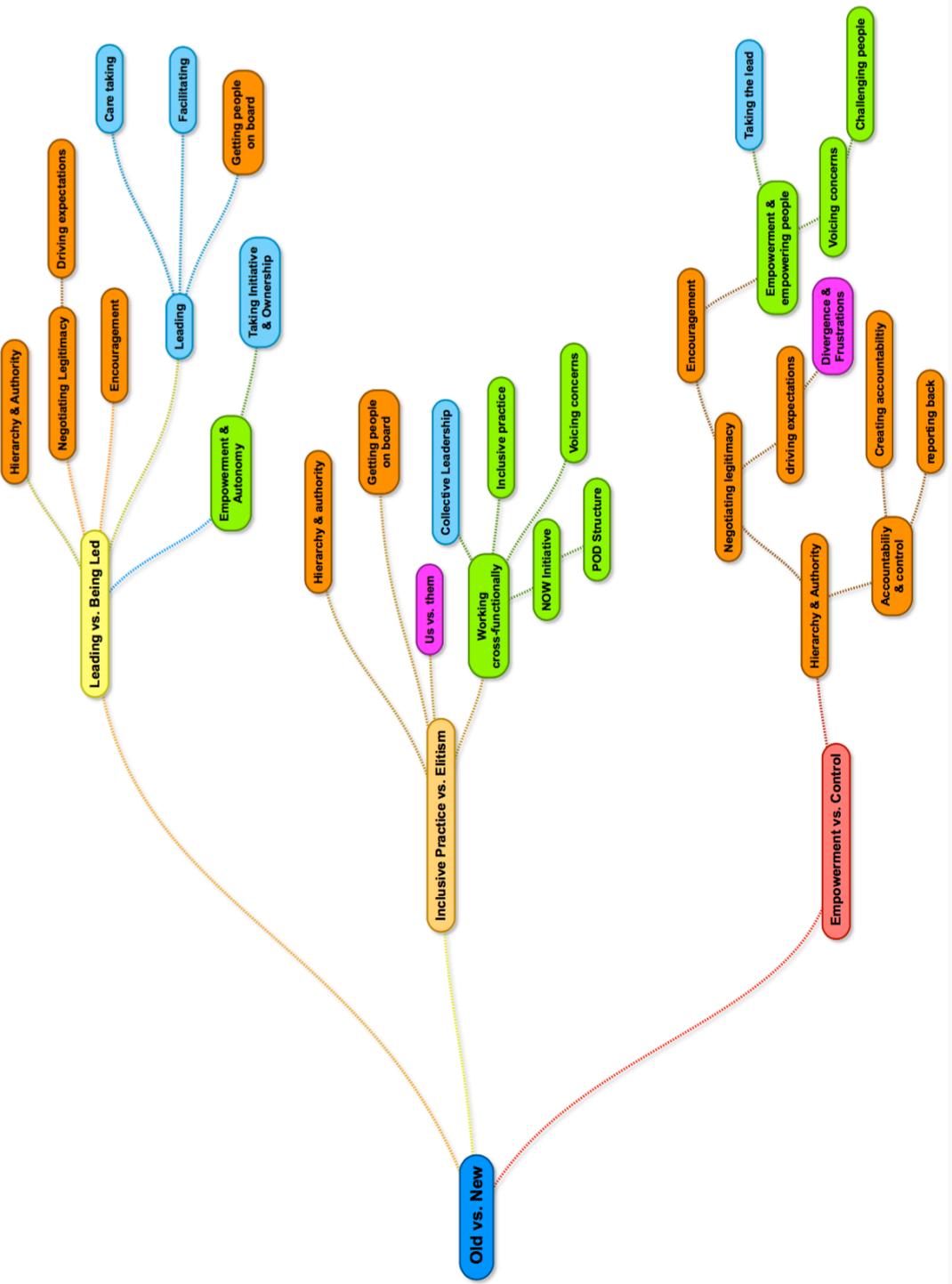
Further analysis of the relationships between themes led me to realise that all themes appear to overlap in some way. At the same time, this map displayed how the five previously separate themes now formed entirely new *thematic groups* – three in total, comprising elements from each previous theme. So much so that, through exploring their relationships further, e.g. through re-reading data and reviewing codes, they seemed to be in *contradiction*. For example, notions of ‘Setting Direction’ seemed to affect empowerment and autonomy via accountability and control. Simultaneously, however, empowerment and empowering people contributed to setting direction and negotiating legitimacy.

As I pointed out earlier (Section 3.2; Alvesson et al., 2008), instead of seeking to avoid contradictions and tensions or trying to remove them altogether, these should in fact be embraced in order to possibly afford deeper insight. Similarly, as several ethnographic writers note in relation to ‘abductive logic’ (see Sandberg, 2005; Van Maanen et al., 2007; Agar, 2010; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011; Yanow, 2012), one should welcome unmet expectations and surprises in the data. I therefore analysed the three new thematic groups identified in Figure 8 further, specifically concentrating on their contradictory relations.

I was thus able to identify two tensions within thematic groups I and II, respectively; i.e. ‘The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment’ (Group I), given the sub-themes of setting direction that stress notions of expectations, accountability, and hierarchy; and ‘inclusive practice & elitism’ (Group II), reflecting notions of working collaboratively on the one hand, and subtle forms of hierarchy and authority on the other. Further, I identified one tension between thematic group I & III (‘leading & being led’), based on the relationship between taking the lead through empowerment, and direction being set through authority and hierarchy. Moreover, given the focus of the thesis, I decided that the learning theme had to be re-considered and further refined. Considering the theme’s emphasis on how TexCo has changed and evolved, I discerned an *overarching* tension transpiring in all thematic groups, namely an interplay between the TexCo of the ‘old days’ and more contemporary practices – encapsulated in the tension ‘old & new’. In a practice-based sense, I was inspired to not treat these seemingly opposing relationships dichotomously, but as dualities instead (cf. Giddens,

1984; Smith and Lewis, 2011; Schad et al., 2016) given their recursive interplay – as shall also transpire in the findings in Chapter 4. This analysis of seemingly contradictory relationships resulted in a new and final thematic map, shown in Figure 10, which constitutes the way I present my findings in the following chapter, with the overarching theme of ‘old and new’ as a running thread.

Figure 10 – Final thematic map, illustrating particularly the tensions between different themes.



At some point the researcher needs to ‘return’ to theory in order to ensure relevancy for the research questions (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006); although as explained regarding my sensitizing framework, research questions and theory constitute a continuous influence on the direction the analysis may take. Fully embracing the notion of surprises and tensions referred to earlier, I sought to work inductively (as far as it is feasible to begin with) as long as possible (Sandberg, 2005). Since at this stage I, and also my supervisors (cf. Armstrong et al., 1997; Sandberg, 2005), considered my analysis to be ‘sufficiently sophisticated’, I then explicitly returned to the literature and my research questions. First, I considered how I could identify both leadership and power – a necessary step, as emphasised strongly in Chapter 2.2 and 2.3. With my *heuristic-type* definitions (see notion of ‘infra-language’, Chapter 2.2, 2.3) I then re-approached the themes in Figure 10 vis-à-vis my research questions – developing an understanding of how power dynamics were implicated in the work of leadership – in terms of re-reading data pieces and codes within each theme. This led me to identify three interrelated what I call ‘expressions of power’: shaping legitimacy, enablement and constraint, as well as inclusion and exclusion. Although these expressions of power appear in all, each theme stressed one expression in particular. Through attending to leadership specifically I also realised that leadership is in fact part of all themes, meaning that a separate theme attending to leadership specifically (‘Leading and Being Led’) was redundant. I thus collapsed this theme into all other three.

I then proceeded to Step 7 (Step 6 in Braun and Clarke’s process), i.e. writing the findings, in which I explore ‘old & new’ as an overarching and contextualising theme, whilst ‘The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment’ as well as ‘inclusive practice & elitism’ represent two further sections of the findings chapter – presented next. The way I treated theory in my analysis, as described in this paragraph, is also reflected in the presentation of findings. Namely, in each section I first explore said themes in an inductive and ethnographic fashion (see Section 3.2), and thereafter comment on how leadership and power dynamics transpire in each of these themes in terms of said three expressions, which in turn sets up debates for my discussion in Chapter 5.

### 3.4 Beyond Validity & Reliability

Both validity and reliability constitute important criteria to assess the knowledge claims produced by research; i.e. the integrity of the findings (validity), as well as the extent to which the results can be repeated (reliability) (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Sandberg, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Guest et al., 2012). However, as I indicated in Section 3.1, these criteria assume that the world and knowledge about it is objective, meaning that truth claims can accurately be assessed. In other words, as measures ‘imported’ from positivism, they are problematic in qualitative and particularly interpretive research (Sandberg, 2005; Shah and Gorley, 2006). To conclude this methodology chapter, therefore, I briefly comment on validity and reliability notions, which as important issues I hinted at throughout the chapter, and how they can be perceived in an interpretive study.

Some qualitative scholars nonetheless argue for maintaining validity and reliability regardless of the methodology applied and in spite of its underlying positivistic assumptions (e.g. Morse et al., 2002; Silverman, 2011; Guest et al., 2012). However, if as proposed earlier truth is multiple instead of absolute, how can we say that a truth claim is ‘valid’, and that the way we arrived at it is completely ‘reliable’? It is for this reason that I echo the view of applying alternative measures to assess and justify knowledge produced via interpretive approaches (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Shah and Gorley, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Indeed, as Sandberg (2005: 62) suggests, “although objective knowledge is untenable, it is still possible to make truth claims consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the approach to interpretative research.” To assess said truth claims, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) landmark publication is particularly useful. Lincoln and Guba propose four criteria for ensuring rigour in qualitative research: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (see also Shah and Gorley, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

To achieve credibility, prolonged *engagement* in the field is required, which, as suggested in Section 3.2, constitutes a key characteristic of ethnography and was achieved in this thesis. However, some argue that mere engagement is not sufficient (see Silverman, 2011). Based on Lincoln and Guba (1985), Shah and Gorley (2006) therefore suggest the use of multiple methods, which is commonly referred to as

*triangulation* (Agar, 1980; Sandberg, 2005; Jonson and Jehn, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Silverman, 2011; Guest et al., 2012). Since people may say and do different things, I indeed deployed both participant observations and supplemented these with several forms of interviews. A further major technique to ensure credibility is *peer involvement*, i.e. discussing findings and interpretations thereof with colleagues (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Armstrong et al., 1997; Sandberg, 2005; Shah and Gorley, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011). To assess prevalence of my themes, for instance, it was not only my judgement at play (Sandberg, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012), but also that of fellow students who also engaged in ethnographic work and thematic analysis, as well as my supervisors. A similar and popular means is taking the findings back to the research participants, called ‘respondent validation’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Sandberg, 2005; Shah and Gorley, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Silverman, 2011). To do so I regularly discussed my interpretations of things with my research participants during my time in the field (e.g. with Jack; see Section 3.2), and also went back to the research site to present and discuss my themes in order to ensure that they were credible (see Step 4, Section 3.3). Finally, an important issue is transparency of the research process (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Guest et al., 2012), which this methodology chapter itself is a testimony to. In fact, transparency in terms of an ‘audit approach’ – i.e. keeping records of steps taken and decisions made, data, etc. – also pertains to dependability, which represents a parallel reliability (see Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Transferability, meanwhile, accounts for the virtue of the contextual richness and uniqueness of qualitative findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Qualitative researchers are therefore encouraged to produce accounts that contain ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) of the data. I referred to this necessity in relation to the centrality of textwork in ethnographic endeavours in order to invoke a sense of participation and immersion (Section 3.2). For Lincoln and Guba (1985), thick descriptions provide “others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux” (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 398). Such descriptions of social encounters at and of TexCo, therefore, are offered in Chapter 4 in the form of several vignettes that illustrate my immersion in the setting.

Finally, confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher “has not overly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it” (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 398). At the same time, however, I echoed several scholars, arguing that as researchers we inevitably operate within certain beliefs, assumptions, and theoretical preconceptions (e.g. Cunliffe, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Yanow, 2012). To ensure confirmability, therefore, I proposed reflexivity to be all the more important in order to assess my values and impact on the setting and interpretations (Cunliffe, 2003; Sandberg, 2005; Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2011; Silverman, 2011), such as through the use of my sensitising framework, regularly keeping a diary, as well as embracing contradictions and tensions (see Section 3.2, 3.3; Sandberg, 2005; Nadin and Cassell, 2006).

### 3.5 Summary

In summary, the preceding three sections – research philosophy, data collection, data analysis – illustrate my overall research design applied to answer my research questions, which I illustrated also in terms of my ‘thematic map’ towards the end of Section 3.1.

In terms of my *research philosophy*, I adopted a perspective that argues practices are constitutive of the social world and hence social reality. At the same time, since this world comes into being via everyday enactments of practice, it is at the same time socially constructed. Since this means that actors cannot be separated from the world, the ontology adopted is subjective. Indeed, as actors, including researchers, we are always entwined rather than separate from the world. Concurrently this means that there are always multiple interpretations about the world, and that it can only be known through participation in it – exhibiting implications for my epistemological position. That is, in line with other practice scholars, I adopted an interpretivist approach to knowledge, suggesting that as part of my research I am mainly interested in the possible and indeed multiple meanings of social phenomena. The implications of such a constructionist-interpretivist philosophy, for instance, pertained to working inductively and reflexively in both data collection and analysis.

A further vital implication of this philosophy is a *qualitative methodology*. Whilst possibilities are multiple, I adopted an ethnographic approach because of its power to engage the mundane nature of everyday life in organisations and its interest in local knowledge, practices and culture. Moreover, ethnography ‘violates’ the fundamental idea of positivism, ontological objectivity, through externality and detachment. I therefore immersed myself for five and a half months in a British textiles’ organisation, TexCo.

The core *methods* of ethnography, meanwhile, constitute daily and ongoing participant observations. Fieldnotes (*n=250 pages in a Word document*), therefore, were my primary source of data. As common practice though, ethnographers are fond of supplementing observations with several interview techniques. I thus conducted 39 semi-structured, unstructured, as well as ‘interviews to the double’ (a technique aimed at foregrounding moral and normative dimensions of practices). Because of my close

participation in the local setting, moreover, I also kept a reflexive diary. This became a habit so much so that the diary and memos were a tremendous aid during data analysis.

To *analyse my data* subsequent to gathering it, I opted for a thematic analysis, since it works particularly well with the ethnographic virtue of induction and flexibility. Also, I found thematic analysis to be overly systematic, helping to ensure confirmability of the study – which is particularly delicate in interpretative philosophy and qualitative methodologies (see Guest et al., 2012). I hence followed a six-step process model, which was nonetheless fluid and iterative rather than rigid and linear. In my particular case I in fact added a step between write up and defining the different themes: namely to conceptualise and analyse the relations between the themes. The process I undertook was as follows. As a first step I familiarised myself with the data set, which occurred mainly during data collection (e.g. via transcribing interviews) already. Next, I inductively coded the entire data set, after which I analysed it for patterns and similarities in order to draft a preliminary set of themes. Once these themes were in place, I continuously reviewed the themes for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity before eventually establishing the (semi) final themes. Normally, one would now write up the report of the themes (i.e. the findings section of a thesis). However, as mentioned, I inserted the step of analysing the relations of the themes. This yielded three interrelated thematic groups instead of as previously five distinct themes. From these groups several tensions appeared, which I explored further and narrowed down to three, and interrogated vis-à-vis existing theory and my research questions; which eventually constitute the way I present my findings in the next chapter; namely, ‘Old & New’, ‘The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment’, as well as ‘Inclusive Practice & Elitism’. At the end of each section, moreover, I comment on how each theme indicates the relationship of leadership and power dynamics.

## 4. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present my empirical account based on the methodology outlined in the foregoing chapter. This findings chapter in turn consists of three main sections. In the first section, Contextual Background (4.1), I set the scene for the ethnography, and primarily discuss the ways in which TexCo's practices have evolved through said change initiative – in order to shed light on the practices of the present. In the second section, The 'Boundedness' of Empowerment (4.2), I explore the ways in which empowerment was enacted at TexCo, how it is produced to begin with and how it might be limited. This involves examining a puzzling contradiction: is empowerment in fact generated through notions of authority, accountability, and legitimacy? Lastly, in the third section, Inclusive Practice & Elitism (4.3), I delve into the ways in which empowerment translates into opportunities to participate in certain practices, and how simultaneously notions of authority and hierarchy shape these opportunities. In other words, I examine a tension between working inclusively and collaboratively on the one hand, and how merely a handful of 'powerful' actors shaped the ways in which work gets performed on the other.

These three sections combined comprise 11 vignettes, which as suggested in Chapter 3 are supplemented with further observational and interview material, as well as recollections of events. Also, I continue my inductive and data-driven approach for the time being, by presenting the data as largely un-theorised. Whilst not engaging explicitly with the literature yet, I do return to a more theory-driven approach at the end of each section, in order to illuminate how power and leadership dynamics were evident in the data presented beforehand.

As also mentioned previously, my analysis reveals three major 'expressions' of power: shaping norms, enablement and constraint, as well as inclusion and exclusion. Although these expressions are evident in each of the sections, they map nicely on 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, respectively. Therefore, at the end of each section, I concentrate on one expression in particular, discussing how it is evident in the data presented. For future reference and clarity, Table 6 lists every main character that appears in this chapter, including the position held by the individual.

<b>Character</b>	<b>Position held</b>
Jack	CEO
Maria	POD Manager
Patrick	POD Manager
Jacob	POD Manager
Kelly	POD Manager
Igor	Product Development Manager
Phil	Product technician, reporting to Igor
Madeleine	POD assistant to Patrick
Keith	In charge of Composites' POD shop floor
Garry	In charge of machine maintenance
Linda	Director of operations
Lucy	Production/Purchasing scheduling
Donald	Product development
Adrian	Assisting Lucy with scheduling
Arianne	Receptionist
Abigail	Formerly in charge of production scheduling, now quality testing
Kacy	Customer service representative
James	Quality engineer

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Table 6 –Main ‘plot characters’. POD, thereby, is what TexCo refer to as a Business Unit.

## 4.1 Contextual Background

In this section I am going to introduce several intriguing aspects of organisational life at TexCo in order to set the scene for the stories to follow in subsequent sections. Specifically, this section is divided into three main parts. First, I explore the practices that a substantial change initiative has aspired to engender, a major aspect of which was introducing notions of empowerment and inclusivity to TexCo's practices. I put these notions up for debate, and also scrutinise the material appearance of TexCo that, as it turns out, played a pivotal role in engendering said ethos.

The second part of this section constitutes a detour into TexCo's history books. I delve into the apparent practices of the organisation's past, which, allegedly, have little similarities to the ones of the present. Part of this examination is also a brief elaboration on an apparent 'us vs. them' culture at TexCo, with the office and shop floor as 'opposing camps'. Not accepting the assertion of a difference like day and night at face value, the final part of this section goes on to examine how TexCo's past may inherently creep into the practices of the present. To interrogate this interplay between past and present, I attend to the driving forces of the change initiative, especially the subtle yet significant exercise of power particularly by the organisation's CEO. I therefore challenge the notions of inclusivity and empowerment that constitute such prevalent discourses at TexCo. In this way, the final part opens the floor for debating whether the TexCo's ethos has truly changed, and if so to what extent their past is intertwined with the present.

To delve into the findings, in the first vignette I recall my first arrival at TexCo, and introduce notions I picked up, some of which subtle and others obvious, which turned out to be particularly illustrative for illuminating TexCo in a critical light.

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It's my first day of fieldwork and I'm thoroughly excited for this new phase of my research. I'm supposed to be at TexCo at 9.30am, which is an hour later than normal start of business. I don't think much of it since it is my first day. Thrilled I hurry to the bus station to take the 42 that will take me across the wet and bumpy country roads almost right to TexCo's doorstep. I merely have to walk 2 minutes until I finally see a massive sign saying 'TexCo – an employee owned company' on a brick wall. The wall is at the entrance road, which goes on for about 100 metres until it is blocked by an open iron gate. Behind the gate is the parking lot, next to which is a golf course. I wonder if these people ever get their cars hit by balls, and I shall soon learn that I'm

right. I eagerly walk across the parking lot and along the golf course, which is separated by an about two metre high, greenish fence. After a good further 50 metres a massive and almost anciently industrial manufacturing hall or warehouse begins.

I walk towards and pass by it to my left. I pass the canteen and a blue metal door with a black card-reading device to its left – it must be a door only for staff I figure. There are no signs next to it. The building so far reminds me of an old train station. Through the canteen windows I spot shop floor workers in blue overalls sitting on dusty tables eating their breakfasts. It feels like they are waiting for the next train that gets them to work. A few more steps and I come to a halt and turn to my left. I now stand right in front of the strikingly inconspicuous reception. Instead of a pompous, inviting sight it is just the opposite. If it weren't for the sign reading 'Reception' I would have walked right past it towards the end of the premises, where there is only woods and grass until there is the ocean. 'Seems like they don't want to be easily found', I'm thinking.

Facing the reception, I look at another red brick wall, which turns into corrugated iron walls rising at least ten metres to the sky. The wall reveals a door, however, with two windows right and left. Slightly nervous I enter the door unknowing of what to expect – certainly anything but this. I find myself standing in a completely refurbished, modern looking space. Dark grey walls, fancy furniture, a wall plastered with pictures of employees, and a little reception desk to my right, of course, at which I meet a kind lady who introduces herself as Arianne. I approach her telling her my name and start to explain what it is I am here for. After a brief introductory chat exchanging the commonplace niceties she begins to print out some documents and prepares everything for my induction. In the meantime the appearance of the room behind the reception continues to baffle me. The reception entrance and the room behind it are not separated in fact.

Later on as we pass the reception desk we take two steps and find ourselves in what TexCo calls the 'Museum room'. It is a very large, rectangular room with dark grey walls and light grey floors. In the middle there is a massive glass box within which there is a large white conference table with fancy looking white chairs around it and a large TV flat screen at the table's left head. In the meeting room, in which they host visitors as I learn later, the floor is covered with green artificial grass like on a football pitch. The grey walls of the Museum room I find particularly fascinating. They exhibit a timeline of major milestones from the company's history such as its founding, invention of major products, international expansion (and later downsizing), or more recently, the move from family to employee ownership. A fundamental part to play in this transition was the NOW team (New Opportunities Within) – an initiative that sought to change the culture of the organisation from autocratic and disempowering to an inclusive and empowering environment. Information about the initiative is awarded space on the wall accordingly.

The NOW team is described on the wall as "a team of non-hierarchical colleagues" that collaborated with the objective to create a "culture of innovation". The quote on the wall further reads: "The aim of this project was to unlock potentials otherwise unrecognised within the company and to develop **new ways of working** and ways of interpretation of the business to improve profit and stability" (emphasis original).

I discover even more intriguing quotes on the wall:

*“You’ve got a **voice** in this process. You’ve got something to say, **say it**. And that works for us as a business” (Jack, CEO – emphasis original)*

*“The **entire team** is more involved and I think we are at the stage of **spreading the word**” (Kacy, Sales Administrator – emphasis original).*

*“An employee owned company shares **knowledge, power and rewards**.” (Unknown – emphasis original)*

In another picture on the museum wall, it’s noted what TexCo call the “Ripple Effect”. Embedding this newly ‘invented’ culture was seen as the greatest challenge to the NOW team. It says:

*“The mind sets of employees who were used to working in certain ways needed to be changed and they needed to be encouraged to be **open-minded**, get involved, share knowledge and understand others working methods. Include? The POD structure within TexCo has set about doing this and continues to embed this culture through the ‘ripple’ effect.” (emphasis original).*

“Now this is interesting”, I say intrigued as Adrienne and I pass the room towards a door on its right hand side which has the same colour as the wall. I wouldn’t even have spotted it if Arianne would not led the way.

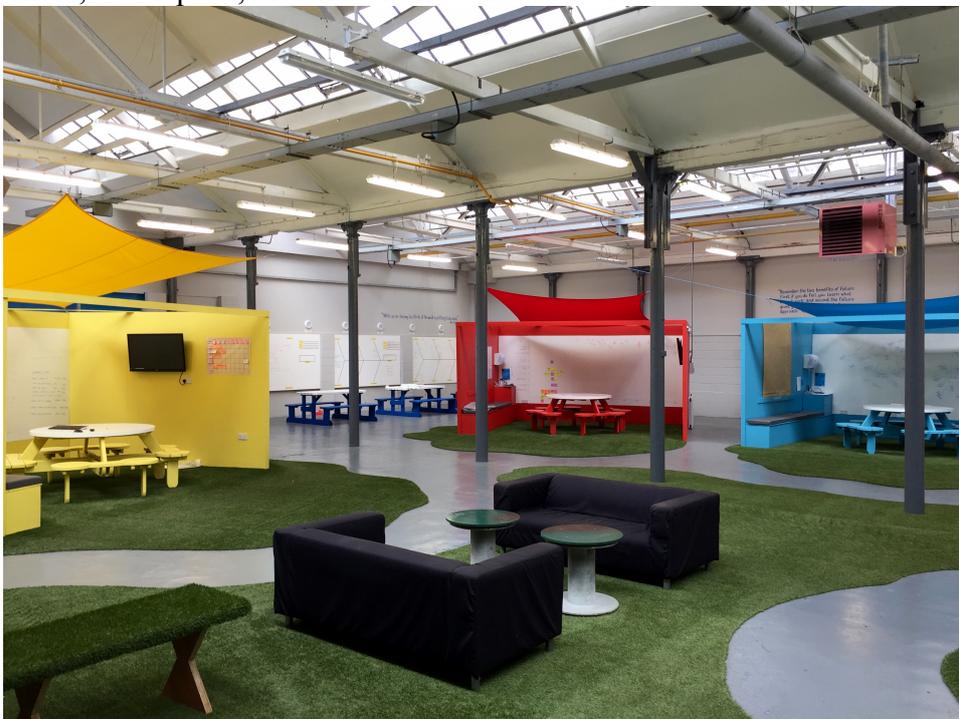
“It is, isn’t it?” She says smilingly as if she is used to newcomers making some remark about the room, and opens the inconspicuous grey door that leads to the office.

I enter, and find myself in a massive room that is actually an old shop floor hall, rectangular shaped and high ceilings, with table groups of four tables each on the right and left side. Here as well the floor is covered with artificial grass, except in the middle of the hall where there is a path that leads in between the table groups towards the back of the hall where there is the kitchen and a cinema-like auditorium where Jack, the CEO, conducts company presentations. From one side to the other of the room I notice several colourful canvasses being bow-taut. They are in the same colour as the wall to the right, which exhibits panels in yellow, red, green and blue. It’s an extremely colourful place that reminds me of the offices at Google.



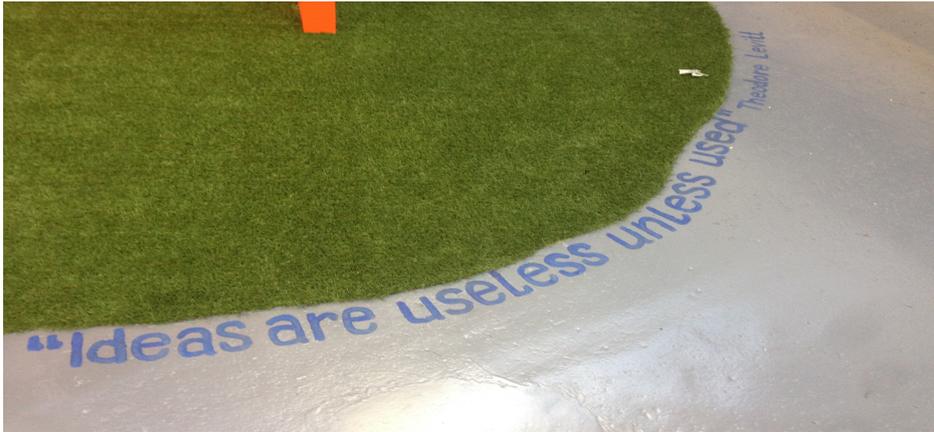
Photograph 1 – The office entrance viewed from the POD hall. The tree in the picture displays samples of new products introduced since the NOW Initiative and is called ‘innovation tree’.

The office is absolutely deserted, and hardly any of the few folks I can spot notice or care about my arrival. My face must say ‘where the hell is everybody?’, since Arianne explains “Yeah not many people are here today as you can see. They are all on a retreat to discuss next year’s strategy.” It turns out all the *important* people are away to develop the strategy. Before Arianne introduces me to everybody present later on, she first leads me to the left where there is another old shop floor hall, an annex hall to the office, so to speak, in which there is the POD area.



Photograph 2 – The ‘POD area’. Each POD, essentially a business unit, has its own homeport, where they conduct meetings or retreat for certain tasks such as doing research or brainstorming.

Arianne sets me up at the yellow POD – the homeport of the Composites business unit. I unpack all my stuff while she hurries away to fetch somebody from IT to set me up into the network and to get a coffee for the both of us, which we are going to have over sorting out the induction bureaucracy. Whilst I wait I let my eyes wander across the room, and notice several quotes on the walls: “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower” – apparently once said by the late Steve Jobs. Or: “Remember the two benefits of failure. First, if you do fail, you learn what doesn’t work; and second, the failure gives you the opportunity to try a new approach” – Roger Von Oech. There is even a quote by Theodore Levitt painted on the *floor*.



Photograph 3 – Office quotes.

This must indeed be part of ‘creating’, if not enforcing, a new culture – a notion I find overly intriguing and one that I shall stumble upon many times in the near future.

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Vignette 1 – You’ve got a voice.

The foregoing vignette illustrated my first arrival at TexCo, and introduced a number of subtle yet significant plot issues that will resurface throughout the findings chapter, and that I am going to introduce further in this discussion. To begin, however, I provide more detail about the NOW Initiative. As indicated in the vignette, the NOW Team’s (consisting of 12 diverse employees) remit was to engender collaborative and creative ways of working – distilled in the phrase ‘culture of innovation’. While the vignette unequivocally points to TexCo’s fascinating material appearance, achieving this involved much more than a redecorating job that was supposed to help engender the new culture. Aside from developing new and innovative product ideas, part of this initiative was a fundamental restructuring effort that resulted in 5 PODs – essentially business units – that are led and are solely comprised by one manager, who is responsible for the operational and strategic delivery of that business, including profit responsibility. All other employees in the office (e.g. working in scheduling, product

development, customer representative, director of operations etc.) work for all PODs at the same time. In other words, TexCo nowadays embraces working in cross-functional teams rather than rigid departments.

Similarly, TexCo has an inclination of not doing explicit job descriptions. Although people do have a certain remit (e.g. administrating customer enquiries, being a receptionist, or managing product development), given the cross-functional way they work it is expected that one gets involved in activities that go beyond ones' ordinary tasks. Lucy, for instance, took over the scheduling job for the company, but is still involved with assisting James in the quality testing she did before. Similarly, Madeleine, who is actually an assistant in running the POD for Patrick, was also asked by Jack, the CEO, to take care of TexCo digital marketing activities such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Aside from her actual tasks I have spotted her many times composing Tweets and asking colleagues for content ideas.

The focus on working cross-functionally allegedly removed layers of hierarchy and created a great deal of empowerment and the requirement to work autonomously. Indeed, the most profound purpose of the NOW initiative was to create and engender said 'culture of innovation', which precisely rests on embracing such notions of collaboration, taking initiative, flat hierarchies, staff empowerment and having as well as sharing conflicting views. The sentiment the NOW Initiative sought to engender is well reflected in the following vignette, in which I describe how Keith, a machine operator in charge of the Composites POD's shop floor, took the initiative to solve a problem. It specifically shows empowerment to autonomously do certain things (i.e. taking the initiative to solve a problem), collaboration, and ultimately flat hierarchies as there were no authority figures involved.

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The afternoon is slowly coming to an end as I sink deeper into my chair of an utterly quiet if not to say boring day. I'm about to pack my stuff expecting Jack, who gives me a lift, to come down from his office shortly when suddenly Keith excitedly approaches Lucy's desk. She has recently taken charge of the company's production scheduling activities. Keith, a tall fellow with short blonde hair and thin like a stick, to me always came across tired as if he's been running machines all night. I have been told about him a few times, though in unrelated matters, that he used to be a rather low regarded machine operator, but through the years it transpired that he is in fact an overly capable one. Given his appearance as quite sluggish I can relate to people's impressions.

Keith is now standing at Lucy's desk to share some news as it seems. He has checked the forecast, I eavesdrop, and has realised that they will be running out of extrusion line (a material they make in another shop floor department, that goes into the production of a Composites product). "I just wanted to let you know—" Keith says, but Lucy interrupts him.

"Thanks", Lucy says, "I'll check what I can do about it." Yet Keith, it turns out, has already taken care of that. "I already did", he replies. "With the current scheduling we won't get the extrusion line in time for what I need to make next. So we need to reschedule the other (that produce the lines he needs) machines. I thought the guys might be able to work overtime." "Okay, I'll check", says Lucy.

"Did that, too", Keith announces proudly. He has already worked out a plan with the guys about how to reschedule, so that he gets his lines in time. News of Keith's behaviour travels fast. The next morning in the car on the way to the office, Jack referred to this very instance. "This is exactly what we're trying to achieve here", he said with pride and delight swinging in his voice.

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Vignette 2 – Taking the Initiative.

In this brief vignette, Keith encountered a problem that interrupted his normal routine. He could have either done nothing and waited for Lucy, in charge of scheduling and ensuring raw material supplies, to notice the shortfall and buy new materials; or he could have let Lucy know about the shortfall and do nothing otherwise. Instead, Keith chose to solve the problem by himself by making Lucy aware of the issue, revamping scheduling so that it matches production needs, and getting machine operators on board in other departments to make his plan work. In other words, rather than waiting to be told what to do, Keith *took the initiative* to get ahead of the problem before it actually became one, in spite of such actions being beyond his ordinary remit. It's a notion of pro-activity rather than passiveness. By extension, I found Keith actions to indicate that leadership is not principally a concept reserved for managerial elites. Instead, as section 4 of this chapter will demonstrate, I encountered leadership as a collective practice (cf. Raelin, 2011a).

The previous paragraph is a reading in accordance with what the NOW Initiative sought to achieve: engendering a way of doing things in which staff take initiative to 'make an impact', collaborate with each other, and independent from formal authority. However, this anecdote may not only be read through the uncritical lens of 'culture of innovation'. Consider instead the notion of expectations. Towards the end we hear Jack saying that Keith's practice is 'exactly what we're trying to achieve here' – a phrase that he used more than once (with reference to other incidents), suggesting this to be the

‘desired’ way of working. In fact, others up and down the hierarchy also bombarded me with expectation-laden statements such as Jack’s, suggesting that ‘people are supposed to make an impact here’, or ‘you have to take initiative’, and ‘we need people to take ownership’. People who do so, I was told by Jack, are “the formula for success”. In one of our interviews, Phil, a product technician in no particular authority position, put it in almost patriotic words:

The ones that stand back and go ‘pfff, that’s somebody else’s decision.’ Well, maybe in some cases it is somebody else’s decision, but you have to make the decision to go and ask the right questions. Don’t stand there waiting for someone else to come and tell you. (...) it’s like the old Kennedy quote, ‘don’t think what your country can do for you. What can you do for your country?’ So...it pretty much applies here as well, because if you’re waiting for everybody else to do something for you, sooner or later what they’re going to do for you is show you the gate (laughs) (Phil, Product Technician).

Phil’s comment offers a glimpse into the normative and moral dimension of what he considers ‘good practice’; namely, pro-actively questioning things, and, as mentioned, getting involved with things that may not directly fall into the boundaries of one’s immediate remit. Initially one may think of Keith as ‘going the extra mile’. Yet, if his activities are considered the norm it is altogether questionable whether going the extra mile is in fact taking the initiative.

The notion of expectations is in fact prevalent in the vignette of my arrival, particularly in terms of TexCo’s material appearance and hence the way they present themselves. For instance, the museum room and innovation space in particular almost scream ‘we are innovative!’, indicating a protest against being traditional, industrial, or old fashioned (virtually everything TexCo used to be in the past, as the next vignette shall discuss). In that sense, part of presenting who and what you want to be also involves establishing who and what you *do not* want to be.

To achieve and perpetuate this sense of identity, the new and bright material appearance may be seen as a subtle but effective face of power. For example, supposed to engender a collaborative and creative way of working, the innovation space in all its colours, its roundtables and whiteboards for brainstorming, artificial grass and quotes on the wall, says not only ‘this is who we are now’, but also ‘this is who *you* need to be or become accordingly’. The museum room is a case in point. It shows a deliberate

portrayal of the way TexCo allegedly operates: they embrace flat hierarchies and staff empowerment; people have a voice in the process of change and are *encouraged* to use it.

If we accept Foucault's (1980) proposal that power is everywhere, we are compelled to critically question these quotes. In other words, in one way or another power dynamics are ultimately present even, or perhaps particularly, when it is stressed so vigorously that TexCo's staff members are empowered. Empowered by whom, and to do what? If power is shared rather than concentrated, does this imply expectations towards 'ordinary staff members' to make use of that power? Encouraging people to 'make use' of their empowerment, I soon realised, indeed engenders certain expectations. Power through expectations, in this sense, would imply a camouflaged 'power over', but power no less.

Considering the expectation-laden sentiment presented by the vignette and offered by other commentators I see the quotes about empowerment and voice presented in the museum room to be shining in quite a different light. Are people empowered to work as autonomously like Keith, or are they simply expected to do so and hence not empowered at all? People are *given* empowerment on the one hand, but are expected to capitalise on it on the other. In that regard, as section 2 (The 'Boundedness' of Empowerment) shall explore in detail, I discovered a paradoxical duality between empowerment to do certain things, and its boundedness in the sense of normative expectations that constrain from doing other things. What follows is a short vignette of the potential consequences of not complying with said expectations, which describes one of my frequent rides to and from work together with Jack.

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I sit in the passengers' seat of Jack's 1967 Jaguar E-Type, a beautiful white car with red leather seats. It has no seatbelts, and in combination with its candle-like headlights and bumpy and narrow country roads, the ride home makes me slightly uneasy. Jack's racy style of driving certainly does not help. Jack is a funny chap, and I enjoy my rides to and from TexCo with him – not least because riding in this car is a delight (more so during the day), but also because his stories are mostly amusing and often intriguing. Tonight Jack is quite disappointed by an employee just recently hired, Adrian. "We're going to sack him", he says indifferently as he overtakes another car. He's keen to get home. We talked about Adrian a lot recently, who was brought in to assist Lucy, who just took over TexCo's scheduling activities. In Jack and Lucy's opinion he is just a too passive kind of worker. Adrian, Jack explained, waits for others to tell him what to do

instead of “taking the initiative” by himself. Jack confronted Adrian with this mismatch of working styles, but as it turned out nothing changed thereafter. “You know”, Jack says and gestures randomly with his right hand before he shifts gears “some people just want to be told precisely what to do, and then go about and do it.” He seems unimpressed by that attitude. In his view, this is actually a vivid reflection of a working style characteristic of the “old days”. “It was culture where you wait for the bell to ring. If the bell rings you dance, but before it rings you do nothing”, Jack says to me taking his eyes off the road for an uncomfortably long time. Adrian, apparently, was not fit to dance without the music and has indeed been shown the gate. “Not everybody needs to change the world, but everybody needs to want to change the world”, Jack says as we’ve finally arrived in one piece. He stops the car a few metres away from my front door. This was the last time we ever spoke about Adrian. A few months later on the way to my office I passed the taxi stand at the bus station and was startled to recognise Adrian sitting in one of the taxi’s reading the newspaper, awaiting the next fare.

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Vignette 3 – Waiting for the bell to ring.

In sum, in this first section we have encountered the NOW Initiative and the ethos it has aimed to create. A major aspect of Vignette 1 has been TexCo’s telling material appearance that was part of engendering said ethos. This appearance carries a particular sense of identity that guides what kind of organisation TexCo does and does not want to be. It may initially seem trivial, but points to significant underlying power relations when critically examined. Similarly, while the sentiment of the NOW Initiative and ‘culture of innovation’ may seem compelling, this section has aimed to offer a more critical reading of the notions presented by TexCo. I thus pointed out a paradoxical interplay between empowerment on the one hand and disempowerment on the other. In a sense, where there is light, there is also shadow.

Indeed, not only is there a shadow looming over empowerment in the form of managerial control, but also in terms of the old days haunting the present. The ways of practicing under the ethos of a ‘culture of innovation’, whether empowerment or camouflaged ‘power over’, are a relatively new phenomenon at TexCo. Up until about five years ago, the company used to function in a different manner, when TexCo was run by ‘the family’, that had a different notion of doing things. As Turner (1994) believes, conventional wisdom of the present is usually to be found in the faces of the past. The next vignette, therefore, delves into TexCo’s history books to explore the past.

### 4.1.1 The Old Days

As the following descriptions shall illustrate, in my perception TexCo has undoubtedly changed – materially and culturally (i.e. in terms of how work is carried out). More ambiguous, however, is the *extent* to which they have (and *how* they have managed to do so, explored by section 1.4 subsequently). The more time I spent in the field, the more I realised the TexCo of old to dance with the new in the sense that previous ways of doings still transpire in new arrangements of how things are supposed to be done. In the first vignette above, for example, this is well reflected by the contrast of appearance from outside to inside. One minute I faced old brick and plate walls, and in the next I found myself in an office displaying an overwhelming brightness. This material contrast is continued in the inside of the building as well, as the following vignette reveals:

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Patrick is visiting a few customers down south today, so this morning I sit at his desk. The office fills up slowly as people begin to slurp to their desks. I have taken off my soaking wet shoes and socks to dry them on the radiator. I feel like I took a canoe instead of the 42 bus this morning. The next time it rains like this I need to take my life vest, I'm thinking irritated. 'What's that smell...?' Lucy teases me as she walks by and notices my bare feet. Very funny, we're all having a laugh.

After a little while my belongings seem dry enough to finally pay the bathroom a visit (I didn't dare barefoot). It is quite a stroll for a body chilled with damp morning cold. Passing the desks, across the POD area and through a blue metal door situated in a wall with overly high ceilings, so inconspicuous one may think it leads into a storage unit for office supplies (which is in fact at the other end of the hall next to the kitchen). People enter and leave through the door so many times a day impossible for me to count. They are little time travellers, I'm thinking cheerily. Or world travellers perhaps, hobbyist globetrotters. The door connects the office area with the shop floor, and as I shall discover later it is a seemingly subtle border to cross that shall turn out to be not so subtle at all. I turn the handle, and find myself standing in a factory's hallway, a place from decades ago, a world away. From here the office space from which I entered moments ago seems like the mere glitter of a façade constructed to escape the organisation's past.

I turn to the right to continue my stroll to the bathroom facilities over a green concrete floor, and the sensation of dust, oil and burned rubber creeps into my nostrils. I hear ancient looking machines aching and fuming as they process metre after metre of yarn. I went from the fancy first class deck of a cruise ship into its engine room. Along the machines I pass what looks like a storage space for even older machinery that is no longer in use, and I'm wondering whether anybody in fact knows what is to be found within these piles of for me indistinguishable metal and steel. On randomly allocated tables to my left I recognise all sorts of other clutter of smaller scale: some kind of saw, pieces of metal and splinted glass, buckets; stuff of the sort that accumulates over the

years with no one bothering to clean up. Shop floor staff hurries about the machines, pushing buttons and turning levers and shouting at each other things unintelligible to me. The machine operators wear blue overalls stained with what I believe is oil (and possibly all sorts of other things for all I know). Complying with health & safety signs abound, they wear earplugs, too (no wonder they are shouting!), and some of them carry yellow builder's helmets. The bright colours in their overwhelming manifold of the office seem like a world away. How can this place be so different? Puzzled I enter the bathroom.

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Vignette 4 – The Time Machine.

This enormous difference between the shop floor and the office space I found in fact to be representative of more than material appearance. It is indeed representative of two main aspects worth to elaborate upon.

First, it is a reflection of a divide permeating TexCo's culture in the sense that there were fundamental debates going on along the lines of it is us (the shop floor) versus them (the office). I will explore this contradiction and the 'us vs. them' culture in section 3 (Inclusive Practice & Elitism) of this chapter. As a cameo, Jack, for instance, commented once that although he believes nowadays people do feel empowered, he does think that probably more so in the office than on the shop floor. He suspects that this is due to the fact that particularly longer standing employees, most of which work on the shop floor, have not only been used to a remarkably different style of practicing – 'don't ask stupid questions' – but also perform practices that stress a different set of normative values, which for instance entail following certain routines whereas 'office employees' are urged to innovate and do things in a different fashion if they see fit. In the office, he explained to me, people are told to "make an impact"; on the shop floor, contrarily, people "get paid to do the same thing every day, but on the other hand they're told to change anything they deem necessary and to be innovative" – obviously a bewildering contradiction. Arguably, the shop floor has been left behind by the NOW Initiative. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the NOW Initiative received sceptical and cynical comments from some employees, yet particularly from those on the shop floor. As Maria, a POD manager, commented:

I think there was some skepticism, people going 'ooh they are going away for...', you know, two days a month, what are they doing, and, you know, it's a bit of a jolly, or, you know, 'I've seen all this before, what's going to come back and what's going to happen...' (Maria, POD Manager).

Second and relatedly, I perceive the material difference to signify TexCo's heritage – the 'old days' up until five years ago, when the organisation was still owned and ran by 'the family'. An initial impression of an Italian Mafia clan may not be too far fetched given the descriptions to follow. For example, terms used to describe the chairman are thrilling, albeit not particularly flattering. Some refer to him as the "autocrat" or the "patriarch", others say he was "the godfather". Recalling images of 1972 Marlon Brando, he seems to have made quite the impression. The office, back then a "concrete shell", was apparently a "ruthless place", where one would "hide into nothing" if one disagreed with the Godfather. Even though he was the dominant figure, people rarely ever saw him or the other managers. Yet if they did a sensation of dread crept on to them; after all, one might just disappear...

In the old regime I didn't really ever have any experience or dealings with the managing director at the time. The only time it was a thing you would see him coming down, cause we were in the building up the road, you would kind of go 'oh no, what's he wanting, what's he coming down?' And it was more a feeling of dread. Hardly ever saw the management. *Bob was hardly ever here, was that his name? Jack's predecessor, he spent half the time in China. What was his name, that's terrible (Lucy, Scheduling).*

Invoking a sense of a totalitarian state, 'the regime' appears to have resembled a dictatorship in which it was ruled through fear, and people dreaded 'the leader' coming to tap one on the shoulder. In fact, leadership practice at TexCo in the past was described to me as dictatorial indeed. "People listened to only one voice", I was told, and the Godfather ran a "command and control" operation deciding everything to the tiniest detail. He and his 'made men' or 'bosses', to adopt a Mafioso discourse (i.e. the board members), operated in an exclusive and detached fashion. The board is recalled as a "secret society", excluding managerial staff from discussions relevant to their business and practices. Jacob, a POD manager, for example, expressed to me frustratedly how he was pushed to the sidelines of a project he was working hard for that the board of directors recognised to finally materialise. After a while, when all negotiations with the customer were complete, Jacob was let back in on it by the board, but had to play catch up figuring out what had been discussed in his absence.

I was told that if ideas did not come from certain people, these ideas simply did not exist. Given this *elitism* that permeated life at TexCo, people were discouraged from thinking for themselves. Instead, they were given clear directive about what to do.

Recall, for instance, Jack's statement I quoted earlier: like marionettes you wait for the bell to ring; if it rings, you dance. If you dance without the music, however, as Keith did in Vignette 2, you may have gotten "hit with a wall", unlikely to be a pleasant experience:

Before [in the old days], they might have just done what they were told, because that's what they were told, and they knew that they would get hit with a wall (Lucy, Scheduling).

Jack once recalled what he found was a bizarre experience. When he called his very first prototyping meeting, a meeting that takes place every fortnight to this day, he was bewildered when he asked his new colleagues what they were working on. "Oyster bags", they said. Apparently not the most promising market to be in, Jack inquired further. "How big is the market for that?" He asked. "Uh, we don't know", one member of the group replied, "but there's this chap in Fife..." They then told Jack that they've tried to figure out the product for about ten years, but it still is not quite right. As he told me the story Jack looked at me, shook his head and said, now in amused disbelief, "What the hell..."

Others I talked to confirm that in the old days people did not do background research of markets and products. The guiding principle was to keep the chairman happy. It was thus a culture of obeying the all-mighty word of the Godfather, who, through exercising control and keeping his staff on the short leash, shaped an *exclusive* and *disempowering* way of practicing. Yet, apparently people were led to believe to be working cross-functionally in the old days as well. Phil commented:

But we had management previous to Jack that liked to be, you know, 'I'm inclusive, I want you on board.' But it was all a front. You know, what that management strategy was about was making you think you were something, and you weren't. It was just to get the work done...for...as quickly as possible for as little as possible (Phil, Product Technician).

Interestingly, Phil also mentioned to me that contemporarily the notion of employee ownership is perceived in exactly the same way. Namely, some people, especially shop floor workers (again), believe that employee ownership is a plot by 'the Family' and the new management to make money from employees' investments. Laughingly, Phil said to me: "the conspiracy theorists are with us!"

In summary, since the shop floor was left behind by the NOW Initiative, the move to the 'new era' has arguably contributed to creating a divide within the organisation.

This divide not only presents itself through a material difference, but also via different ways of working, values and norms, and particularly a deep-seated suspicion towards anybody and anything in ‘the office’. Thus, despite all efforts to change, notions from the past still go hand in hand with the present. As contemporary stories have it, the culture of the old days was radically different – in fact, it is asserted to be just the opposite of the values and ways of practicing TexCo stands for today (see Vignette 1). Given these not particularly delightful descriptions, it is compelling to believe Jack attesting “80% of what we’re doing now we haven’t done five years ago, and 20% of what we do we started just this year” – meaning TexCo changed literally everything. Once entering the blue door to the shop floor, however, a whole different perspective emerges. Granted, TexCo has changed in the sense that employees do ‘take initiative’, voice concerns, and work (more) autonomously. Yet while the office space gallantly manages to suppress notions of the old days, the shop floor demands an interrogation beneath the surface of bright colours and catchphrase quotes. The next part of this section, therefore, explores how the NOW Initiative had come about, and reveals that certain power dynamics of the past have made it into present day practicing.

#### **4.1.2 Setting the ‘True North’**

During my time in the field several observations I made and incidents I encountered increasingly led me to question how different a company the TexCo of today actually is. This section, therefore, is dedicated to examining how the NOW Initiative came into being (as already introduced briefly in Vignette 1). The intention here is to unveil the curious role of one specific actor, Jack the CEO, that appeared to have been subtly pulling the strings in the background as the ‘architect of the scheme’, as he once referred to himself. Although the NOW Initiative was spearheaded by a team consisting of a cross-section of employees (from shop floor workers such as Keith to managers and technicians), it was nonetheless driven by a selected few (12) handpicked by Jack and Maria, a business manager that ended up on the team. These 12 people were then supposed to start “the fire across the organisation”, as Jack puts it. “Jack was trying to change the ethos of how things worked at TexCo”, said Phil in an interview. Jack was the one who “set the ball rolling”. He commented on his role during the NOW Initiative accordingly:

I was the critical element in defining what the true north would be. That's the direction we're going. That's...we're going to be innovative, we're going to go out, we're going to be far more...In terms of the, this is what we're going to be, our true north as a business, that was my role in this. In terms of the execution, everybody else did that. I was there to keep pushing along the way, but really, it is hiring the right people, and putting the troublemakers in the right place (Jack, CEO).

In other words, he says to have pulled the strings in the background as to what he deemed the best way forward – according to which his followers were then supposed to act. Putting troublemakers in 'the right' place he did indeed, such as Adrian in Vignette 3. A seemingly empowering staff-led initiative, the NOW team was essentially bringing Jack's vision to life:

I think it was a lot of guys on the NOW team who were trying to put forward what our vision was or what Jack's vision was as far as the NOW team was concerned (Phil, Product Technician).

The 12 NOW members then went on monthly retreats with an outside educational institution to develop new ways of practicing embracing the aspects outlined previously (collaboration, empowerment, flat hierarchies, conflicting opinions). For example, this was achieved through utilising creativity tools such as brainstorming, 'dotocracy', a technique in which decisions are made democratically as each participant can cast three votes, i.e. dots; or 'six hat thinking', whereby each participant is wearing a rather silly hat (e.g. a police officer's or a fire fighter's helmet) that constitutes a particular way of thinking such as overly positive or devil's advocate (to name a few). Suddenly people found themselves working in a colourful office, enacting bizarre techniques and collaborating cross-functionally. It's quite the change compared to the sentiment outlined in the foregoing vignette. Subsequent to developing these tools, it was the NOW team's task to implement them into daily work practice.

We were given a remit to really, you know, go through it and get the thing rolled out into the company and start using it and start working with it. So we were kind of, it was kind of forced initially, and you were using tools that you were uncomfortable with and all the rest of it (Jacob, POD Manager).

Hence, the NOW Initiative can be seen as a subtle mechanism of power enforcing a new way of working via the cloak of a staff-led endeavour. Part of engendering a new

culture also was to encourage others to take initiative, like Keith in Vignette 2, rather than waiting for the boss to fix things (like Adrian, see Vignette 3). For instance, some machine operators were complaining to Jack about some colleagues acting unsafely on the shop floor. Since TexCo is now an employee owned business that embraces initiative-taking and commitment, Jack replied to them in an oddly empowering manner:

And my response was ‘I’m doing nothing about it. What are you doing about it?’ Uh, cause if you’ve seen somebody act unsafely, or if you’ve seen somebody not care, then why are you waiting for me to do something about it? It’s your company, you should do something about it. So we had that whole debate about ‘well it’s not my place’, and I’m like, ‘the fuck it’s not your place. Absolutely it’s your place!!!’ (Jack, CEO).

Here, Jack exercises power on two levels. On the one hand, by encouraging, even demanding, staff to address the issue themselves he empowers them. Thus if they were to ‘take the initiative’ it would be a perfectly legitimate and even desired thing to do. On the other hand, however, Jack is also making clear his expectations regarding how employees should act. By extension he is thus de-legitimising the old ethos, in which employees would refrain from taking action if not asked for it. At another incident I had the opportunity to glimpse into Jack establishing what is legitimate. I was observing the year-end employee presentation Jack gave to all employees:

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Today Jack is holding the year-end presentation. There are two presentations, in fact. One is tailored towards managerial staff involving rather little people from the shop floor, and another one is ‘open’ to all employees. I’m not sure whether some folks are actually not allowed to attend the first one, or whether it is simply that the information provided there is not interesting to them. Anyway, we all gather in the cinema space towards the end of the office hall. It is actually like a cinema, although not as comfy and certainly less entertaining. Jack is standing in front of the blue seat rows going up as far as almost the ceiling. Behind him on the wall a Power Point presentation is displayed. He’s ready to go. I sit somewhere in the middle rows, to the left-hand side. Unfortunately the ‘seats’ are mere benches with no backrest, so I do hope we won’t be here forever. Jack begins his presentation and goes through his talking points. Financial statements, challenges ahead...the usual stuff.

During the presentation, he repeatedly announces that if people notice something going wrong they should by all means ‘call it’ – again stressing that it is their company. Employee ownership I sense is keenly used as rhetorical mechanism for empowerment. A few rows in front of me somebody raises his voice. It is Phil taking the opportunity. He asks about replacing some of the machines. He pointed out to me before, in fact, that

some machines have been here before him. That's indeed quite remarkable, given that he's been at TexCo for 30 odd years. Back then he was absolutely bewildered, and others share his view. In response to Phil's question, Jack explains that they (he and the board) are very happy to spend money on new machines, but only if there is a plan. A plan, that is, means for Jack that somebody has approached him with details as to why the machine needs to be replaced, why repairs or other fixtures won't do it, how much the investment would be, where the money could be coming from, and what the gain would be. Put otherwise, he is reluctant to make investments on a hunch that a particular machine is 'too old'. Unfortunately I cannot see Phil's face from where I sit, but after Jack reiterated his point a couple of times, saying he is happy to spend if there is such a plan, Phil says nothing.

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Vignette 5 – Legitimising concerns

Employee ownership is thus utilised as a rhetorical device that seemingly empowers workers, but concurrently invokes a sense of expected commitment. When employees act on Jack's invitation to voice concerns, we witness who carries the burden of legitimising claims.

Jack, it turns out, was also critical in legitimising why the old ways were undesirable. Although the new ways of working under the banner of a 'culture of innovation' are considered a stark contrast to the old days, changing the ethos was allegedly rather unproblematic – a claim so baffling I addressed it with Jack. He explained: "The platform we stood on was burning. And if it's burning, you jump no matter where to". There was thus an acute awareness for the need for change, and, as others comment, Jack was instrumental in generating that awareness.

I think everybody recognised that it was going down, it's just that we were powerless to do nothing about it. When Jack joined, he stated what a number of us already knew and felt. And at last we were able to do something about it. You know, rather than just keep propping up [...] I think Jack, when he joined the company, was instrumental in demonstrating 'look, you know, this is where the floor covering [business] is going. It's heading downwards' (Jacob, POD Manager).

Yet change might have not been brought about quite that smoothly after all. One night on the way home, Jack confessed to me that he has been relentless in trying to change the attitudes of people towards embracing change and innovation. I asked how he achieved this. He shrugged his shoulders and without taking his eyes off the road he dryly said, "we got rid of people. Just four or five though, those who were actively blocking change". Some employees were simply put into different roles. I recall I had

talked to Abigail not long ago, who was then in charge of production and purchasing scheduling. “I’m literally the only one who can do this job, people are phoning me up when I’m off sick”, she had said to me.

As transpired, however, Abigail was fighting a losing battle. Apparently she was reluctant to change her scheduling practice that was still based on having to make four major products. Yet, as part of the NOW Initiative, TexCo introduced countless new products, rendering her way of doing scheduling rather antiquated – to the frustration of Jack and other POD managers, who were the customers of her service, so to speak. People suggest that Abigail is not a typical person that would embrace ambiguity and change. “She is a person who just wants to do what she does”, said Jack. He had changed her role slightly to get her to adapt to change, but “it didn’t work at all. So now she’s been assigned an entirely different role. We have taken all her toys and given her completely new ones.” In other words, Abigail has been moved to the laboratory, where she from then on was doing quality testing on product samples, whereas Lucy, a worker considered highly competent (by Jack and Maria in particular), was put in Abigail’s place.

#### **4.1.3 Summary**

This glimpse into how the NOW Initiative came into being concludes the section. In summary, these selected examples offer insights that extend both Vignette 1.2 and 1.3. In the first vignette, I have shown the way TexCo presents itself, and argued for treating notions of empowerment carefully. I proposed that, through exercising power via perpetuating normative expectations, empowerment is inherently bounded. Although the NOW Initiative is said to have introduced inclusive and empowered ways of practicing at TexCo, this foregoing discussion illuminates a different side to this story.

As the second vignette suggests, under the old regime work practices were characterised by disempowerment and exclusivity. Only specific members up the hierarchy were in a position to make decisions, and withheld information from ordinary employees. One would generally stick to one’s direct remit, and not get involved with things pertaining to somebody else’s responsibility. Only the selected few were in a

position to steer the direction into which the notion of what constitutes ‘good practice’ should unfold.

The NOW Initiative, meanwhile, was supposed to and has arguably changed the elitism of the past. Hence nowadays employees collaborate in cross-functional teams and are empowered to challenge others by vocalising concerns and opinions, as Keith’s vignette or other observations of mine attest (e.g. Madeleine, who suggested TexCo’s regular product launch practice to be ineffective and took it upon herself to develop a new process). Therefore, practice did change. Yet, even though employees might be empowered, they are only within the boundaries of newly enforced expectations. As the final vignette of this section demonstrates, the path forward was still laid out by the elite, especially Jack. Although the move to the POD structure and away from departments did strip away layers of hierarchy and authority, a different way of looking at this might involve that nowadays it is only a handful individuals – POD managers and board members (the former got ‘elected’ to the board while I was in the field) – that are in a hierarchical ‘position of power’. Therefore, has TexCo actually moved to ‘inclusive practice’, or is inclusivity merely dependent on the willingness of the elite?

Arguably, via the cloak of empowerment power is being exercised in disguise. The voices of those who did not comply with expectations – the ‘troublemakers’ as Jack puts it – were simply silenced, as the stories of Adrian or Abigail underline. In this way, in spite of embracing new ways of performing practices, I perceive power relations of the past to have been perpetuated in the present. Indeed, a common theme throughout this first findings section has been the interplay of old and new, past and present. While TexCo’s efforts to change at times may appear desperate to escape their own past, the section has offered numerous descriptions suggesting the escape has not been entirely successful. Admittedly, it was pointed out to me that the transition TexCo is undergoing is not yet complete. This first section, therefore, is testimony to change being a dialectical interplay in which practices of the past swing with ways of doing of the present. In the following three sections of this findings chapter, I will explore in more detail the paradoxes of The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment (Section 2), Inclusive Practice & Elitism (Section 3), and Leading & Being Led (Section 4).

#### 4.1.4 Implications for Leadership & Power

In this first of three findings sections, where is leadership, and how is its production implicated with power dynamics? Recall that I define leadership in terms of producing direction, i.e. turning points, which may materialise in three major ways:

- a) A course of action has changed
- b) Multiple courses of actions present themselves, yet the current one is actively reinforced
- c) A difference to organising, i.e. to the practices under construction, has been made

In my theoretical framework, meanwhile, I define power in terms of one person's actions structuring another person's (or a group of peoples') possible actions. In this concluding part of the first findings section, I will briefly elaborate on how leadership has materialised in the foregoing data, and how it is implicated with power relations. Although each of my three sections features all three 'expressions' of power, each section emphasises one of the faces in particular. The present section especially considers shaping norms, while section 4.2 attends to enabling/constraining action, and 4.3 to inclusion/exclusion. At the end of each of my three sections, therefore, I will attend to each 'face' respectively. It should be noted though that I may refer back to other sections; that is, section 4.2, for instance, may pick up aspects regarding enablement/constraint that have been discussed in section 4.1, and so on. I will repeat this procedure in the following two findings sections (4.2 and 4.3) as well.

In the above findings, the work of leadership is evident mainly in terms of three turning points. First, vignette 2 is a prime example of producing direction. To reiterate, the machine operator Keith encountered a problem that prevented his ordinary flow of doing to continue. He therefore took the initiative to analyse and solve the problem at hand. In other words, leadership materialised in terms of Keith being struck by unexpected events and having produced direction by setting and executing a particular course of action in response, which enabled the continuation of the production schedule.

A second turning point in the data is the *establishment* of the NOW initiative by the CEO, Jack, and Maria, a POD manager. As the tale so far has shown, TexCo found themselves at crossroads, needing to make drastic changes in order to survive financially. Establishing what the 'true north' should look like proposed a specific way

forward, and thus made a difference to organising in the sense of some practices needing to be dropped, whereas other practices needed to be refined and developed. Bringing to life the initiative has given the 12 members of the team discretion with regard to developing these new ways of working as in this section. Strikingly, this turning point one can be argued to be both a manifestation of leadership *and* power, since, as discussed in the following, setting the true north essentially entailed shaping what is legitimate and what is not, thereby structuring possible actions. From this perspective, the two NOW turning points can be seen as the enabler of other turning points down the line, such as the NOW initiative by itself.

Therefore, third and lastly, through engendering said new ways of working under the banner of ‘culture of innovation’ – embracing collaboration, autonomy and empowerment, creativity etc. – the NOW initiative *itself* can be seen as a turning point. Although I have not discussed *a* specific turning point in terms of observational data, the previous section let’s us glimpse into the ways the staff-led initiative, as an aggregate of multiple turning points, has made a profound impact on practices of organising – whereas the *establishment* of NOW can be seen as having set direction (the ‘true north’). Akin to the second, this turning point arguably has wider reaching effects, than for example turning points that change direction in the moment (such as Keith). Thus the NOW turning point materialises both as leadership and power, as it also structures future possible actions in the sense of what can and cannot be done – e.g. Keith being enabled to take the initiative.

Since this thesis is more concerned with *how* turning points are produced rather than what turning points are evident, I further consider how power dynamics were implicated in the production of these turning points. In this section, we can discern power dynamics implicated in the work of leadership in terms of three central and inherently related ways: by *shaping norms and legitimacy* (e.g. expecting staff to act according to the NOW sentiment, being pro-active in the production of direction), through *regulating access* to leadership practices (inclusion/exclusion; in this section, both Adrian and Abigail were removed); and, deeply linked to norms, by *enabling and constraining action* (showing that some activities are rendered possible, such as Keith taking the initiative, whilst others are rendered unacceptable, like Abigail refusing to evolve).

Shaping norms has been evident at multiple occasions during my time in the field, hence in the data and particularly this first section of my findings chapter that especially attends to how the company has evolved from the old days to the NOW era. Consider, for example, the quotes on the wall of the museum room. These I took not only to be a representation of the company to outsiders, but also a representation of particular desired and expectation-laden ways of being – e.g. the expectation to not only realise one has a voice, but also to be using it. Notions of access also map onto shaping legitimacy. Both Adrian and Abigail, two prominent figures in this section, were removed from practice essentially because they did not comply with the new ‘standards’ engendered by the NOW initiative (whether they were incapable of changing or simply refused to I cannot say). In this sense, the NOW initiative, if seen through a ‘power lens’, was involved in re-shaping what are considered legitimate and illegitimate ways of practicing.

Through establishing expectations, legitimacy was also driven by utilising discourse, such as employee ownership. Consider, for instance, how Jack reiterated employee ownership during the year-end presentation, or how he strongly encouraged, if not demanded, machine operators to address issues with colleagues themselves – after all, it is ‘their’ company. Implicit in shaping legitimacy and by extension norms is a fundamental imbalance of power in the sense that some actors are more influential when it comes to establishing what is seen as legitimate and acceptable. Furthermore, this points to a paradox, further explored in section 4.2: on the one hand such exercise of power *enables* others to do certain things (taking the initiative, hence producing direction), but *constrains* from doing other things (waiting for the bell to ring, hence not partaking in the work of leadership) on the other. In this section Madeleine, or Phil, for example, echoed this sanction by speaking of being shown the gate if one does not make an impact.

The example of Abigail and Adrian in relation to shaping norms links to another vital aspect of the data: norms have fundamentally evolved, ultimately affecting the ways direction might be produced and hence how leadership may materialise. As the section has argued, participating in the work of leadership in the old days meant mindlessly following and executing orders – if one was allowed access to leadership practices in the first place. Recall Jacob, a business manager, for instance, whose

participation in a project was completely shut down as soon as the board realised it was going to come to fruition. After the NOW initiative had been introduced, the work of leadership acquired new meaning. Arguably, leadership may still be about producing direction, yet the *form* this production may take has substantially evolved towards voicing concerns and challenging people, taking initiative, ‘making an impact’, as well as working and producing direction autonomously.

In the next section – 4.2: The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment – I am going to explore some of these aspects in more detail, concentrating particularly on the power face *enablement/constraint*, which is closely related to shaping norms/legitimacy.

## **4.2 The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment**

In this section of my findings chapter, I explore the interplay between empowerment and its limitations. Discourses of empowerment were an utterly omnipresent notion at TexCo. Metaphorically speaking, from the first day to the last it hit me in the face (asked and unasked for), no matter whom I talked to or which corner I turned. It all began on my very first day, in fact, when I was strolling across the premises of TexCo to familiarise myself with the place, absorbing every little detail. Although the empowerment devil is in the detail indeed, it didn't take much 'snooping around' for me to discover that 'people at TexCo are empowered'. Consider, for instance, the quotes from the Museum Room I presented in the previous section. But were they really empowered, and what does empowerment mean anyway? Empowered by whom, and to do what? How far does empowerment go? Those are the questions I began to ask myself (and others) soon, and they are also the questions I will explore in this section.

Specifically, this section is structured as follows. First, I am going to show how empowerment manifested itself at TexCo; that is, exploring how empowerment was enacted. The enactments discovered, second, lead me to investigate how empowerment is actually produced. Third, looking for the mechanisms at play enabling empowerment also calls for addressing how empowerment might be limited. This ultimately leads to interrogating a puzzling paradox: is empowerment essentially intertwined and thus generated by notions of authority, accountability and legitimacy? As in the previous section (contextual background), I am going to address these questions by offering vignettes which are produced from my fieldnotes of multiple occasions. Additionally, I am going to supplement the observational material with interview quotes.

### **4.2.1 How empowerment is enacted**

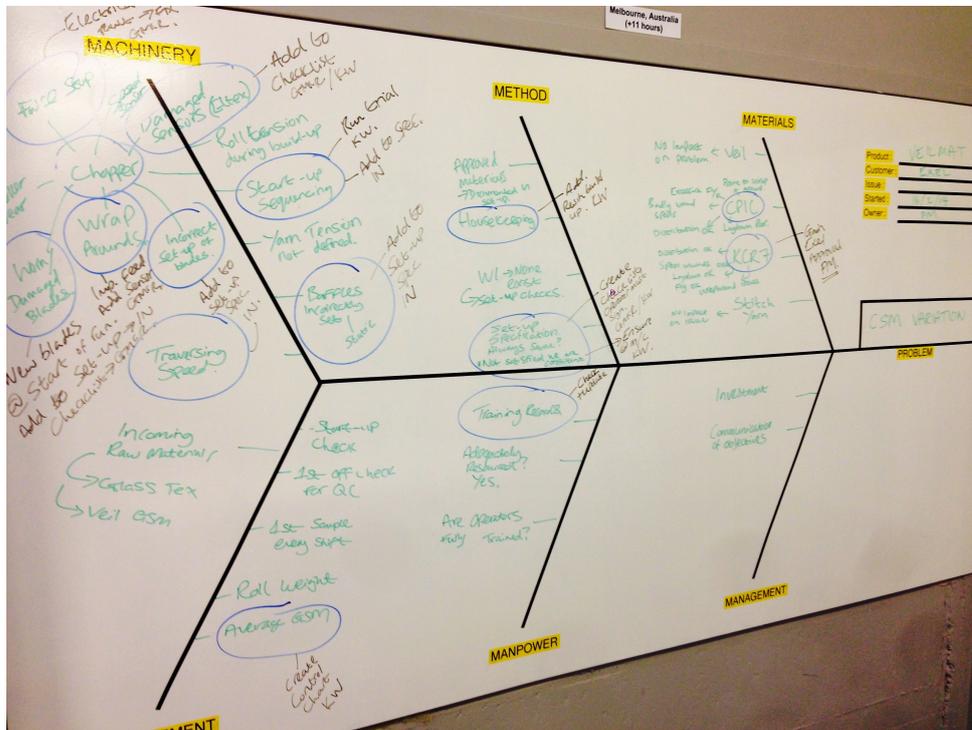
In this first part of the section I am going to elucidate how I experienced (other people to experience) empowerment to occur. It is worth noting that the stories I recall here are not intended to paint a full and all-inclusive picture of empowerment at TexCo. Instead, my aim is to highlight instances of empowerment I found most profound in the field and during analysis. In that regard, a major aspect of enacting empowerment I discovered to be *voicing concerns* and *challenging others* – particularly up rather than

down the hierarchy. The following vignette, which shows a dispute between Patrick (a POD manager) and Garry (responsible for machine maintenance), illustrates this particularly well.

**Vignette 5 – ‘Talking shite’ Voicing concerns/challenging people**

*In this vignette we encounter a dispute between Patrick, the POD manager, and Garry, responsible for machine maintenance. It illustrates Garry’s ability to object and challenge Patrick.*

Behind the Innovation Space just down from the offices there are so called fishbone diagrams, which as I am told serve the purpose of facilitating various sorts of analysis – mostly getting to the bottom of quality issues. A picture is worth a thousand words.



Today I am joining such a meeting to discuss the ongoing problems with a Composites customer that is complaining about serious quality issues. They often use these boards to get to the bottom of problems, as it allows for splitting up an issue into its components. (Truth be told people at TexCo are discussing quality issues every day). I gather from what is said that its purpose is twofold. On the one hand, obviously, it is about identifying and ruling out issues that can cause the quality problem (and eventually solving the problem of course), but on the other hand, it is to present to the customer concrete evidence of what the issue is not, and demonstrate to them the effort made by TexCo to sort out the problem in a systematic and scientific fashion. A previous fishbone analysis, for instance, served as the backbone of a presentation delivered by Jack and Patrick to the same customer.

I follow Patrick, Garry, Keith, Lucy, and Igor, who are walking down to said fishbone diagrams. I have not dealt very often with Garry or Igor. Garry is a half-bald guy wearing glasses who seems to be wearing the same blue overall every day. Sometimes I think its intensity of oily stains might make the overall stand without a body in it. Of greater relevance than Garry's dutiful appearance, of course, is his responsibility, which is to be in charge of machinery maintenance.

We now gather casually around the fishbone diagrams, some of us, including myself, sit at the blue tables facing the wall. Given that this is just one in a series of quality faux pas, Patrick seems to me especially uneasy. He stands next to the whiteboard with a pen in his hand. Normally a very calm and thoughtful fellow, this must be the first time I've seen him this tense. The fan starts screaming in the background. It is supposed to heat the massive innovation space, I suppose, but essentially it is just a gigantic pain in the butt (and it doesn't help that it is freezing in here either). It is in a cycle of going on and off, and when on full blast conversations may be rendered unintelligible if one is sitting more than three feet away from one another. Exasperatedly I switch off my voice recorder and put it into the pocket of my sports coat – it is pointless, I figure, all I would hear is a mind-numbing buzz, and some faint voices in the background if I'm lucky. Pathetically I picture throwing something big at the fan, silencing it once and for all – perhaps my now useless voice recorder... what a delight this would be.

The group, following Patrick's lead, begins the analysis. After deliberating for a while on numerous aspects, they've now arrived at examining possible issues with manpower. For Patrick this entails asking whether they have people in place that know what they're doing, and have been trained properly on the respective machines.

"We can say that both guys are fully trained operators on this machine?" Patrick inquires. Apparently there's uncertainty about this, so Patrick says they need to check that, as it is a first necessity to make sure somebody's fully trained to work that machine. Garry, the machine maintenance chap, disagrees, since the operator in question has been here for years. "I know", Patrick replies remotely irritated, "but we should have documentation that says that."

Apparently Mike, the operator in question, can comfortably run the machine but cannot do the setup.

"That's why it's all the more important... I know Mike, he's a good operator. But we should have a bit of paperwork that says 'this guy is trained on that machine'", Patrick maintains.

Garry objects again. "A machine operator is a machine operator", he says confidently.

"I disagree... No, no. Now you're talking shite! You can't take one guy off one machine and say 'he's a machine operator so he can run that machine.'" Patrick mocks Garry. "He needs to be trained on *that* machine!"

Garry isn't convinced, and replies something unfortunately unintelligible to me.

Things get a little heated again. It's almost comical how my eyes, and probably my head, too, move from Garry to Patrick, back and forth.

"They are fucking different machines!" Patrick shouts back.

"No!" Garry protests.

"The carcass is the same, I won't dispute that, but the chopper, the winding system etc. are all different." Patrick's puzzled. "Everything. You're trying to tell me I can go and take Joe of GO9 and say 'go to GO2 and run that machine'?"

"That's right!" Garry maintains.

Patrick comments in disbelief that Joe needs to be shown and trained on GO2 to do this.

The discussion moves back to the topic of documenting who is trained on what machine. Patrick insists that such document is terribly needed. “This guy has been shown, he’s signed it, he’s trained, and I’m signing it off as his supervisor to say I’m satisfied and he knows what the fuck he’s doing”, he demands vigorously. So much so that Garry doesn’t seem to have a decent enough argument to put forward other than saying ‘no’. Eventually, Igor, too, agrees with Patrick saying that operators are not interchangeable. Garry still won’t agree, despite Igor insisting that the choppers of machines are different, amongst others, and simply because one can operate machine A doesn’t grant that the same person is capable of operating machine B.

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#### Vignette5 – ‘Talking shite’

Above we have witnessed a brief but intense dispute between Garry and Patrick, who debate heatedly about the issue of documenting which operator can handle which machine. Their views contrasted sharply, as Patrick believed it is necessary to have a document that outlines people’s training, whereas Garry was of the opinion that since each operator is interchangeable such documentation is unnecessary. Interesting about this dispute is the supposed inequality of formal authority between Patrick as a manager, who is also chairing the meeting and is responsible to deliver a solution to the customer, and Garry, who is ‘merely’ responsible for machine maintenance and in this case reporting to Patrick. In spite of the imbalance of power, however, Garry stood up to Patrick.

Being a silent observer of the debate, it strikes me as a reflection of empowerment at TexCo. As I described in section 1.1 (contextual background), in the old days people hardly questioned what they were told. As Lucy once recalled, if the boss asked jump you would ask ‘how high?’ So if Patrick would assert that documentation of operator skills is necessary then that would be the end of the story. Instead, the vignette illustrates that Garry is enacting his empowerment to voice his diverging opinion on the matter in spite of Patrick’s seeming authority. Garry’s objections above I have come to experience as *voicing concerns*, i.e. people being empowered to assert themselves up and down the hierarchy.

Voicing concerns, however, also entailed *challenging people*. Given Patrick’s authority position, him challenging Garry on his views about documentation in the vignette above might not be particularly intriguing, given that Patrick is doing so *down the hierarchy*. In fact, as Patrick once commented, he perceives it as part of his remit as

POD manager to challenge people in order to achieve the best possible outcome, and to not accept arguments or excuses at face value. During a one to one encounter between Madeleine and Patrick, for instance, I observed Patrick instructing her how to proceed with a project she was leading. As he mentioned in an interview thereafter, Patrick knocked on the table with his index finger underlining the urge to stress to Madeleine the following:

And one of the things I stressed to her at that meeting was that these people, ‘you will delegate these respective things to these people, and you must then challenge them to make sure they deliver to your plan.’ (*knocks on the table as he says that*) (Patrick, POD Manager).

As an individual responsible for delivering a project, a solution to a customer, revenue etc., Patrick evidently feels that it is necessary to challenge people to fulfil their part of the bargain. Unsurprisingly, therefore, he expresses fiercely his objections to Garry’s opinion on the matter of operator skills documentation. Garry standing his ground and openly displaying his disagreement, however, is more thought provoking, considering that technically he would have no basis to dispute a superior.

In a more intimate talk I had with Patrick, he pointed out that challenging people should indeed not only work as a one-way street. In fact, the vignette above is a testament to other instances I witnessed in which formal authority is put up for debate. Such instances though need not be interpreted as resistance or disobeying the ‘ruling’ protagonists. Instead, challenging notions one disagrees with I learned is a way of practicing ‘desired’ ways of working at TexCo. Consider again Patrick’s comment:

‘I’m asking you to deliver increased output from this machine. Are we capable?’ And then listen, be open, ask open questions, ask challenging questions. And in return, encourage people to challenge *you*. So that it’s a two-way discussion, a healthy discussion about how we can deliver this objective (Patrick, POD Manager).

Indeed, as Phil confirms:

You can say ‘this might be a problem for these reasons...For these reasons I think we should may be doing this or doing that...or honestly, this won’t work.’ And that’d be either taken on board or an individual will say ‘well actually, I really want to try this.’ (Phil, Product Technician)

In other circumstances I also witnessed ‘ordinary staff’ challenging Jack, the chief executive. In an emergency meeting about how to retain one of the organisation’s

largest customers that was threatening to walk away, Jack was proposing certain activities to prevent a loss of the account. Failing to convince his employees, however, they refused doing so. Instead, to Jack's delight as he commented to me afterwards on our regular ride home, they proposed alternative measures which he happily agreed with. As part of the move to employee ownership, "there is nothing anybody cannot say to a manager or the chairman", Maria once said to me. "Everyone's got a voice." Not only do people apparently have a voice, but they are urged to 'make an impact', echoes Jack. "Everybody is responsible for something specifically, and has a responsibility for making an impact", he said to me – just like Keith seemingly going the extra mile as I suggested in section 1.1.

Relatedly, I encountered people at TexCo to work *autonomously*, such as Madeleine, Patrick's POD assistant, who took the initiative to fundamentally restructure the way TexCo launch their products after being dissatisfied with how launches used to be done previously. Patrick, in addition, was very supportive of her doing so. Generally, she says, Patrick lets her get on with her work.

I think, uh, with my work I do kind of work alone. But it's always inputting back to Patrick. I think it's just that he's not the type of manager that's constantly asking you where you are with this, where you are with that. And to be honest, I don't think he knows half of what I'm doing to be honest (Madeleine, POD Assistant).

Likewise, in the year-end one to one meeting Jack is conducting with his POD managers, Maria pondered hiring someone to help her out with certain activities pertaining to her POD. Jack did not have too much to say to this, other than 'it is your business, you are in charge.'

A further aspect of empowerment I experienced at TexCo is staff-led initiatives, in which autonomy and responsibility is handed over to 'ordinary staff'. Consider for instance the NOW initiative that was spearheaded by twelve employees. Similarly, an employee forum has been introduced at TexCo, solely headed and run by shop floor employees. Jack said to me that although he was initially part of the forum, he retreated from it fully in order to let it develop into an 'authority-neutral' platform for sharing concerns and making suggestions about potential improvements to the organisation and its practices. A related form of empowerment I realised is the notion of employee

ownership, which I will discuss in further detail in the next section (1.3 Inclusive Practice & Elitism).

In summary, this section shows that people at TexCo are empowered to do certain things, such as challenging superiors (and peers) and voicing opinions, taking the initiative to solve problems, and to do so autonomously. Whilst this section provides an insight into how empowerment is manifest, how it is enacted, it so far has not considered how such enactments can be performed to begin with. In other words, where does this empowerment originate? The next part of the section, therefore, addresses how empowerment is *produced*.

#### **4.2.2 How empowerment is produced**

After having explored in what ways empowerment was enacted at TexCo, I am now delving into an examination of the mechanisms involved in *producing* said enactments of empowerment, which I already insinuated in the previous section. To do so, I first provide a vignette that illustrates another encounter between Patrick and Garry, in which Patrick passes the ball on to Garry to make an important decision.

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At 8.30 in the morning, the first meeting is scheduled. The timing tells me that it is rather urgent (it turns out that it is indeed), since thankfully meetings never take place this early. After coming into the office I just throw my belongings on a chair, grab my notebook and a pen and follow Kacy, Linda and Garry hurrying into the glass box meeting area which is situated towards the end of the hall behind Patrick's desk. No time for coffee. We take a seat on the bar stools around the small roundtable. Patrick called the meeting, so he comes along, too. The reason for the gathering is to discuss a chopping issue they have with the GO9 machine. A different day, a different quality issue.

Patrick is looking rather serious. "I'm sure you know about the issue on GO9" he begins, wasting no time for chitchat. Linda has trouble supressing laughter, whilst Garry asks cynically "which one? Just got another one..."

Gallows humour...

GO9 has two motors for chopping glass fibres, one at the front and one at the back of the line. The one at the front doesn't run smoothly at low speed; it is stalling. As a result the glass fibre distribution on the fabric is uneven, and not according to the specification required by a particular customer. Given the urgency, Keith phoned Patrick on Saturday letting him know about this issue. Staring at his notebook in front of him, Patrick bluntly remarks: "we are in the shit".

It is a very busy machine, especially because they have a contractual agreement to hold stock orders for a specific customer. That is, they always have to have two weeks of stock (for that they calculate the weekly average per year, multiplied by 2; i.e. 2.000

kilos), and are obliged to deliver to the customer within 24 hours. Thus they operate on a cycle; once the customer orders they produce again and so on and so forth.

To come up with a solution, Patrick is consulting Garry for his expertise regarding what the issue may be, and how the fixture influences the decision to be made. Normally he would involve Donald since the machine is his baby, yet he is on holiday skiing in the Scottish highlands. Momentarily, they just know the problem but not the cause, which could either be mechanical and what they'd deem a relatively easy fix, or electrical, which would constitute a much more severe problem since only David could fix it. "God forbid something happens to him while skiing", Patrick mumbles crossly. His comment strikes me as him being somewhat upset by the special position David holds at TexCo, since he is the last remaining family member.

"You reckon the machine will be up and running by tomorrow night?" Patrick addresses Garry.

"Depends on the problem", Garry replies shrugging his shoulders. "I'd say yes...hopefully. But we're not going to know once we strip it out."

In other words there's no way of knowing as of now how long the machine will be out of order. Patrick's still undecided whether they should go for a quick maintenance or letting the customer know about the potentially colossal delay. Maintenance is Garry's area of responsibility.

"It's your call mate..." Garry mumbles indifferently, looking at Patrick expectantly.

"No! It's everybody's call...WE have got orders to do!" Patrick replies forcefully and slightly upset.

Eventually they agree for Garry to take out the motor tomorrow to do an inspection. Patrick informs me that once they know the cause, they will put the repair plan in place. So another discussion follows tomorrow once Garry has a better understanding of the issue.

"It's in Garry's hands...no pressure mate!" Patrick announces teasingly and apparently slightly relieved.

"Uh...cheers..." says Garry not particularly impressed.

"Is that okay?"

"Production comes first...trials and stuff can wait. We need to sell..." Garry says indifferently as he stands up to get to work.

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#### Vignette 6 – Gallows Humour

In this vignette we encounter how Patrick consults with Garry (and Linda, who has yet been absent from the conversation) about how to proceed with the malfunctioning machine. As Patrick told me later on, his objective was "getting people around the table. We are all involved in this, how do we get it sorted out?" The vignette highlights that, essentially, empowerment is *given* considering the perceived imbalance of power on Garry's behalf. He seemingly believes Patrick ultimately being in charge of deciding how to deal with the machine. Patrick, on the contrary, empowers Garry, as he is most educated to judge how to fix the machine without jeopardizing too much

production time. At the same time though, as I discuss towards the end of this section and in Chapter 5, this kind of empowerment might also be seen as a *burden*, since now Garry has to reluctantly take responsibility.

However, Garry is not entirely wrong to initially say to Patrick ‘it’s your call’. Indeed, whilst the vignette could be argued to be exemplary of what some consider collective leadership (see e.g. Raelin, 2011) in the sense that no single individual is in charge, this is not to suggest that there is no authority present. Although Patrick decided to put the problem up for debate instead of dictating his view, I witnessed other instances in which he did exactly the latter. Consider this brief vignette:

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Patrick, Keith, Kacy and I are sitting at the roundtable in the yellow composites POD. The three of them are pondering how to catch up with a production delay for an important customer. They kick around a few ideas. Patrick notes them down eagerly on his notepad. “How about we maximise container load? Let’s say two more rolls per pallet?” Patrick suddenly says with a rhetoric undertone – he is not really asking I sense. Keith disagrees. He doesn’t think this would be feasible. “One seems more realistic”, he says hesitantly. “Two would be better though”, Patrick replies bluntly, looking Keith in the eye. Keith is still sceptical, explaining that then there would be an overhang. Kacy backs him up. Yet Patrick isn’t keen to speculate. He suggests mock loading a pallet in the warehouse and seeing what happens. Both Kacy and Keith nod in agreement, not particularly enthusiastic.

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Vignette 7 – Dismissing Concerns

In this vignette, although Keith and Kacy do have the opportunity to object to Patrick’s suggestions, Patrick simply decides to go with it. In that sense, concerns are not necessarily heard, or they are heard but not agreed with. Patrick commented in an interview:

I have been in situations where I’ve had to say because there’s an urgency and something needs to be done, that’s what we are doing, it’s not up for debate, this is the plan, get on and do it. And I’ve not even entertained the thought of asking people’s opinions (Patrick, POD Manager).

In other words, if there is the need to exercise his formal authority Patrick is not hesitant to do so. For empowerment this implies that it is enacted via the deliberations of those in powerful positions – as provided by the local practice arrangement. In the vignette above, therefore, Patrick is *letting* his colleagues voice concerns/opinions.

(You have to) make sure they have their opinion...at least the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns and debates and...and then hopefully at the end of it we can all sort of reach an agreement as to whether it's a worthwhile goal or not (Patrick, POD Manager).

Similarly Maria recalls that in meetings she normally seeks to involve others instead of herself taking centre stage:

Yeah and I would say it's a collective discussion. I try to have, the POD meeting's not about me sitting there speaking about everything to do with the POD. I try to make sure that everyone has more of an equal input in the meeting, that they all speak a similar amount, you know. It's not one person dominating that meeting. And that they're all having that kind of input (Maria, POD Manager).

In other words, producing empowerment also entails *encouraging* people to make use of their empowerment, such as actually voicing opinions. Consider, for instance, the previous section (1.1. Contextual Background) in which Jack reflected on his encounter with machine operators discontented with their colleagues' adherence to health & safety standards, whom he encouraged to address their issues themselves rather than waiting for an authority protagonist to fix things for them. As Jack believes, it is elemental that employees feel they are provided with the opportunity to 'make an impact' and accordingly feel that their contributions are valued. Jack practices what he preaches, creating employees' empowerment. From my field notes:

Jack is wandering around the office again, deciding to take a seat on Kelly's chair (she's currently not there, in the bathroom or so). Suddenly Dan, an undergraduate student from Edinburgh Uni writing his dissertation at TexCo approaches Jack, asking rather hesitantly: "Excuse me...can I take some flyers from the board upstairs?" Dan is hosting a meeting today for some business-dressed folks. Although I have no clue what he's talking about, Jack's response strikes me: "It's all to do with you, you are the boss." Dan seems a little puzzled, too. Yet he goes upstairs to fetch some flyers.

The approach advocated by Jack therefore entails staff in authority positions at TexCo adopting a 'hands-off' approach. Maria described this to me as 'keeping your nose in but your hands out'.

I'm training to get that balance between...giving people the empowerment and go and do things within in their team, and not to have to be on their case all the time; but also I feel like I've maybe swung too much the other way. And she [the course instructor] described it as keeping your nose in

but your hands out. And that's something that I've been focusing on as my coaching skills, of...I'm now trying to get that right balance. And that balance is different for different people within my team (Maria, POP Manager).

Such an approach also involves actively asking for concerns and opinions, such as Jack asking for advice from people below him in the organisational hierarchy:

I ask Maria what she thinks what should I do. Cause there's nothing quite as empowering as your boss coming asking for your help, your advice (Jack, CEO).

While doing so is certainly noble, Jack's underlying intentions lead me to question if he is actually interested in Maria's opinion, or whether he merely consults her for the sake of creating an environment of empowerment. While not in a position to answer this question one way or another, I did discover that such an environment was considered 'sought to be achieved' by the 'managerial elite'. An example of this is the notion of *employee engagement*, a phrase I heard several times from Jack, but also from Kacy, who as member of staff was elected chair of the employee forum mentioned previously.

Employee engagement – the clue is in the name – in essence describes endeavours to foster commitment and engagement of (especially shop floor) employees. The employee forum indeed was one of the mechanisms put in place to facilitate engagement. Yet, also in spite of the move to employee ownership, Jack felt that although a great opportunity for its members – self-selected employees from the shop floor – to have a say in certain matters, they did not make use of it. Engaging particularly shop floor employees, therefore, was deemed necessary; given also their continuous apprehension towards 'the office' – as Kacy confirms what I have encountered as well:

There's a lot of guys on the shop floor that are apprehensive if they speak to managers and directors and the CEO and all the rest of it (Kacy, Sales Representative).

Indeed, as mentioned previously, I discerned a pervasive notion of 'us versus them' between office and shop floor permeated working life at TexCo (which I am going to discuss further in the following section). To mitigate this divide and foster engagement, several measures were taken. For instance, one initiative involved going

around the shop floor asking machine operators for needs and concerns, along the lines of ‘what would make your life here easier?’, and ultimately addressing those concerns. The intention behind this effort was making employees realise they’ve got a voice (i.e. realising their empowerment) so that hopefully they would use it in the future. Kacy elaborates:

Greg [a machine operator] has maybe given us stuff now that he thinks is not too controversial or too expensive or whatever else, but once they’ve [shop floor staff] seen it happening all the way around, and you go back to the beamer again and say ‘what’s changed? Did all that help? Do you need anything else’ then they’ll start to become comfortable and start speaking more. Hopefully, hopefully (Kacy, Sales Representative).

In other words, employee engagement sought to show people they can ‘make an impact’ – to use Jack’s phrase – with the ultimate aim of getting them ‘hooked’ in the sense of ‘hey, what I do here actually makes a difference, so why not give it my all!’ Engagement is thus about creating an attitude similar to Keith’s (recall my vignette in section 1.1) so people want to make a difference and are committed to the company – one of TexCo’s biggest contemporary challenges as Jack worries.

I question, however, whether this effort to empower employees is made for purely altruistic reasons. Instead, I realised that empowerment is an exchange. People are provided with empowerment to have a say on the one hand, but are *expected* to make it use of it on the other – committing to the organisation by making an impact, ultimately for the betterment of the organisation. Employee engagement, in that regard, might be interpreted as a ‘scheme’ – albeit with no evil hidden agenda – by managerial staff to improve the company’s bottom line.

I would like to conclude this sub-section by introducing Maria’s view on a critical aspect of her remit as a manager. Her use of language I find especially intriguing:

So I think it’s just knowing that people have got the support, that they’ve got the empowerment to make those decisions, they’ve got the opportunity at TexCo to drive and make it what they want it to be as well. And really *enforcing* that more than anything (Maria, POD Manager; my italics).

Although I do not doubt her intentions are good, notions of empowerment and enforcement do not strike me as belonging together naturally. This seeming paradox has in fact featured throughout this sub-section. The example of employee engagement being an empowerment exchange is a case in point. Evidently, empowerment does have

its boundaries. The first part of this section (1.2.1) already insinuated that there are strings attached to how empowerment was enacted at TexCo. This section more explicitly demonstrated that empowerment is produced via imbalances of power. That is, empowerment is produced by the deliberations of those in powerful social positions in that these actors ‘create’ the conditions for other actors’ practices – in this case empowering them to do certain things (e.g. voicing concerns, making decisions). While this section has addressed the production of empowerment and has pointed towards the ways empowerment might be *bounded*, the next section’s task is it to delve deeper into said boundaries, especially interrogating notions of hierarchy, accountability and legitimacy.

#### **4.2.3 How empowerment is limited – The façade of empowerment?**

As my foregoing discussion of the production of empowerment clearly suggests, empowerment does have its boundaries. In this concluding part of the section, therefore, I am going to elaborate in more detail on how these boundaries manifest themselves. Specifically, I discovered empowerment to be *bounded* by four interrelated aspects: accountability, authority, legitimacy, and expectations.

##### 4.2.3.1 Accountability

Although people at TexCo are generally empowered, as the foregoing discussions have shown, empowerment is nonetheless tied to accountability. For instance, I realised that To Dos agreed in a meeting are always noted down, and at times even distributed via email afterwards to ensure everyone knows their task. In one particular meeting I attended, Patrick wrapped it up by announcing: “Ok. I’m going to write all this down, so nobody can say afterwards we didn’t agree on this!”

At another meeting, Patrick made it clear to Keith that it is Keith’s responsibility to ensure his guys are running the shop floor, and that Patrick does not care how Keith does it. In that sense Patrick is giving him ‘full’ autonomy. Yet, Patrick also said that he would want to have a policy in place that is written down so that everyone is aware of his responsibilities and accountable for them. Perceiving this to be a great idea, Patrick in fact assigned it to Keith to finalise such a responsibility document. Keith did not seem pleased.

Whether people did complete their tasks is then ‘checked’ via control mechanisms such as having people report back – for instance in the next meeting.

So like the meeting you were in the other day, where that was the Multiaxial review, he (Patrick) just kind of sprung that on me, uh, to see what I’d done for the last two weeks. Uh, but then I hadn’t done all that much, because he hadn’t given any timescale for it. So I was planning to start it next week, so when he’d set that meeting last week, I had to just push it forward (Madeleine, POD Assistant).

In this instance, Patrick is exerting a degree of control over Madeleine’s accountability by checking on the progress they previously agreed upon. Madeleine, in turn, panics slightly and reschedules her work to accommodate Patrick’s check-in. Yet, even Patrick is reporting back to Jack – although he may not have to do so:

So, for example, when we’re making bigger decisions, I will quite often run it past Jack just to say ‘look, here’s what we’re thinking, maybe we’re going to do a campaign in this direction, maybe we’ve got an initiative on this part of the business, maybe we want to spend a chunk of marketing on an exhibition in this area’ (Patrick, POD Manager).

Aside from accountability created on the go, there are also formal mechanisms put in place, such as goals assigned to every employee. People thus work autonomously on the one hand, but are bound by achieving their goal on the other. Jack explained this process to me in one of our rides to work using a simple analogy:

Jack explains to me how the goal setting process works with getting to Dundee as an example. They (he and the POD leaders) set the goal (getting to Dundee), and some of these are team goals. Then they decide who to pull into the team and who not. Jack says that some people are very eager to be in every team, whereas others are less inclined to volunteer. So he has to make sure that everybody’s got a responsibility. In addition, Jack adds, everybody wants to work with the good people, so one has to make sure to include the ‘outliers’ – as he calls them. So when the goal and the team is set, they decide when it is to be achieved – e.g. by Wednesday. Then, a budget will be allocated, according to which it is decided whether they take the bus or a car to get to Dundee – metaphorically speaking. The team then decided how they accomplish the goal, whether they go by bus car or whatever, as long as they comply with the budget and get there by Wednesday (Field notes, day 6).

In other words, people may do as they please as long as they move within the parameters of the business.

Here's the markers, these are the things I need to know as we're going, but apart from that it's all yours. By and large though the team leaders will set a target, we will agree dates and times and so on, and quantities. And then we pretty much...stand back and let you get on with it, and the appropriate individuals do the job (Phil, Product Technician).

However, not only is accountability enforced from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, it is also generated laterally among peers. The prototyping meeting taking place every fortnight, attended by the product technicians and developers, all POD managers as well as the CEO, for instance, is a case in point. Jack described it to me as a 'walk of shame'. The meeting's purpose is twofold. First, it is intended to keep everybody in the loop about new products and thus new business developments. Second, as a side-effect, it produces accountability. As Madeleine explains, if none of a specific POD's new products move up on the development process, it is embarrassing in front of all the others. Maria agrees:

And then we would obviously have to feedback at the next meeting. If you don't have an answer you're going to look a bit silly around the table, kind of thing. So that's another way we're...that's how people take accountability (Maria, POD Manager).

In that sense, people at TexCo are being empowered to work autonomously, to achieve their goals as they see fit, and to manage their own time – as long as people complete their tasks, take care of their remit, and achieve their goals. Empowerment is thus *bounded* by accountability.

#### 4.2.3.2 Authority

A further aspect that casts limits on empowerment I discovered to be formal authority. For instance, when the ordinary routine of practice breaks down, people turn to authority figures for taking care of things.

I think it's because Patrick is my manager, so they see him as the person to go to, not me. And that's only if there is something going wrong. If everything is going smoothly then it's all fine, (...) But I think it's only when things start to become more difficult and problems come up that people... (Madeleine, POD Assistant).

Similarly, I quoted Patrick earlier saying that if the urgency of the situation dictated it, he would take a stronger line and be decisive about what should be done. I

did encounter instances when POD leaders clearly expressed what they want – in spite of their colleagues’ concerns and indeed dismay – as for example Donald, the star product development guy at TexCo, said to me very plainly. Maria, as it happened, agreed dates with a customer but refrained from consulting with product development experts:

I do believe Maria says ‘Oh, we’ll get that for you the next month’; goes to everyone at the meeting and says ‘can you get that down there...well I don’t see why you can’t get that done. Okay. We’ll have that for next month.’ And you’re like ‘pfff okay...’ That’s not, you can say that’s not the real world. It might be possible, if everything goes right (Donald, Product Development)!

As a consequence, Donald does not exactly strike me pleased:

You work your fucking bollocks off, get something that’s...substandard, might be good enough, probably not. So why bust your balls for something that’s not going to be given the best chance? Whereas you might be able to say ‘hey, right, I know you need it by then. I think it’s going to take that length of time, but let’s break it up into bits. Right, we’re going to work together to get the solution quickly’ (Donald, Product Development)

Yet, as Donald sees it, this rarely happens. Instead, I encountered satisfying customer needs as authoritative, which in turn means that POD managers were in a position to determine what should be done, and how it should be done. Concerns of the product experts were thus hardly heard. Donald agrees:

You know, uh...that product had these characteristics, and we went with that spec. This product is smashing those characteristics, so it’s a superb product. But! There’s other things not good about it that need new specs. ‘No, the customer has asked for these specs which are satisfied, so that’s it. No we don’t need to talk about it anymore.’ Well, no (Donald, Product Development).

Authority hence also limits empowerment. As Patrick once said to me, “The intention is there to have a democratic system, but ultimately you need to have people who can make decisions and lead the business”. The idea of having people capable of being decisive if need be will be explored in more detail in section 1.3 (Inclusive Practice & Elitism). For now, the section shows that although people are empowered, this does not imply the power associated with formal authority to be absent; quite the opposite, as the above discussion demonstrates. The examples I provided also

underscore the point made in the previous part of the section; namely, that empowerment is generated by the deliberations of ‘the powerful’.

#### 4.2.3.3 Legitimacy & Expectations

Empowerment, I realised, is also bound by what is considered legitimate. I also learned that legitimacy and expectations are closely interwoven, which is why I discuss the two aspects together.

For example, in interviews or conversations in the field I often encountered the phrase ‘legitimate concerns’. I learned that if concerns are legitimate, those with capacity to do so will happily address them – mostly POD managers or the CEO. Not only did I wonder what might be a ‘legitimate concern’ as opposed to an illegitimate one, but also, more critically, who in fact establishes what is legitimate or illegitimate.

The answer to my first question I found readily: a legitimate concern was considered to be one that is backed up by an argument based on facts. In case of a machine breakdown, for instance, Jack would want to know when does it break down, why presumably, and how often? Knowing these facts would make it easier for him then to decide whether a new machine is actually required. Additionally, an argument is required. For instance, if somebody refuses to make a certain product, that person needs to provide reasons as to why he or she believes the product will not work, so that these concerns can be debated and addressed. As Jack says:

So, if you have...if people are...if their complaints are valid and realistic, and based on facts, then you have to do something about it. It’s exactly about legitimacy. That’s a great one. That’s exactly what it is. If they have a legitimate complaint, then we’d be fools to ignore it (Jack, CEO).

Yet, who establishes legitimacy? The answer to the first question, in fact, implicitly addresses the second question as well. Namely, determining what is considered legitimate seems to reside with formal authority. In turn this means that the burden of proof as to whether a claim is legitimate lies on those who happen to be in less powerful positions. Consider the following Vignette 5 of the previous section, in which Phil was encouraged to voice a concern. Yet one should never ask a question whose answer one may not like. Vignette 5 reveals a contradiction. Although people are encouraged to voice concerns, they concurrently face the burden of legitimising their concerns in front of their superiors. It is up to Phil, as the person urging to buy new

machines, to make a case for why this is wise. Apparently it is not the first time that the issue of ancient machinery has reached Jack's desk.

There's been a couple of instances where, uh, two instances where I've been asked for new machines, and I've said prove it. And they can't justify it, so they...so we went down the road of let's rent the machines and see if we can go from there. In one instance we couldn't develop the business, so the machine went back. And in the second instance we couldn't get the machine to work, and the machine went back (Jack, CEO).

Jack further complained to me that nobody ever came back to him with plan outlining the specifics and reasons for a replacement:

There is none of that fact-based there. There's no...it's like 'it always breaks down.' Well, give me the facts. When does it break down? How often does it break down (Jack, CEO)?

In addition, there is the notion of *expectations* in relation to legitimacy. Recall, for instance, the tales of Abigail and Adrian I have told in section 1.1 (Context Background). Both of them did not comply with the parameters of what is considered 'good practice' under the umbrella term of 'culture of innovation' – as established by those that in this instance were in powerful positions (i.e. POD managers, Jack, and Lucy, Adrian's superior; and the NOW Team). Since they would not adjust to 'how things are done around here', they were both removed in one way or another.

I also invite you to consider Keith once more, who in section 1.1 went the extra mile by immediately addressing urgent problems he encountered on the shop floor. As I suggested, his way of handling the situation encapsulated the sense of practice the NOW initiative sought to engender. Based on reflections of several actors, e.g. Jack, in the old days, Keith's activities would have been considered rather anomalous, whereas Adrian's passivity and Abigail's reluctance to embrace change would have been met with confirmation. As the boundaries of practice have clearly shifted from the old days to the NOW era, Adrian/Abigail's ways of conducting themselves are rendered illegitimate, whereas Keith's I came to understand as being expected. As Jack remarked, "this is exactly what we're trying to achieve here". Therefore, I discovered, those in powerful positions may not only determine what a legitimate concern might be, they may also fundamentally influence what is a legitimate and desired way of practicing. Jack, for instance, has a clear view on what he would expect from somebody joining the organisation:

I ask him what sort of impact they would be looking for in a new person. Essentially, they are looking for someone who is keen to make an impact. “Not everybody needs to change the world, but everybody needs to want to change the world”, Jack says. He adds that of course not everybody is an outgoing personality, but they need people who still try their best in becoming one. Adrian, as it appears, is too quiet, ‘sitting in the corner’, being reactive rather than proactive (Fieldnotes, day 11).

Maria has a remarkably similar view:

Yeah I don’t want somebody to come in and, you know, at the start of the day their head’s down and then at the end of the day they go and you kind of go really? I want to them to be going ‘Oh, I’ve just spoken with this, I think we’ve got an opportunity here! Or I just got an order for this! Or...I think we could go and speak with this company and do that kind of thing!’ And actually, then to be taking ownership of the things and driving ideas, or driving orders, and...you can actually, they’re maybe quite vocal about how they do that, or celebrate that kind of success or win, or that drive to do things (Maria, POD Manager).

In other words, employees are not only encouraged to make use of their empowerment, as suggested before in section 1.2.2, they are also *expected* to do so. In that sense, people are empowered as long as they move within the newly established parameters of a ‘culture of innovation’.

In summary, this final part has explored the limitations of empowerment. Its key argument has been that empowerment is essentially bounded, and paradoxically intertwined with notions of accountability, control, and complying with what is considered legitimate. Without these seemingly opposite aspects, empowerment could not occur in the first place – they are two sides of the same coin.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

This section has examined the notion of empowerment at TexCo. To do so, I first explored the ways in which empowerment is enacted. Namely, I identified empowerment to be enacted in the sense of being able to take the initiative (such as Keith), and, relatedly, to work autonomously (e.g. Madeleine taking the initiative to change product launching practice). Additionally, empowerment occurred in terms of voicing ones’ concerns and opinions, which also involves challenging peers and indeed superiors (e.g. Garry objecting rigorously to Patrick, or people refusing Jack).

Since my analysis and time in the field revealed that empowerment does not magically appear, discussing enactments of empowerment was followed by addressing how these enactments were enabled in the first place. The key finding here is that empowerment is essentially *generated*. Empowerment is thus created through an imbalance of power in the sense that I found actors in powerful positions, mostly associated with formal authority, allow others to do certain things. Those in powerful social positions thus *created an environment* of empowerment for their peers.

For example, in the vignette in section 1.2.2 Patrick *chooses* to involve Garry for the sake of his expertise in deciding how to proceed with the broken down machine. POD managers thus created empowerment by actively encouraging peers to be vocal, *asking* for concerns and *letting* them have a say. Yet empowerment is *situational*, since at times authority figures may decide to dictate things rather than putting them up for debate. Moreover, empowerment was created through *encouraging* peers to do certain things, such as taking the initiative (e.g. Patrick supported Madeleine's idea to re-work product launch practices), or as Jack put it, providing employees with the opportunity to 'make an impact'. This entailed for managers to adopt a hands-off approach – as Maria said, keeping your nose in but your hands out. A final major aspect of 'creating an environment of empowerment' was the notion of employee engagement, which sought to make especially shop floor workers realise they have got a voice which is indeed valued.

The final section of the chapter thus addressed the key finding that empowerment is essentially bounded. The production of empowerment in essence rests upon notions of accountability, authority, and legitimacy and associated expectations. As such, empowerment is bound by accountability in the sense that although people are enabled to work autonomously, they nonetheless are accountable to their superiors and peers in terms that *move within the parameters of the business*. This has two related meanings. First, 'moving within the parameters' means that employees need to fulfil their remit and aspire to achieve their assigned goals in order for them to be 'allowed' to work autonomously. Second, it means that one is accountable to the work practices as part of which one lives organisational life. In other words, one is accountable to conducting oneself in ways commonly deemed acceptable (consider again Adrian's or Abigail's ways of practicing).

Relatedly, people are accountable typically to those in authority positions. As we have seen, managers may *enforce* what they believe is right, thereby ignoring opinions expressed by others (e.g. Donald's objecting to making a certain product, or making it within a too short a time frame). This points again to empowerment being a fragile and situational phenomenon. Typically those in superior positions are the ones to *extend* the power bestowed on them by the hierarchical system to others. Similarly, the 'selected few' in authority positions I found to have the capacity to *determine what is legitimate and illegitimate*, thus, referring back to 'parameters of the business', limiting empowerment. These actors *drove expectations* as to how things should be and how practices should be carried out (again, Keith vs. Adrian's ways of working).

This chapter highlights to me that power was subtly exercised over employees so that they would embrace a 'culture of innovation', for instance by being pro-active and speaking up if they encounter problems. 'Power over' has thus been exercised through the cloak of empowerment. Given these mechanisms at play in the production of empowerment, therefore, I found TexCo's mantra of 'people are empowered' to not be entirely adequate. Instead, I propose to say that people are *being* empowered – accounting for empowerment principally being a social relation rather than a state. Echoing the sentiment of this section I conclude by highlighting a paradox: if empowerment is based on an imbalance of power, empowerment and *disempowerment* seem to occur simultaneously.

#### **4.2.5 Implications for Leadership & Power**

The main argument of the foregoing section was about a paradoxical interplay between empowerment and its 'boundedness'. In relation to leadership, this interplay maps onto simultaneously being enabled and constrained to participate in the work of leadership. In this concluding part of the section, I follow the same approach as in section 4.1.5. That is, I am going to outline some of the turning points evident in the section, and how these are implicated with power dynamics. Note though that the following brief discussion is merely exemplary, as there may well be more turning points to be found in the section.

A first turning point to be discerned, for example, is a debate mainly between Garry and Patrick in Vignette 5. Garry's opinion diverges with Patrick's regarding the documentation of machine operators: Garry believes a machine operator is a machine

operator, whereas Patrick contends that different operators are differently skilled, thus required documentation as to who can operate which machine properly, also for accountability purposes. What we see here, in essence, is a discussion of which course of action to take. Since Garry is running out of arguments, Patrick ultimately ‘wins’ the debate, establishing that such documentation is needed after all. Hence, I take this encounter as an example of how direction is negotiated collectively and irrespective of whether all participants occupy authority positions, rather than one person dictating what is the ‘right’ way forward. This section has suggested, therefore, part of partaking in the work of leadership is standing one’s ground and challenging others, such as in the emergency meeting where employees were objecting to the course of action proposed by the CEO, and instead suggested an alternative. Other employees, such as Phil, have also commented on the possibilities of voicing different opinions in attempts to change direction.

More importantly, however, how did power dynamics contribute to these turning points’ materialisation? As this section has argued, inherent in empowerment is in fact an *imbalance of power*, considering that those in more powerful social positions (which are produced by practices), such as Patrick or Jack, ‘grant’ empowerment. Actors such as Garry and others throughout this section, therefore, were *enabled* by other actors to either produce direction themselves (e.g. Madeleine was encouraged to restructure product launch practices) or engage in the joint negotiating and production of direction.

This negotiation is reflected vividly in the third turning point of this section: as it happens a further encounter between Garry and Patrick – Vignette 6. A machine had broken down critical for the delivery of orders to an important customer. While Donald is away skiing, it is up to Garry and Patrick to make a judgement call that limits the machine downtime as much as possible. By deliberating what the best option might be, the two of them jointly established a course of action, i.e. produced direction. ‘Jointly’, however, is not to suggest there are no power dynamics at play – on the contrary, such dynamics in this encounter are manifold, and are subject to interpretation.

A first reading is similar to the first two turning points: Patrick chose to involve Garry, *enabling* him to partake in the turning point. However, we may at the same time observe that Garry was reluctant to carry the burden of making a decision. Therefore, paradoxically, he was *constrained* in his choice of activity by Patrick’s demand for him

to take the lead. Similar to Section 4.1.5, this is reflected in simultaneously being *enabled and obliged* to participate in the work of leadership. In this sense, being empowered might not mean having the capacity to do ‘more’ or ‘different’ things than previously, but in fact quite the opposite. Being empowered may actually *remove* someone’s ability to legitimately act otherwise (Giddens, 1984). This is echoed in the notion of expectations that transpired in this and the previous (4.1) section. Newly shaped norms in terms of a ‘culture of innovation’ – i.e. being pro-active and ‘making an impact’ – simultaneously enable and constrain actors to participate in the work of leadership.

Another possible reading of the power dynamics at play entails recognising that Patrick may not have chosen to involve Garry after all, but saw himself in a disempowered position instead that constrained Patrick in producing direction. With David being away, and Patrick not having the necessary skills and expertise to assess courses of action, he might have been *required* to involve Garry. Either way, however, it is possible to discern how this imbalance of power contributed to creating the conditions for leadership to materialise – through being enabled and constrained to produce a turning point by existing power relations.

Being constrained in the production of turning points is also evident elsewhere in this section. In Vignette 7 we can observe how Kacy and Keith express concerns towards a course of action suggested by Patrick, who despite his colleagues’ concerns subtly insinuates them doing it anyway. Similarly, Donald reflected bitterly in this section on his experience working with Maria, who regularly made him develop new products in what he thought absurd timescales. Although he objected fiercely (Jack once talked of ‘shouting battles’), Maria, being the POD manager, made him do it all the same. In these examples, direction was dictated rather than negotiated. As my theoretical framework (Chapter 2.4) suggests, in this case both Maria and Patrick are in powerful positions. The practice arrangement enables power in terms of authority, and considering the normally pleasing customers is authoritative when it comes to diverging concerns. This enables Maria and Patrick to exercise power over their colleagues in order to enforce a course of action, while David found himself constrained influencing said direction. In other words, here again leadership has materialised through the exercise of power.

In addition, shutting down debates about courses of action and dictating them instead also points towards issues of inclusion and exclusion with regard to accomplishing the work of leadership. In the next section of the findings chapter – 4.3, Inclusive Practice & Elitism – I draw out the nuances of these dynamics, and will again end with a brief examination of how turning points were implicated with power dynamics.

### **4.3 Inclusive Practice & Elitism**

In this section I explore a further tension identified at TexCo. Namely, on the one hand I discerned an inclusive and collective way of accomplishing work, whereas only a handful of actors seemed to be capable of including a large majority in debates to begin with on the other. What I call ‘inclusive practice’, therefore, was reflected in notions such as working cross-functionally, embracing a way of doing things that involves a plethora of people in order to have multiple views on matters, even if this means having more conflicts and disputes. As a result, people were especially keen to stress that TexCo’s hierarchy is flat. The NOW initiative described in section 1.1, which introduced the POD structure and an inherent sentiment of collaboration, was seen as an essential means to strip away layers of hierarchy. Yet, while the notion of ‘inclusive practice’ sounds very compelling, I also experienced a subtle yet significant sense of elitism and merely a ‘democracy of sorts’, as Patrick once put it, casting doubt on how inclusive work practice might actually be.

To unearth this tension between inclusivity, cross-functionality and collaboration on the one hand, and an ostensible elitism on the other, I begin this section by exploring the ways in which I discerned ‘inclusive practice’ to manifest itself – mainly in terms of working cross-functionally. Thereafter, I delve into ‘flat’ hierarchies, showing the ways in which these are indeed flat. After having delineated the ways in which said aspects were manifest at TexCo, I also show that creating flat hierarchies produced what could be called unintended consequences. These consequences are reflected in the notion of elitism, in the sense that removing layers of authority created an elite number of actors that were critical in shaping TexCo in the present and for the future. In the concluding part of the section, therefore, I am going to discuss the ways elitism was present and perhaps casted doubt on the more positive notes above.

#### **4.3.1 Working cross-functionally**

As I have indicated in previous sections (e.g. 4.1), TexCo subscribes to a cross-functional way of performing work practices, illustrated by the following brief vignette. We encounter a spontaneous emergency meeting about a severe production delay, attended by Patrick, Madeleine, Keith and Kacy.

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Today is a busy day at TexCo. My diary is mad, and as I am sprinting from one meeting to another I feel less guilty for skipping my workout on the treadmill the other day. Patrick, Madeleine and I have just finished off a meeting at the Composites POD and are hurrying back to our desks, looking forward to a well-deserved lunch break (one during which we will all probably continue to work while we are eating, an unfortunate habit I have come to share with many of my colleagues at TexCo). I'm looking forward to my leftovers from yesterday's dinner, but my anticipation shall evaporate. Just as we arrive at our table group Kacy suddenly blocks our way. "We are heaving a dilemma", she announces nervously.

"A good or bad one?" Patrick asks not striking me as being keen to hear the answer. It is about a severe shipping delay to a customer in Poland, and nobody is pleased by a shipping delay. Patrick is keen to not waste time on this. "We need to involve Keith in that", he instructs Kacy to phone Keith in order for him to come along from the shop floor so the four of them (Madeleine, Keith, Kacy and Patrick) can have a quick emergency meeting. Kacy doesn't seem delighted. "Yay another meeting, as if I'm not having enough of them", she sighs. They're all having a laugh, and Patrick nonetheless suggests for Keith to come along. Kacy wonders whether they also need Lucy, who happens to overhear our conversation.

"No Lucy doesn't do Composites", says Madeleine.

Lucy comes to join our group standing in-between desks anyhow, asking what the problem is. Kacy explains to her that Poland wants the product by next week, to which Lucy says: "Didn't you have problems to make the original date anyway?"

According to Patrick however it was tight but they were on track.

"Well, which one is the more important customer, Schubert or Poland?" Lucy asks glaring at Patrick.

"They're equally important", he says.

"Ha, right answer...this was a test!" Lucy replies teasingly.

"Did I pass?" asks Patrick cheerfully.

Yet, Lucy suggests that perhaps Schubert, because the business is in decline and Poland on the way up, the former might agree getting their order later. With a cynical laugh Patrick replies that he doesn't want any orders late, but he agrees that this might be a possibility.

Yet again he is eager to not discuss the issue too much now, because they cannot make a decision anyway without speaking to Keith. So once more he says he wants a meeting right after lunch.

And so Keith hurries along shortly after lunch; or during lunch I should say, I haven't even finished my lunch and reluctantly put my bowl away. With a mouth full I reluctantly run down to the yellow Composites POD, again. We all gather around the roundtable, and Patrick begins deliberations to come to a solution.

"What's the shipping date for Poland?" He asks drearily.

"13<sup>th</sup> February, two containers. And three containers in March" Madeleine informs him as she goes through her notes. Patrick nods.

"Safe to say that we are ready for the March order, right? Being six weeks away...so let's put that aside for now" he suggests.

"I think the question is whether we've got enough cores which are necessary to make the product in question", Kacy remarks.

“I’ve got enough for two containers, but then I need to restock”, Keith replies calmly. He’s got quite a monotone voice and speaks quietly, so it is hard to tell whether this is just his way or if he simply cannot be bothered all that much.

“I’ve got 12 rolls but merely need 10”, Keith adds. Patrick asks him how many rolls he needs for the other orders going on. Keith soberly tells him not to worry, as he reckons to have enough by next week.

“Ok, good. How long does it take you to make one container for Poland?” Patrick asks.

“Four shifts, maybe five...between four and five.”

“So it’s eight shifts for two containers”, Madeleine calculates.

Kacy sighs and points out that the customer has requested the product for next week, so they would need to dispatch by Friday.

“That’s never going to happen”, Patrick yells with a cynical laugh. He does so while throwing himself back in the imaginary chair. There are no backrests though, but he doesn’t fall over...

Not quite ready to throw in the towel, Patrick and Kacy begin to scribble down the shifts on their notepads. They calculate that in order to make the orders for Poland and two other customers due shortly they would require 16 shifts in total, which means four overtime shifts. “Do you have overtime available?” Patrick asks Keith. Not entirely delighted (but then again Keith never is), he tells Patrick that he is going to pass on the request to his guys on the shop floor.

“If it gets turned down come and tell me right away!” Patrick requests.

“Oh but they won’t...” says Madeleine confidently.

Half-jokingly Patrick mumbles he won’t be happy if they do... “It cannot get turned down, we got the orders so we need to make it”, he says bluntly, and suggest for Keith to talk to his guys right away doing what he can to make this work. Keith reassures him that he will, but points out that one of his guys is a new trainee, and that this fellow will be ‘thrown into the deep end’ – as folks at TexCo like to say. Patrick reacts rather helplessly. “I understand that’s not ideal, but it’s just how it is right now”, he replies.

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#### Vignette 9 – Solving problems collectively

There are several things to note about this vignette. Firstly, working cross-functionally means that employees have more than one area of responsibility. Although Lucy does not do Composites, she is still informed about shipping dates and possible bottlenecks, and briefly gets involved in the discussion. Whilst this might be argued to be a spontaneous exception, I experienced that often people’s remit transcended boundaries and involved a multiplicity of functionally different tasks in an official sense. Related to the expectations regarding initiative taking and making an impact, Madeleine, for example, was asked to take the lead in TexCo’s online marketing activities (such as Twitter and LinkedIn) aside from her ordinary duties as a POD assistant. In fact, her role as POD assistant involves a multiplicity of tasks. For example, Madeleine is taking care of her own customers, pursuing sales activities, doing market

research, business development, getting involved with developing new products, and looking at how products are being launched. Maria agrees with that view, and her statement conveys that it is in fact expected to perform activities outwith one's actual remit.

So...the structure that we've got where people do kind of get involved with other things and it kind of crosses over that it's more natural, so if somebody then would move more percentage of their time into a different area, or a different role, that's maybe just a higher level of maybe the cross-functional work that's happening in that team anyway (Michelle, POD Manager).

In fact, Madeleine complained several times to me that the extra work due to taking care of TexCo's online marketing efforts started to be unbearable. She was genuinely worried that she could not perform her core duties with the diligence they deserve. Not only did she express this to me, but also to Jack. His response was telling. He jokingly suggested to Madeleine to be off sick one day a week working on marketing without telling Patrick. During one of our car rides, I also mentioned Madeleine feeling overwhelmed, to which Jack simply replied that due to TexCo's unhealthy financial situation "we all need to stretch". In that sense, inclusion and its positive connotations may in fact be seen as being implicated and indeed overloaded, thus possibly rather a burden to be carried.

Secondly, the vignette shows that a variety of stakeholders that may contribute in solving the problem are involved. I have insinuated this phenomenon in previous sections. Recall for example the severe machine breakdown in section 1.2, when Patrick involved Garry's for his maintenance expertise; or the notion of employee engagement which was supposed to involve making changes at TexCo and increasing staff commitment – highlighting the deliberate nature of involvement. Similarly, I have observed countless meetings in which multiple people with diverse backgrounds were discussing issues as described as working cross-functionally above. For instance, at one meeting the group present did not know why a machine would turn out the fabric in the (undesired) way it did. Lucy suggested just asking Wendy whether she would have a clue, considering that Wendy operates this machine. Not wasting time, Lucy got up and hurried away to grab her and pull her into the meeting so that Wendy could share her wisdom.

Once we had identified where those opportunities existed...in that sort of cross-functional team, so everyone had the opportunity to participate in that debate and discussion, and be part of it to...the sort of analysis and the direction setting that we would go through. So we would have guys from quality, from sales, from finance, from marketing, you know etc. involved in all of that...that discussion. So we sort of collectively agreed almost (Patrick, POD Manager).

In the vignette above, Patrick apparently is unable to make a decision without consulting his colleagues due to a disparity of information (e.g. Patrick is not readily aware of shipping dates, nor does he know the stock level or overtime capacity), which is why he is eager to involve Keith. Therefore, as the basic principle of cross-functional teams, different people with different skills, expertise and hence multiple perspectives are involved. The rationale for doing so is simple:

The primary objective is that no one person really has all the answers, and it's really about making sure that we get input and perspective from all the different parts of the business that could influence the outcome of that process or that challenge, whatever it may be (Patrick, POD Manager).

This, in turn, has several implications. For instance, all employees except POD managers (and Madeleine) work for all PODs at the same time. Recall, for instance, Vignette 5, in which Garry and Patrick got into a heated argument. We were down at the fishbone diagrams to get to the bottom of a persistent quality issue. Each 'bone' represented a different area, such as manpower, machinery, materials etc. Therefore, for each area somebody else was present sharing their expertise and being responsible for taking care of things (Garry for instance needs to take care of machine maintenance, whereas Keith needs to ensure adequate manpower is put in place making the product).

At the same time this means that people work for 'multiple bosses', as Jack explained to me. He stressed TexCo to be a non-hierarchical company. If one goes to a meeting in the Composites POD, he said, then one answers to the person in charge of that – Patrick in this case. Would it be a meeting in the Pipe Fabric POD, one would be accountable to Maria. The hierarchy as part of working cross-functionally according to Jack is hence simple: it is himself on top as CEO, followed by the board and the POD managers (who are part of the board), and then everybody else. During this section, however, I critically question this notion of allegedly flat hierarchy, and examine possible unintended consequences thereof.

Yet, one way of looking at the vignette indeed entails recognising that issues are resolved collaboratively and collectively. Consider how Patrick describes work practice at TexCo:

You know, I've used the analogy of a sports game, a team game like football before, to explain to the guys how we operate, you know. It's not about the striker putting the ball in the net, you know, because without defence, you know, midfielder etc. it doesn't work. Everyone needs to work together as a team. And hopefully the outcome is that we score more goals than our opponents. But if you don't work well as a team no matter how good the individuals are, then you'll never win the game, so... (Patrick, POD Manager).

Just like a football team, people at TexCo largely seem to work towards a shared goal – in the vignette above resolving the production delay to prevent a customer being dissatisfied with TexCo's services. Thereby, input from multiple stakeholders is required – be it managers or 'ordinary' shop floor workers who may influence the outcome of a meeting. Yet, also like a football team, there are different personalities, status claims, and interests. This involves recognising that in a team of multiple personalities, roles and skills, *diverging perspectives* and hence conflicts are frequent:

It brings of course a high level of conflict at times. You have people with different perspectives, different views. Sometimes, you know, that can be about self-interest, sometimes it's about not understanding the true issues... It can be various conflicts that come up through the discussions (Patrick, POD Manager).

As an example I invite you to return to the meeting at the fishbone diagrams in which a diversity of people, led by Patrick, tried to resolve a persistent quality issue, first discussed in Vignette 5. Patrick now has to deal with Igor this time, who is furious about a particular machine operator.

#### **4.3.2 Diverging Concerns**

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We are almost finished with going through all axes of the fishbone. It's been a very long meeting.

"Anything else?" Patrick asks eventually as I get ready to gather my things. "What about the compression test, do we still do that?"

I sigh quietly.

"We haven't been lately, because the rolls are..." Keith admits.

"What did we say we are going to do, I cannot recall?" Patrick enquires.

“We’re meant to go over three points in the roll and get less than a five point variation. The operators haven’t been doing it”, Keith reports.

“Have we been doing that as part of an initial set up check?” Patrick probes further slightly annoyed.

“No you can’t do that.”

“But at the first-off?” Patrick insists.

“He hasn’t been doing it”, Keith replies helplessly.

Igor finds that absolutely unacceptable. Ostensibly it’s a requirement to do it. Even though every machine is typically within the specification, every machine *could* be out of specification. Nobody should be left off the hook for not doing it”, Igor demands forcefully. He’s quite outraged in fact, making it very clear that he doesn’t draft a specification for every machine and product for the operator to decide what is all right and what is not. ‘Unacceptable’ he protests several times, clearly in rage. Lucy agrees, “It’s not their call to make”, she says decisively. Keith, apparently intimidated, backpedals and admits that he isn’t quite sure about all this after all. “I need to ask them”, he mumbles timidly.

The group gets quite hung up on the issue of roll weight and the frequency of actually testing this, and although Patrick acknowledges this to be an issue that needs to be addressed, he doesn’t think it plays into making the product consistently and therefore should not be the focus of the current analysis. He finds the customer complaint contemporarily more urgent. Patrick says so very clearly, but apparently unconvincingly. Igor, Garry and Keith, who are off to a relatively outraged debate about this issue choose to ignore Patrick’s comment. “It’s not affecting glass distribution, but it’s fundamental to what we’re trying to do!” Igor shouts fumingly. “It’s a critical measurement!” Lucy concurs shaking her head in disbelief. Standing next to the whiteboard seemingly uneasy, Patrick is still keen to settle this debate and move on. “I agree...you’re right”, he repeats to settle the dispute. “But! This whole process is about trying to make sure we get the product right and we do it consistently and...it’s a separate issue and we shouldn’t forget about it. We need to agree what is the test frequency for doing that and then make sure we do it. But it’s a separate issue” He explains. His statement indeed manages to calm the situation down, but the group still discusses further albeit in a somewhat less intense manner. I have encountered Patrick as a patient man, so it startles me as I suddenly hear him shout “Manpower!” unnerved and authoritatively, insisting to carry on with the analysis. The others, though still agitated, fall silent and pay attention to Patrick as he moves on to elaborate on the next possible issue cause.

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#### Vignette 10 – Diverging concerns

In this vignette we encounter two major diverging concerns. For Patrick it is of the essence to solve the quality issue as quickly as possible, given that he is ‘the face’ of TexCo towards the customer, and faces the threat of losing business and a reputation for quality products – as he perceives one of TexCo selling points. Igor (and a few others who happen to be closely involved with the shop floor in the sense that a majority of their practices take place *on* the shop floor), meanwhile, is more concerned with the

matter of a machine operator having the discretion to do or not do certain things. Igor is offended by what he apparently perceived as a breach of his authority as the person responsible for managing product development. Thus Igor does not see the same urgency Patrick perceives in this instance.

This reflects in what I have encountered as a ‘market vs. production challenge’. ‘Commercial’ employees – i.e. who are involved in dealing with customers, as Patrick referred to them (himself included, of course) – generally care more about getting products delivered to customers of highest quality and as *quickly* as possible. The production challenge, on the contrary, reflects in employees involved in making or developing products being concerned for issues related to actually being able to make the product, which they normally found to take longer than requested by commercial staff. Recall, for instance, how in section 1.2 Donald bitterly reflected on Maria making him develop products to what he perceived as absolutely absurd timescales.

In my mind, we’ve got one goal that’s a meeting in a couple of weeks time, and that’s been there since before Christmas. The next one is I believe we need to actually have development done throughout the year so the end of the year (product) principles will be improved. And then the other year, start with the year will be producing a productionised (i.e. it went through development and is ready for production) material, minimum quantities, to get tested. So that’s a year. And then in the part of the second year and the third year will be getting ready for real production, at a point when it looks as if the product is good. And it’ll take another year for that to get going. Yeah. Maria wanted all that done by October (Donald, Product Development).

Here, Donald is referring to several years to get a product to a point ready for mass production, whereas Maria thought this should all be done within a matter of months. Donald was bewildered when he explained this schedule to me. His view on getting a product ready clearly contrasted with Maria’s, who was more concerned with making commitments that would please the customer. Normally, in situations like this, POD managers get their way. People, Donald and Igor for example, on the production side of the spectrum, meanwhile, speculate that this rushed product development is the root cause for ongoing and severe quality issues on a range of products and customers.

Corresponding to this disparity of concerns, Maria recalled what she found a bewildering encounter between Shawn, who works in the office, and a shop floor operator. Shawn approached the operator about an order that was rather urgent. “Can

you get this out of the door by Friday?” Shawn was asking. The response he got was unexpected. “Tell the customer to fuck himself”, said the operator. It is two completely different mind-sets, Maria said to me laughing in disbelief.

The meeting in the vignette is thus unfolding into either of two directions: a debate about the operator in question, or returning to what had been the reason to call the meeting in the first place. As I have suggested in my discussion about empowerment and its boundedness (section 4.2), I experienced customer satisfaction as authoritative if it comes down to diverging concerns. As the vignette turns out, therefore, Patrick is decisive about demanding a re-focus on what *he* thinks is the more important issue (pleasing the customer). His authority as a POD manager, and as a meeting chair for that matter, therefore, prevails. Although Patrick realises that he is dependent on others to achieve his goals (e.g. machine operators working overtime) and that he hence avoids ‘autocratic’ measures in the sense of dictating to people what to do without entertaining the thought of asking their opinions, he is aware that at times exactly those practices are required.

I mean in some instances it’s obvious and everyone agrees. In other instances, you know, there is a real disparity of opinion, about what is the problem and how to fix it etc. In that situation you’re trying to first of all...shape and form consensus, but if consensus can’t be reached then the situation dictates it, then you need to...someone needs to stand up and make the decision (Patrick, POD Manager).

Thus in both vignettes in this section, even though it seems like the group collectively makes an effort to solve a problem (a quality issue or a shipping delay), it is Patrick no less who shapes what is being done. For instance, in the first vignette, although all attendees give an input, it is essentially Patrick deciding that they will give it a shot by doing extensive overtime, and so he is decisively persuading Keith to convince his guys to make it work in spite of him not being pleased. In second vignette, he demands his colleagues to drop their discussion of operator documentation. Thus, as suggested earlier, to the contrary of Patrick’s football analogy, motives and goals at times necessarily diverge if there is a diversity of expertise, skill sets and backgrounds present (e.g. Keith being concerned for limiting the burden on his workers, whereas Patrick is keen to please his customer). Patrick, therefore, told me he perceives his role to require him to align different opinions.

In addition, Patrick's choice of words in the quote above – 'shaping', or 'forming' consensus – is striking. He may or may not be keen to avoid 'autocratic measures', though if consensus is 'shaped', or 'formed', is it then consensus to begin with? Do all parties agree, or are they convinced to agree? In this sense, 'shaping consensus' appears like a juxtaposition – one that may challenge the idea of 'everybody being equal', and indeed the notion of hierarchy allegedly being flat. Rather than seemingly 'everybody being equal', as per the sentiment of cross-functionality and the idea of employee ownership, TexCo operates in what Patrick describes a 'democracy of sorts'.

In a true democracy everyone has an equal vote. One vote, one person. Each vote means the same as the next person's vote. In organisations like TexCo that's not the case. So there is a *democracy of sorts*, I would say. The intention is there to have a democratic system, but ultimately you need to have people who can make decisions and lead the business (Patrick, POD Manager).

He continued to explain that TexCo's 'democratic system' is limited in the sense that some people, for various reasons, are more influential to steer the course of action than others:

I think within that democracy there are certainly layers of authority, if you can put it that way, based on either people's longevity in the business, or a degree of knowledge on a specialist area of the business, and...that can mean that they maybe have more of an influence certainly over certain discussions and topics than other people (Patrick, POD Manager).

In this sense, Patrick describes an imbalance of power to steer the direction of possible courses of action, yet an imbalance that is not one per se. In other words, some people might be able to influence a discussion about product development (e.g. Patrick commented that he would rarely challenge Phil because he put great trust in Phil's expertise), but not a discussion about when to ship an order (see Donald's frustrations). Contrary to 'inclusive practice', however, in which a diversity of actors are involved in steering direction, ultimately it is either Jack or the POD managers who are in such a position – exerting more influence over the course of action than other people, by, as the next section shows, carefully constructing how and which actors work together. Madeleine confirms my impression:

Ultimately it comes down to the POD manager, nine times out of ten, I would say. And then they make the call. And that can be hard for me sometimes, because if it's something that I'm taking ownership of, or a

project that I'm working on, then sometimes I have to run past Patrick first. And a lot of the time it's just to get him to say yes, and I know he'll say yes. But if he's not there in that meeting, then I've not got his authority, so I can't push things on (Madeleine, POD Assistant).

Clearly, from Madeleine's perspective, despite seeming empowerment formal authority is required to make certain decisions and drive projects forward. At TexCo, only a few people are in fact in such a position. As I explained in section 1.1, as part of the NOW initiative layers of authority were removed and departments restructured into PODs to foster empowerment (section 1.2) and, as discussed here, collaboration. I have insinuated, however, that a – perhaps unintended – consequence of this might be the facilitation of *elitism*, evident in the notion that key individuals have the capacity to shape practices, which I am going to explore in the concluding part of this section.

#### 4.3.3 Elitism

In the previous part of this section I have insinuated that working cross-functionally and an allegedly flat hierarchy were accompanied by elitism, as opposed to a 'sense of collectiveness' that the previous part explored. Such elitism I experienced to manifest itself in numerous ways. To glimpse into elitism, consider the following brief vignette of another encounter between Jack and myself on the way to the 'madhouse' – as Adrian once called it:

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As usual, I take a ride with Jack to work today. We meet at 8am at Starbucks, and he, also as usual, orders a latte in the largest size available. He is not very talkative this morning; something seems to bother him. I make a few attempts to talk about things, but the conversation just won't evolve and so we mostly talk about our uneventful private lives. We chase across the icy roads, the odd snowflake makes its way through the crisp Scottish winter air. As we turn onto TexCo's parking lot somehow our otherwise rather stale conversation this morning turned to Jacob. He is a POD manager, but only looks after one specific and major customer. "So he's just looking after that customer?" I ask curiously as I get out of the Jaguar and almost slip, yet barely manage to keep one hand on the door. "What the f..." I say out loud as I discover I stepped on a golf ball right next to his car. "You may want to make sure you're not being hit today, I don't think bumps would look good on that car of yours" I say to Jack as I show him the golf ball between my index finger and thumb. "Jesus, we need to build a higher fence!", Jack shouts as he shuts the door. I throw the ball back over the fence onto the golf course as we walk towards the building's entrance. "Where were we?" I ask. "Right! That customer is just being looked after by Jacob?"

“Yeah. It’s a really big one we need to put our top talent on.”

‘Putting top talent on customers’ somehow startles me.

“And who decides which people should work on that high priority stuff? Is it you, or the board?”

“Well, yes and no”, Jack says. “The board and also the POD managers. It’s pretty much a team-based decision. It has to be, with these kind of things...I hardly decide anything. Well, a few things I do.” He laughs. “But with Kelly for example, she gave a presentation of the top nine things that interest her most. So we sat down together as a team and decided on which of these she wants to work.”

“You mean in conjunction with her?” I inquire.

“Yes, absolutely!” Jack confirms as he holds open the reception door for me to walk in. The same day as we drive home I chuckle: Jack cannot help himself but walk around his car, checking for golf bumps before he gets in.

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#### Vignette 11 – Picking top talent.

This brief conversation I had with Jack that morning puzzled me. The phrase ‘top talent’ I found to invoke a sense of some employees being worth and trusted more than others, some being included in important tasks whereas others are best left at the sidelines. For instance, Jack regularly involved particularly Patrick and Maria in certain decisions, or consulted them for advice. Likewise, Lucy he held in high regard so much so that Jack gave her autonomy to make of scheduling practice she took over from Abigail whatever she wanted (within certain parameters of being more effective mind you). Abigail, by contrast, I sensed Jack did not like very much. He was rather displeased about her performance given severe order delays, and discontented with her very way of doing things – i.e. being reluctant to embrace change but trying to force her antiquated system instead.

Some voices, therefore, were heard more than others. Indeed, as discussed at several occasions beforehand, voices that did not correspond with what some people (e.g. Jack) wanted to hear were either not listened to, or simply removed altogether. Recall my discussion of setting the ‘true north’ in section 1.1. Although a diversity of employees were involved in negotiating what this true north shall be, Jack played a dominant role in defining it. As the ‘architect of the scheme’ he perceives his task to make sure that the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ people are dealt with as appropriate:

You know, putting in the people who want to change things, like Patrick, like Maria. Hiring people that want to make a difference, and in some regards moving to the side maybe some of the people that are quite happy with mediocrity. So that’s really, pointing out that north...and then getting some of the people involved to...the more disruptive personalities, to come

in and start changing towards that. But then over and above that it's literally just letting them do that (Jack, CEO).

'Moving to the side' employees 'happy with mediocrity' in other words means placing staff in peripheral roles or removing people altogether who do not correspond or agree with a new sense of practicing along the lines of a 'culture of innovation'. At one point, Phil recalls, Jack was explicit about enforcing what the new TexCo should be like:

Jack once said 'Look, you might not like it, but it's fine. But if you don't like it...shut up!' (Phil, Product Technician).

The concept of employees being diversely talented and thus 'utilised' in different ways may not be hugely surprising. However, the vignette also reveals a very limited number of people to be involved in the allocation of people to teams. For every year, TexCo design a balanced scorecard reflecting different objectives. These objectives are pursued by cross-functional teams and are led by different people (who may or may not be in formal authority positions) – so far appearing like a fairly democratic and authority-less practice. Jack notes:

So then they agree, who would be the best person to lead that...and the good thing as well is you set...when you set up cross-functional teams, you pick the best person for it. You don't pick who's in charge of that department. Because sometimes the person who's in charge of that department isn't the right person. So you pick the best person for delivering the team, you then work with them to agree... (Jack, CEO).

In other words, projects are led based on merit, not authority (which of course need not mean that an authority figure does not lead). Yet only few employees, indeed authority figures, are in a position to decide on who 'has' merit. For instance, Jack is talking about picking the 'right' person to get the job done, reflecting in how he described himself at a different occasion: the 'architect of the scheme'. Remarkably, by 'they' in this quote Jack refers to him and the board members and POD managers. Here is how he describes the construction of the balanced scorecard:

We set together the balanced scorecard, so at the end of the year we look at what the objectives are as a team, the board and the POD leaders, we sit together and we then agree... So that is the what, that's what we're going to do. And then we agree, well, what's the how. And that's done by the top team. So everybody's involved in that, the POD leaders, the board (Jack, CEO).

Jack's use of language (making decisions collectively) is telling. A 'team-based' process setting up the balanced scorecard it may be. Yet, while phrases like Jack's easily invoke a democratic practice, a team involved in making a decision does not principally suggest that it is not a highly selective number of individuals pondering the organisational fate of much larger group of people. In this sense, indeed as Patrick has said, it is a 'democracy of sorts' in which everybody has a vote, yet not every vote weighs as much as the next. This is very much reflected in the sentiment that POD managers (recall Maria and Donald's dispute over production times) usually get their way. In this case, in fact, some votes appear to not be heard at all and thus do not weigh to begin with. Contrary to statements plastered to the walls of the Museum Room (encountered in section 4.1; statements such as 'you've got a voice, use it'), by far not everybody has a say in matters. The idea of a 'top team' orchestrating who might be in- and excluded, for instance, runs counter to an inclusive and collaborative way I described throughout this section. On the contrary, a 'top team' deciding what is done and how it is done might be elitist in the sense that those 'in power' determine who may get the chance to participate and who is 'unworthy'.

#### **4.3.4 Summary**

In summary, in this section I have presented the preferred way of working at TexCo, i.e. collaboratively, and its paradoxical twin brother, elitism. Under the banner of a 'culture of innovation', TexCo has started to embrace the notion of working cross-functionally and inclusively. This had several implications, such as stripping away conventional departments from the business structure and hence layers of hierarchy, deliberately involving a diversity of people in debates and discussions, listening to different voices for the sake of embracing diverging views and conflicts, as well as practicing empowerment to use one's voice.

Engendering these practices through the NOW initiative, however, also seems to have had unintended consequences. Because layers of hierarchy were removed in an effort to empower employees, this simultaneously means that merely a handful of actors, incidentally occupying authority positions, are rendered disproportionately 'powerful' – which I described in the sense of 'elitism'. In other words, despite all empowerment as discussed in Section 4.2, and regardless of notions such as

collaboration, cross-functional teams and involvement, only a few actors occupy social positions that enable them to for instance determine who is in- or excluded to begin with, or to shape what the dominant perspective on matters might be. In that sense, seemingly contradictory, while there is ‘inclusive practice’ on the one hand, for it to materialise in the first place authority appears to be required. Although hierarchy ‘flattened out’ through the NOW initiative, this need not mean *equality* of power relations.

#### **4.3.5 Implications for Leadership & Power**

As in Section 4.1.5 and 4.2.5, I am now going to outline briefly the ways turning points were evident in the preceding section, and how these were implicated with power dynamics. To reiterate, although aspects such as shaping norms and enablement/constraint were also evident in the preceding section, the expression of power I am going to focus on here is *inclusion and exclusion*.

The key point of the section was to illustrate the ways in which TexCo perform their work practices: in terms of what I have called ‘inclusive practice’ that is, mainly, collaborating in cross-functional teams. In relation to leadership, the notion of inclusive practice could be argued to reflect in the idea that a diversity of actors participates in the work of leadership. The following turning points indeed echo this sentiment. Yet, the foregoing section has also brought to attention a ‘shadow’ cast on the idea of working cross-functionally, in the sense that the organisation also exhibits few particularly influential actors when it comes to producing direction.

The first turning point I wish to pick up here is evident in Vignette 9, ‘Solving Problems Collectively’. To reiterate, a group of employees up and down the hierarchy (Patrick, Lucy, Madeleine, Keith, and Kacy) were confronted with a severe shipping delay that needed to be mitigated immediately. Since Patrick is in charge of the Composites POD, Kacy did not hesitate to inform him – indicating the need for somebody officially ‘in charge’ to decide a course of action. Since Patrick, as he commented once, cannot simply dictate overtime, he had to *involve* Keith, who is representing the Composites’ shop floor. Also, Keith was better informed about the production schedule, how busy the machines are, and who might be able and willing to work overtime. Keith hurried along and the group was having a meeting, going through possible courses of action that would hopefully solve their problem. The vignette is

therefore a testimony of how a variety of actors contribute to negotiating and producing direction. It is also representative of further data in the foregoing section, such as when Lucy went to fetch a colleague to involve her in the decision-making process as she was the person considered to have the most expertise regarding the issue at hand.

However, although they are produced jointly, these turning points are not short of power dynamics. Take the first vignette of the section. My theoretical framework allows for appreciating differently empowered social positions due to distinct access to resources of power. Whilst Kacy is confronted with the problem first, she assesses the need to involve the person officially 'in charge', namely Patrick, in order to make a decision about how to proceed. As a first course of action Patrick, meanwhile, simply decides to include Keith in their deliberations. As argued in section 4.2.5, Patrick essentially creates the conditions of Keith's empowerment by enabling him to participate in the direction setting. Again similar to section 4.2.5, we can observe that Keith, in fact, is in an empowered social position himself because he has the necessary information to work out a shift plan, and since overtime cannot simply be ordered Keith may profoundly influence the direction taken. In this sense, zooming in on power dynamics highlights the ways actors are distinctly empowered or disempowered to contribute in different ways to producing direction; and that in this case several actors are involved in setting direction.

Exclusion as an expression of power, however, is also evident in the section. In Vignette 10, 'Diverging Concerns', for example, we can observe a debate among a few actors, but mainly between Igor and Patrick. Towards the end of the vignette, when Patrick is unable to settle the debate he deems is taking the meeting into a contemporarily less urgent direction, he simply shuts down the debate and demands fiercely to continue to discussing the quality issue. Muting distracting voices and dictating what is going to be done has produced direction in this case. Other actors in the section have also been excluded from the work of leadership. Consider, for instance, Donald's ordeal developing products to absurd timescales. Maria, as POD manager clearly a dominant figure in setting a course of action, simply forced Donald to do so in spite of his resistance. In this case, strikingly, we can discern the turning point not only being produced by power (in the sense of enacting formal authority in the matter), but as an act of power itself – insinuating power and leadership to be deeply intertwined.

The preceding section, if not the whole findings chapter, has very much echoed the literature by indicating different regimes of empowerment (see Nicolini, 2011) and disempowerment regarding who can do and say what, whose voices are foregrounded and whose are muted. Fundamental to performing and producing the work of leadership, the findings suggest, are power dynamics. As this last part of the final findings section (4.3) has argued, accordingly, and similar to empowerment in Section 4.2, inherent in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are major power imbalances.

After some final concluding remarks in the following section, my discussion chapter is going to draw out further the ways in which power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership, and elaborate thoroughly on how these insights reflect back on and advance existing literatures.

## 5. Discussion

In this final chapter of my thesis, I am going to draw on the findings (see below) presented in Chapter 4, and connect these to ongoing debates in the literature. To reiterate, in this thesis I examine the two research questions (see Chapter 2.4 for an in-depth discussion):

- 3) How is the work of leadership implicated with power dynamics?
- 4) How is the work of leadership accomplished?

As outlined in Chapter 2.3, in order to answer these questions I used the concept of power as a conceptual tool. The theoretical framework is based on a variety of different insights from the power literature. To reiterate, the framework begins with the premise that practices, based on a variety of resources (e.g. tenure, expertise, capital, social position, relations, rules, information, authority), provide for certain power relations (cf. Nicolini, 2011). The literature calls this ‘systemic power’ (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2008, 2012). These ‘systemic’ power relations then translate into certain dispositions, i.e. ‘dispositional power’ (power as a capacity to do certain things, e.g. Giddens (1984)). Ultimately, dispositional power connects systemic power with what is called ‘episodic power’, which simply describes the *exercise* of power (see e.g. Dahl, 1957). This exercise I identify empirically by deploying the definition of power that one actor (or a group of actors) structures the possible actions of another actor (or a group of actors) (Foucault, 1982).

It is important to note that notions of systemic, dispositional, and episodic power have largely been treated in a separate fashion by the literature (exceptions being Clegg, 1989; Lawrence et al., 2012), and hardly in a practice-based approach. As argued elsewhere (Mueller et al., 2016), a practice-based approach would suggest that systemic and dispositional power is rendered meaningless without its exercise, whereas the exercise of power (i.e. episodic) cannot be understood completely without taking into account notions of systemic and dispositional power. In other words, these three ‘variations’ of power are in a mutual relationship, and need to be examined in a ‘relational whole’ (cf. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Chapter 2.2).

To clarify the terms I use in this chapter (see also Chapter 2.3), by *power dynamics* I simply refer to this mutual interplay of systemic, dispositional and episodic

power based on practices, whilst by *power imbalances* I mean that actors are differently empowered or disempowered to do certain things.

Besides the theoretical contributions made by this thesis, briefly discussed below and thoroughly throughout this chapter, I propose this theoretical framework, which shows a novel way to utilise a practice-based concept of power as a family resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1967; see also Haugaard, 2010), in order to study other organisational phenomena, as a further conceptual contribution.

As argued in Chapter 2, power dynamics are often highlighted to be a pivotal social dynamic in practices generally and therefore in the work of leadership specifically (e.g. Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2007, 2011, 2013; Raelin, 2015; Simpson, 2015). However, I also emphasised that although scholars acknowledge the importance of power – for instance by asserting practice to exhibit ‘regimes of unequal empowerment’ (Nicolini, 2011) – they seldom focus specifically on such dynamics and mostly offer indicative suggestions. As Nicolini (2013: 92) observes, issues of power and conflict have conveniently been “tucked away in the footnotes”. In that sense, addressing power dynamics in leadership arguably constitutes in itself a contribution to the literature.

There is, however, a stream of research that takes criticism of a ‘lack of power’ seriously: Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) (e.g. Collinson, 2011; see Chapter 2.2). As argued previously, however, CLS do not adopt a practice perspective, and mostly critique a lack of power relations rather than specifically conceptualising the ways in which power permeates leadership in everyday life. This is where a practice approach offers valuable insight, and where my thesis adds to the literature: exploring the specific ways in which power is exercised, and how this affects the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished in everyday organisational life. Meanwhile, similar to the practice literature, Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) suggests that analysing the work of leadership – as the production of direction (so-called *turning points*, see Chapter 2.2) – should take into account disputes and negotiations (e.g. Crevani et al. 2010; Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015), yet seldom concentrates on how exactly these dynamics contribute to the production of the work of leadership.

At the end of each findings chapter, I discussed how leadership and power were evident in the respective section. This led me to identify *expressions of power* affecting

the work of leadership, which constitute my three main findings: *shaping normativity*, *enabling and constraining* action, as well as dynamics of *inclusion and exclusion*. How these three expressions of power are brought to bear on the work of leadership, thereby, constitutes the overarching contribution this thesis makes to existing literatures of practice in general and leadership/LAP specifically – which I will break down in the respective chapters (see below). This chapter is also structured according to these three expressions.

In the first section, ‘5.1 Shaping Normativity’, I show how power dynamics are implicated in leadership work by shaping, negotiating, and *imposing* what are considered legitimate and acceptable ways of practicing – i.e. normativity. For the work of leadership, this means that some forms of producing direction (i.e. ‘turning points’) are ruled in, whereas other ways to do so are ruled out – addressing the *hows* and *whys* of producing direction. Shaping normativity through power dynamics, however, also entails influencing *what* courses of action may materialise instead of others. The section thereby contributes to the literature by demonstrating the important role of normativity in the work of leadership, and problematizes power relations portrayed as simple leader-led relations – as conventionally purported by the literature. Moreover, the section comments on the intimate relationship of practices and power, proposing to rethink the ways that ‘prefiguration’, as enablement and constraint of activity, is conceptualised by the practice literature.

Thereafter, I delve further into the notion of enablement and constraint in the second section (5.2), which has been another expression of power salient to be implicated in the work of leadership. Drawing particularly on findings Chapter 4.2, the section illustrates how power dynamics, via empowerment and disempowerment, enable and constrain actors at TexCo to set direction; i.e. partake in the work of leadership. Power, as echoed in this section, is conceptualised as *both* productive *and* restrictive. Actors, therefore, seem *simultaneously* enabled and constrained. In that sense, although seemingly contradictory, the section goes on to argue that enablement and constraint (and thus empowerment and disempowerment) are in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Lastly, the section concludes by addressing the delicate relationship between the two concepts of leadership and power, particularly addressing my first research question in that leadership and power appear to be two sides of the same coin.

The section thereby contributes to existing conversations in the practice and LAP literature in terms of going deeper into the ways in which both practice and power dynamics simultaneously guide activity (see above for section 5.1). For instance, based on the idea that different practices are intimately connected (e.g. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2013), I highlight the ways in which power dynamics contribute to these connections, and concurrently add to LAP studies (e.g. Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Crevani, 2015) that build their concepts on this insight.

Finally, in the third section, ‘5.3 Inclusion & Exclusion’, I explore dynamics of access that appear to be implicated in the work of leadership, as also indicated in the first, and vaguely hinted at in the second section. Although notions of access have been a central concern of other practice-based literatures (learning and knowing; e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi, 2000, 2006), it has not been a major focus of LAP studies. In section 5.3, therefore, I contribute to the LAP literature by highlighting the ways in which inclusion and exclusion are brought to bear on how the work of leadership is accomplished. Aspects I highlight specifically include ‘practice breakdowns’. These instances show when leadership turns out to be especially required, and that leadership not only occurs through mundane, as suggested by the literature, but also via deliberate coping (Carroll, 2015). At the same time, the section contributes to existing LAP studies by suggesting a key role for authority, *in spite of* leadership’s inherently collective character, which has not yet featured prominently in LAP studies. In particular, the findings imply that authority is required for leadership to be a dispersed practice *to begin with* – a seemingly contradictory relationship similar to the one described regarding enablement and constraint in the previous section. By drawing on the other two parts of this chapter, I conclude this section by arguing that the work of leadership gets *manipulated* – through shaping notions of acceptability and legitimacy, enabling and constraining action, and by ‘regulating’ who may or may not be allowed to participate in the leadership work. In the following, I address these three sections and their contributions in detail.

## 5.1 Shaping Normativity

A major expression of power in the production of direction (i.e. leadership) identified in the findings has been *shaping normativity*. The main concern of this section, therefore, is about how power dynamics shape which ways of practicing are rendered acceptable and legitimate, ultimately affecting the ways in which the work of leadership may or may not be accomplished. Thereby, I highlight power imbalances regarding who might be capable of shaping what is considered acceptable and legitimate, whilst other actors are in less favourable social positions to meaningfully influence this negotiation.

As I have argued in Chapter 2.1, normativity plays a pivotal role in practices. It is defined in terms of acceptability and legitimacy (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a), and thus guides what is expected of actors and what needs to be accounted for, what conduct is possible and appropriate. In other words, how the practice ought to be carried out. This means also that practices exhibit certain boundaries that establish whether activity is seen as ‘normal’, i.e. to the ‘standard’ of the practices, or whether it is anomalous and thus ‘out of bounds’ (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

In order to explore how shaping normativity affects the work of leadership, I first zoom in on how ‘norms’ at TexCo have ostensibly changed. Since practices cannot be appreciated without reference to a concrete historical context (Schatzki, 2002; Latour; 2005; Nicolini, 2009a), analysing these reflections offers a more nuanced understanding about the practicing of the present. It is important to note that it is neither my intention here to make claims about whether practices have ‘truly’ changed, nor to contribute theoretically to (albeit interesting) conversations about how practices evolve and change (e.g. Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Shove et al., 2011). The reality considered here is thus not of actual practice of the past, but merely the constructions of people’s experiences of it (cf. Alvesson, 1996).

As the data shows, particularly Chapter 4.1, ‘Contextual Background’, normativity of what constitutes the appropriate and acceptable way to practice at TexCo appears to have substantially evolved from the ‘old days’ to more contemporary life that is guided by the sentiment of ‘culture of innovation’. The old days are described by a command and control mode of governance, where it was perfectly acceptable to

perform work practices passively and without going beyond one's ordinary remit. In the old days, people apparently only listened to the voice of the Godfather, while the board operated in a secretive and exclusive fashion. As reflections have it, in the old days people were accustomed to only dance when the bell started ringing. In contrast, in more contemporary life, TexCo appears to embrace notions of collaboration, empowerment, having conflicting views, creativity, and autonomy. Examples of this way of practicing include Madeleine, who grew dissatisfied with the way products were launched at TexCo. Ultimately she took it upon herself to change this practice towards being more streamlined and effective. Similarly, I have referred to the machine operator Keith, who took the initiative to solve a production shortfall by re-scheduling shifts and collaborating with machine operators in other departments.

The literature is indeed fond of pointing out that practices are not static entities resilient to time. Quite the contrary, as I have echoed multiple scholars (e.g. Schatzki, 2002; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a), practices unceasingly evolve. Shove et al. (2011) exemplify this evolution by reference to the practice of skateboarding. The authors suggest that while the practice is still about riding boards, it has undergone several transformations – for example the particulars of the materials in use (e.g. the form and shape of boards), or the meanings of turning tricks. A similar observation can be made at TexCo. The company still manufactures textiles, some of which even for decades. Yet *how* they go about manufacturing these textiles has been transformed noticeably. The physical space (i.e. the office) has changed dramatically with the introduction of the Innovation Space, new techniques of working collaboratively have been introduced as part of the NOW Initiative (e.g. via creative tools such as 'six hat thinking'), and, as suggested above, new norms as to what constitutes legitimate ways of practicing have been engendered (e.g. accomplishing tasks autonomously and at times outwith one's ordinary remit).

As insinuated throughout Chapter 4, these reflections reveal an undesired past, and, together with portrayals of the TexCo of today (e.g. the office space or the museum room), can be interpreted as efforts to distance itself from that history. In that sense, the reflections allow for appreciating notions of legitimacy and acceptability of the present. Consider the stories of Abigail and Adrian as two examples. Abigail refused to change her scheduling practice that was still designed for catering to the requirements of

making four major products. Yet, as part of the NOW initiative, countless new products and variations thereof had been introduced. Similarly, Adrian was considered to be a too passive kind of worker, waiting to be told what to do instead of ‘taking the initiative’. Jack even confronted him, asking how Adrian thought he could improve, to which Adrian simply responded ‘Whatever you suggest, boss’ – precisely the wrong response as far as Jack was concerned. Other actors, meanwhile, disdainfully associated Abigail and Adrian’s practices with the TexCo of the old days, when, according to Jack, people were just told what to do.

Their stories are also telling regarding the specific meanings associated with leadership at TexCo. As I have argued in Chapter 2.2, in any given context leadership has specific meanings. If leadership is seen as producing direction, then the particular ways in which this production acquires meaning are subject to the local context. Under the banner of ‘culture of innovation’, people at TexCo are now seemingly empowered and included in a variety of debates, thereby given the chance to participate in the work of leadership (discussed in detail in the following chapter, 5.2). For example, at an emergency meeting supposed to retain a major customer, a group of employees objected to the course of action set out by Jack, the CEO, and instead proposed an alternative route. Other instances in the data in which leadership has materialised indeed include Keith taking the initiative by addressing a production shortfall, a group of employees deciphering together how to address an unexpected and production delay, or Madeleine ‘making an impact’ through revamping product launch practices. The degree of autonomy actors are provided with – to extent of regularly being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ – in fact even renders it a necessity to be pro-actively setting direction.

In that sense, these particular meanings of leadership work suggest *normativity* appears to play a vital role therein, especially if recognising claims that leadership is itself a practice (Crevani et al., 2010; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015; Sergi, 2015), or a ‘meta-practice’ as argued in chapter 2.2, since from a practice-based view leadership always occurs as part of other practices. In other words, if leadership is recognisable as such (cf. Rasche and Chia, 2009) with particular meanings (e.g. ‘making an impact’ etc.), it then follows that the work of leadership, too, exhibits certain understandings, rules, and indeed a normative dimension suggesting how the work of leadership *should be* carried out (cf. Schatzki, 2001a, 2012). The LAP literature (and the ‘conventional

leadership literature), however, is rather quiet about the notion of normativity – surprisingly so, since, as argued in Chapter 2.1, normativity plays a vital role in practices (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2013). This section, therefore, offers an important contribution to the LAP literature by offering an in-depth empirical discussion of the role of normativity in shaping the ways in which leadership work is accomplished, and how normativity is affected by, if not *permeated*, with power dynamics.

Indeed, practices' normativity is never set in stone. Quite the contrary, as established in Chapter 2.1, from the idea that practices unceasingly evolve (e.g. Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) follows that practices also are inherently contested and negotiated (Geiger, 2009; Nicolini, 2009a; Mørk et al., 2010; Benn et al., 2013; Guzman, 2013). Practices merely provide a 'spectrum of legitimacy' – i.e. there are always multiple interpretations about what counts as 'true', the 'correct' way of practicing, or, as for leadership, the 'best' possible course of action. In fact, not everyone embraced ways of doing supposedly engendered by 'culture of innovation' – amongst others entailing to pro-actively engage in the work of leadership. Abigail and Adrian are two cases in point, whose views on the 'appropriate' way to practice evidently diverged from what others – e.g. Jack, the CEO; Lucy, Adrian's superior; or the POD managers, as the 'customers' of Abigail's services – deemed appropriate. Their 'acting otherwise' (Giddens, 1984) can be seen as resistance to dominant views, and hence attempts to negotiate alternative ways to practice that incidentally reflected what have apparently been the 'old ways'. Jack and the POD managers, meanwhile, saw themselves urged to *remove* Abigail and Adrian eventually, so that their basis for resistance (i.e. their position in the practice) was taken from them. Following the idea of putting practices first in the analysis, in fact, shows that it is in fact the *practice* of passively receiving and executing orders as part of the production of direction that has been *shut down*, while concurrently sending a message to other workers regarding illegitimate ways of practicing. In this sense, not only do power struggles occur at the boundaries of practices, as existing studies suggest (e.g. Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Nicolini, 2009a; Contu, 2014), my findings indicate that power dynamics are also at play in setting these boundaries in the first place.

As Foucault would say, there always exist multiple 'truths', meaning that practices necessarily exhibit contradictions and tensions (Nicolini, 2009a). Küpers

(2013) adds to this, contending some leadership practices get *imposed* and thus become dominant while other practices might be excluded and marginalised. As argued elsewhere (Mueller et al., 2016), my findings indeed display such *power imbalances* with regard to notions of legitimacy, insofar that said norms and assumptions seem to be reflective of dominant voices. The practice literature does insinuate this (e.g. Nicolini, 2007; Raelin, 2015), yet does not provide thorough examinations of the ways in which dominant actors affect the ways in which practices, and thus the work of leadership, are being carried out. Schatzki (2002), meanwhile, refers to power in his account in terms of hierarchy, authority, and disputation, and posits that power is closely associated with teleo-affective normativity. Although his account of practice is intimately connected to power dynamics, he concedes that he “has not directly addressed this phenomenon or examined accounts of power that are congenial with the present ontology” (2002: 267). This thesis, therefore, builds on the preceding and largely indicative insights by suggesting normativity to be fundamentally permeated by power dynamics. One way the data show this is in terms of actors establishing *expectations*.

The findings indeed portray this notion rather bluntly, especially in terms of ‘making an impact’, ‘taking initiative’, and ‘ownership’ – in other words, as picked up in Section 5.2, an obligation to participate in the work of leadership. In Vignette 6, ‘Gallows Humour’, for example, Patrick involved Garry for the sake of his expertise with regard to fixing a broken down machine. When it came to deciding a course of action, Garry tried to withdraw from the work of leadership by saying to Patrick ‘it’s your call mate’. Patrick though refused to let Garry off the hook, reminding him that it is their call, not his alone. In other words, Patrick demanded Garry to partake in setting a course of action, reflecting vividly the expectation towards ‘ordinary staff’ to engage in the work of leadership. Expectations, in this sense, are seen as a ‘vehicle of power’.<sup>1</sup>

In the data we can thus discern a fundamental power imbalance regarding who may establish what is seen as a legitimate and acceptable way to practice (‘making an impact’), and what ways of doing are ‘out of bounds’ (‘waiting for the bell to ring’), and holding others accountable to these expectations. The findings hence reflect a seminal idea of the power literature, as insinuated above: Foucault’s (1980) proposal of power

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<sup>1</sup> The expression ‘vehicle of power’ is indebted to Foucault (1980).

and truth being inextricably entwined in the sense that the former profoundly influences, if not determines, the latter. In this context here, I take the notion of ‘truth’ to refer to which ways of practicing are the ‘best’, therefore ‘legitimate’ and thus ‘true’. Others also echo this idea, having found the views of those in positions of dominance to acquire legitimacy more easily (Clegg, 1989; Gordon et al., 2009; Collinson, 2014).

This idea is vividly reflected in the ways in which TexCo’s ‘true north’ has been set, specifically illustrated by Chapter 4.1.3, in which I discussed how Jack was an elemental figure in defining what kind of company TexCo should be (see above). This was achieved through various mechanisms of power. For instance, setting the ‘true north’ entailed de-legitimising the old and reinforcing new ways of doing, for example by removing actors and their practices embracing thereof, through building alliances with others (the NOW initiative) to establish new ways of doing reflective of the ‘true north’, or by empowering others to do things previously unacceptable (e.g. Jack giving employees ‘freedom to act’ – problematized in Chapter 5.2 – literally telling them ‘you’re the boss, do what ever you want’).

A further ‘vehicle’ of power to shape what is considered legitimate and thus ‘true’ is discursive practices (see Foucault, 1978, 1980; Hardy and Thomas, 2014) deployed to engender said expectations. For example, the descriptions of the ‘notorious past’ (‘Godfathers’ and ‘Secret Societies’) I offered earlier can be seen as a discursive means to subtly de-legitimise old and legitimise new ways of doing, since they invoke a sense of what is considered ‘bad practice’. Similarly, by sharing stories of what is the kind of practicing sought to be achieved (which Jack did regarding Keith’s initiative taking), notions of ‘making an impact’ were engendered further. The very phrase of ‘making an impact’, in fact, was uttered frequently to determine what is expected of staff members, and can thus be seen as a further discursive device to establish particular ways of practicing. Another discursive practice the data show to be mobilised is the notion of employee ownership and empowerment, invoking a sense of acceptability according to which actors should act. Consider, for instance, the machine operators complaining to Jack about colleagues acting unsafely. Instead of taking care of the complaint, by reference to employee ownership he stressed that it is ‘their company’, hence giving the operators a mandate for action in the sense of addressing issues autonomously – thus urging staff to take the initiative and ‘make an impact’. In other

words, I argue discursive practices to have been mobilised in order to *intervene in* what is seen as the ‘true’ – i.e. acceptable and legitimate – ways to practice (cf. Ford, 2015).

Discursive practices of mobilising notions of empowerment, meanwhile, translate into the ways materials are at play in engendering a certain sense of normativity, since at TexCo discourses of empowerment and voice literally expand on material objects. Although materials play a central role in practices (see Chapter 2.1), LAP studies, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Sergi, 2015), have barely considered their influence. Similarly, the exercise of power is rarely connected to materials. Munro (2009), for instance, uses an Actor-Network (see also Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) approach to highlight the ways in which materials exert power in terms of enabling or constraining action. Whilst my findings confirm the material set up to enable and constrain action (e.g. Schatzki, 2002) (e.g. roundtables and whiteboards for working collaboratively and creatively), the findings, more importantly, also show that materials are at play with regard to establishing certain ways of enacting practices. As a brief example, the museum may not only be seen to serve as a presentation of the organisation to outsiders. Instead, I perceive it as instructions as to how actors should conduct themselves (e.g. ‘you have a voice, use it’). In this sense, the findings portray materials to be a part of power dynamics at play to establish which ways of practicing are ‘true’ – in other words, acceptable and legitimate.

In relation to leadership, little has been said about the idea of power/truth, other than the vague notion of certain individuals being in a more influential social position to establish what constitutes ‘good’ leadership (Alvesson, and Spicer, 2012; cf. Hardy and Thomas, 2014), whilst other studies propose power asymmetries to be integral in leader-led relations, strongly advocating a leader/follower separation (e.g. Harter et al., 2006). In this sense, these ‘conventional studies’ (see Chapter 2.2) analyse how individuals *qua* leaders are capable of managing meaning and framing the realities of their powerless followers (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Grint, 2005a; 2010; Collinson, 2014). In other words, by retaining a subject/object dichotomy, ‘leaders’ are argued to be in a powerful position to simply justify their practices as ‘good’. From such a perspective, analysis of power imbalances are rendered pointless, however, because ‘leaders’ are per se presumed powerful.

This portrayal of power dynamics, however, is problematic in several respects. Although a power imbalance does suggest some actors to be more influential than others (e.g. Jack or the POD managers) with regard to seemingly imposing a certain sense of ‘truth’ (such as the ‘best’ course of action, or the ‘appropriate’ way to reach a decision), this is not to suggest that there is no room for alternative interpretations and negotiating what is seen as a legitimate contribution. Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) make a similar point by highlighting followers to have a more critical stake in leadership than acknowledged by conventional studies (e.g. Collinson, 2011). Although CLS seek to dialectically resolve dichotomous portrayals of leadership by asserting agency of ‘followers’, they yet retain an *a priori* conceived distinction between ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ that brings power dynamics into an empirical setting that may not entirely be reflective thereof. Since no two practices can possibly have the same histories (Kempster et al., 2015), my theoretical framework allows for understanding power dynamics in local contexts regarding who may or may not be able to shape what is seen as an ‘appropriate’, or ‘correct’, way of practicing, rather than imposing pre-conceived power relations such as ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ (cf. Alvesson, 1996; Carroll, 2015).

This has been vividly illustrated at a number of occasions throughout Chapter 4. For example, Donald and Maria’s opinion about timeframes for developing major new products clashed profoundly – so much so that others spoke of ‘shouting matches’. Donald perceived Maria’s demands utterly unrealistic, while Maria insisted on the possibility of getting the product ready, as she had previously confirmed with the customer. Donald tried to convince her otherwise – to no avail. In this case, my framework indicates, existing normativity – customer satisfaction as authoritative when it comes to deciphering courses of action – is a resource of power that enabled Maria to stand her ground and hence enforce a course of action. Their clash of opinions is also telling regarding the positions they hold. Maria is in charge of making a profit as the POD manager for the product in question Donald is supposed to develop, yet Donald is the director of development and a board member as the last remaining member of ‘the Family’. In this sense, a leader-centric analysis would not yield much insight, since either both or none of them can be considered ‘leaders’ in this constellation.

Through addressing *situated* power dynamics, analysing power becomes relevant again. The framework views power to be enacted in and derived from practices, which means that all actors operate within a web of power relations (Hardy and Clegg, 2006) in the sense that any actors may exercise power or be exercised power over in one way or another. My findings thus challenge the leader-centric studies quoted earlier, since ultimately there are multiple power relations instead of merely between powerful and powerless, or ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’. Appreciating power dynamics thus is a more delicate matter than presently suggested by the leadership literature.

The discussion thus far has mostly examined how power shapes normativity in order to establish the *hows* of leadership work, in other words the ‘true’ ways in which turning points shall materialise (by ‘making an impact’ rather than waiting for ‘bells to ring’). The example of Maria and Donald indicates though that power dynamics are not only involved shaping the *how*, but also the *what* – i.e. which turning points may materialise instead of others. Nicolini (2011) makes a similar point by referring to a ‘hierarchy of knowings’. In his study, he insinuates that when different actors and knowings come together – say in a meeting – it is possible to discern a certain hierarchy of whose views carry more weight – a nurse and doctor, in Nicolini’s study. As my data show, when concerns diverge power is exercised to determine which concern is legitimate compared to others. Maria and Donald’s dispute is an example, or when in Vignette 10 Igor was eager to debate a different issue than Patrick, who then forcefully pulled the debate back on the issue *he* deemed more important. Similarly, at the year-end presentation, Phil raised a request to replace some of the older machines on the shop floor, an apparent need Jack refused to acknowledge, putting the burden to legitimise the claim on Phil. In relation to the work of leadership, this means that power asymmetries affect which courses of action are established.

Although at the beginning of this section I suggested that normativity guides how a practice should be carried out, what needs to be accounted for and thus what is expected of people (see Nicolini, 2009a), the implication of my argument thus far is that *power dynamics* seem to *guide* action. The findings show that power has been involved in shaping the expectation at TexCo towards employees to pro-actively engage in the work of leadership: be it by making an impact on work practices that improves certain things (e.g. product launch practices), or by taking the initiative to tackle problems (e.g.

Keith), and engaging in setting courses of action even if one is not in a position of authority (e.g. Garry, or a group of actors in the emergency meeting to retain a customer). Interestingly, the practice literature makes a very similar claim, namely that *practices* ‘prefigure’ action (e.g. Schatzki, 2001b, 2002, 2012; Chapter 2.1), which means expanding or contracting the field of possible action. The concept of practice, however, is not an abstract structure with causal powers vis-à-vis human action, as this would deny individual and collective agency. Instead, prefiguration of activity is conceived in terms of *enablement and constraint* of agency, to leave room for agency and structure alike (Schatzki, 2002). As Schatzki aptly observes, the same conception of prefiguration as enablement and constraint builds the basis for Foucault’s theory of power, which I elaborated upon previously in Chapter 2.3 as it builds the working definition of my framework. To reaffirm, Foucault (1982) asserts power to be about one actor, or actors, structuring other actors’ possible actions; in other words, *enabling* or *constraining* present and future activity – the field of possible action. Like practice, power is “a set of actions upon other actions” (Foucault, 1982: 789).

This indicates that practices and power appear to form an intimate connection, which Schatzki does insinuate conceptually and my findings substantiate empirically. The implication of this is twofold. First, the practice literature typically proposes practices alone to prefigure possible activity (e.g. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013), yet my findings demonstrate the need to take into account the insight of power and practices to be closely involved vis-à-vis doing so. It is important to note that whether it is power or practices that enable and constrain action I do not consider as an either/or question, as this would invoke a dichotomous portrayal of practice/power. Instead, I am proposing a *recursive* relationship between the two phenomena. Therefore, when seeking to understand why activities are performed in a certain way, or indeed why the work of leadership is accomplished in this way rather than another in a specific context, not only the practice in and from which leadership transpires needs to be taken into consideration, but the power dynamics that *transpire from practices* as well.

The idea of a recursive relationship leads to the second implication. As in fact the basis of my theoretical framework, power is an inherent part of any practice insofar that practices produce certain power relations – a claim not centre-stage but widely

suggested by the literature (e.g. Foucault, 1978, 1980<sup>2</sup>; Latour, 1986, 2005; Schatzki, 2001a; Nicolini, 2007, 2011; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Mørk et al., 2010; Contu, 2014; Hardy and Thomas, 2014; see also Chapter 2.1 and 2.2). As has been the main argument of this section, however, my findings show that said intimate connection between practice and power is not a one-way street. Instead, by arguing that power dynamics shape normativity, i.e. how practices should be carried out, this by extension indicates that *power also shapes practices* themselves. In other words, there is a *recursive interplay* between practices and power: practices produce power dynamics on the one hand, while power dynamics have effects on the practices from which they emerge on the other. This interplay, for instance, is evident when the sense of normativity of putting a premium on customer satisfaction enabled Maria to force Donald to develop products to a challenging, if not impossible, timescale; while simultaneously, from a practice-based view, Maria's exercise of power is also an enactment of product development practices that perpetuates and hence reinforces said existing normativity. Similarly, my discussion of setting the 'true north' in Chapter 4.1 shows that power relations in fact may also contribute to the direction into which practices evolve. In this sense, a practice's normativity provides a resource for power, and is at the same time shaped by power.

It is hence not only interesting how practices produce power relations, but also what these power relations do in turn (cf. Gherardi, 2009a). Since the practice literature primarily concentrates on the practice-power relation in terms of the former part, that is, that practices produce power relations, my thesis makes an important contribution by demonstrating how enactments of power may affect the practices of which the enactments are part, specifically their normative dimensions. In this sense, inspired by Foucault (1978, 1980), the findings show power dynamics to produce practices. As this section has argued, power not only influences *what* people do (e.g. which turning points may materialise), but also, perhaps more profoundly, it contributes to *how* people go about carrying out their practices (the ways in which turning points materialise) – it is,

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault (1978, 1980; Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008) incidentally makes a similar point with regard to discourse, it being both medium and outcome of power. To him, however, is not reducible to language but is more in line with practices (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Foucault, too, argued that discourse as a medium of power enables or constrains what individuals may think, say or do (Hardy and Thomas, 2014).

in this sense, ‘normative power’ contributing to establishing a sense of what constitutes the ‘correct’ way of practicing.

To summarise the argument of this section, I have first utilised reflections of the past to get a sense of normativity of the present. This has shown that the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished have ostensibly changed, and that power dynamics are intimately involved in shaping what is seen as legitimate and acceptable ways of doing. In this sense, power dynamics are also deeply connected to the work of leadership, affecting not only the *ways* in which turning points are accomplished, but also in terms of *which* courses of action might be taken. To illustrate these power imbalances, I have drawn on Foucault’s idea of power and truth being inextricably intertwined, arguing that although practices get negotiated and exhibit multiple interpretations about the ‘best’ way to practice, dominant views may yet get *imposed*. Thereby I have suggested several ways power was exercised, amongst others via driving expectations, and material-discursive practices.

While the practice and leadership literatures have picked up this idea (e.g. Nicolini, 2007, 2011; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Raelin, 2015), such proposals remain mostly indicative, conceptual, and do not constitute the main focus of these studies. Conventional leadership studies, too, have addressed the idea of a version of ‘truth’ being imposed, suggesting that ‘leaders’ exert power over ‘followers’ to ‘frame their realities’ and ‘manage meaning’, and are thus per se presumed ‘powerful’ because of the label they hold (e.g. Smircich and Morgan, 1982). I argued, however, these studies retain dichotomous conceptions of leadership (leader/follower) that do not hold in practice-based theorising. My approach, therefore, makes a novel contribution to the leadership literature by offering a way to study and theorise inequalities inherent in the work of leadership without falling back on dualisms or ‘methodological individualism’ (Chia and Holt, 2006). This section, therefore, contributes to existing conversations within the leadership literature by highlighting the role of normativity in the work of leadership generally, and how shaping normativity as an expression of power dynamics affects the work of leadership, specifically.

I also examined the implications of this section for relationship between the two concepts of practice and power. As argued in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3, the current practice literature does not grant the role of power a wealth of attention, yet it does acknowledge

power dynamics to be produced by practices. My findings contribute to these practice-power conversations (e.g. Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Mørk et al., 2010; Contu, 2014) by suggesting power dynamics to in turn affect practices as well, highlighting the two phenomena to be in a close-knit *recursive relationship*.

By having discussed the construction of normativity to have a vital impact on leadership work, this section has raised a number of interesting issues that are worthwhile exploring further. The notion of enablement and constraint, in fact, appears to be a pivotal expression of power transpiring from the findings, especially Chapter 4.2 ‘The ‘Boundedness’ of Empowerment’. The next section, 5.2, therefore, is going to explore these dynamics in greater detail. In this section, meanwhile, I also indicated dynamics of access: actors who did not conform to the dominant views were eventually removed. In section, 5.3, therefore, I scrutinise issues of exclusion and inclusion – a further pivotal expression of power evident in the data.

## 5.2 Enablement & Constraint

I concluded the previous section – ‘Shaping Normativity’ – by arguing that normativity in effect enables and constrains activity. At the same time, I highlighted a dialectical interplay between power and practices in this process, based on my theoretical framework and the definition of power it proposes; namely, structuring somebody else’s possible actions. In that sense, based on this interplay, actors were given a ‘mandate for action’ that allowed for pursuing certain but denied other activities. Most prominently, normativity, which is shaped through power dynamics, enabled Keith to take initiative to tackle a looming production shortfall, or Madeleine to come up with a more efficient way to launch new products. Simultaneously, in the previous section I argued that because some actors’ views on the appropriate way to practice *diverged* from what meanwhile had become ‘common practice’ due to the NOW initiative, they were removed. These actors were thus constrained to pursue practices of inaction, as this did not comply with a certain set of expectations.

In this section, I delve deeper into the recursive relationship between practice and power I discussed towards the end of the previous section. That is, this section is devoted to discussing how the notion of enablement and constraint in particular is brought to bear on the work of leadership. In order to do so, I particularly draw on findings in chapter 4.2, which examined the dynamics of empowerment and its boundedness – a notion omnipresent in the practices at TexCo. My argument is that empowerment and disempowerment maps nicely onto being enabled and constrained to engage in the work of leadership. A key theme of this section, moreover, is not only to present how enablement and constraint are evident in the data, and their associated implications for leadership. What is more, I am also discussing a paradoxical interplay between enablement and constraint, suggesting that enablement and constraint (as is empowerment and disempowerment) is in a mutually reinforcing relationship – a vicious cycle, so to speak.

To make this argument, the section is structured as follows. I first delve into how power dynamics enable activity, drawing on insights from both the practice and LAP literature. For instance, based on the idea that practices always ‘hang together’ – i.e. that one practice may build the resource for another practice – I suggest that power dynamics are intimately involved in generating the ‘field of possible actions’

(expression indebted to Schatzki, 2002). Power dynamics therefore are at play in connecting different practices. Secondly, I present how in the findings power dynamics were evident in terms of constraining activity, also contributing to how a ‘site for action’ is shaped. This leads to a key argument of my findings chapter; namely that empowerment and disempowerment, and thus enablement and constraint paradoxically occur simultaneously – as suggested above. This echoes existing literatures, yet these insights have not made inroads into the LAP domain. Finally, I conclude this section by commenting on the delicate relationship between the concepts of leadership and power.

In the findings, power dynamics transpire to *enable* the possibilities of actors setting direction, and thus the work of leadership, in numerous ways – some of which were already indicated above and in Chapter 5.1. I have indeed argued before that empowerment and autonomy is ‘provided’ to staff members by other actors, implying a power imbalance at the heart of empowerment (and disempowerment). In other words, actors occupying a more powerful position in the local practice arrangement (Nicolini, 2007, 2011) may or may not *choose* to empower their workers. I referred to both Maria and Patrick, for example, who commented on the importance of making sure other actors get the chance to contribute to debates and decision-making, and to encourage staff to make decisions on their own – merely ‘keeping one’s nose in for being informed but one’s hands out’, as Maria put it. Patrick, for instance, provided Madeleine with opportunities to take charge of ‘her own’ projects (and yet instructed her specifically how to do so). In Chapter 5.1, meanwhile, I outlined how Jack enabled a group of machine operators to autonomously address issues with colleagues acting unsafely on the shop floor, providing them a ‘mandate for action’.

In my discussion of the practice and power interplay regarding prefiguration of activity in the previous section, I highlighted that enabling and constraining future activity can be seen as ‘action upon action’. Since practice ultimately is made of a set of activities, this means that the actions of one practice act upon the actions of another practice, suggesting that different practices are intimately connected – indeed a central idea in the practice literature.

As argued in Chapter 2.1, scholars principally speak of ‘bundles’, ‘textures’, ‘fields’, or ‘nexuses’ in order to denote the inherently *connected* nature of practices (e.g. Schatzki, 2001b, 2002, 2005; Shove et al., 2011; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013). That is,

practices have effects not only in terms of their enactment perpetuating the practice and its associated normativity and rules etc., but also in the sense that one practice provides the resource for another practice (Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini, 2009a, 2013). In other words, by ‘zooming out’ analytically – as discussed in Chapter 3 (Methodology) – practice in the here and now is enabled and constrained by a practice’s activities past and elsewhere (ibid.). Schatzki (2006, 2012) makes a similar point by arguing that time plays a critical role in practices, in the sense that practices enacted in the moment are informed by the past, and in turn inform the future.

When I observed meetings, such as Vignette 5 and 10 that describe a ‘fishbone analysis’ to solve a persistent quality issue, certain follow-up tasks were agreed and another meeting to report on these tasks was scheduled. For example, in Vignette 7, ‘Dismissing Concerns’, the meeting supposed to solve a shipping issue provides the basis for further activities down the line in terms of a ‘mock-loading’. Similarly, when I first entered the premises of TexCo, a lot of staff members were actually away developing the company’s yearly strategy, which resulted in the balanced scorecard Jack presented at the end of the year. This scorecard in turn provided a guiding document for who is in charge of which team, who is a member of which team, and what each team is supposed to accomplish in the year ahead. In that sense, the practices of developing a strategy are the resource for practices of developing a certain product, which in turn feeds into accomplishing a certain team goal.

As already established in my discussion of prefiguration in the previous section, the practice literature typically does not refer to power dynamics when discussing the ways in which practices are connected. Strikingly though, the interplay of practice and power discussed in Chapter 5.1 suggests power to be deeply involved in this process. Recall that in my theoretical framework, practices provide for certain power relations that confer “dispositional power on agents, thus structuring the possibilities for actions” (Haugaard, 2010: 425). In other words, practices produce power relations that in turn guide what activities can or cannot be accomplished, hence shaping activity of future practices. In this sense, power dynamics are involved in connecting practices by enabling or constraining future activity.

The insight of practices hanging together, and hence enablement and constraint have rarely been brought to bear on LAP, two notable exceptions being Endrissat and

Arx's (2013) research on the relationship of leadership and context, and Crevani's (2015) study on the production of direction – both of which I address in the following.

Endrissat and Arx take a practice approach drawing on Schatzki's (2002, 2005) site ontology to examine the effects leadership has on its context and vice versa. The recursive relationship they echo empirically suggests that leadership is *informed by* the context in which it takes place, and concurrently *informs* it, i.e. produces context.<sup>3</sup> In response to studies that neglect context in leadership in the sense that context purely influences which behaviours or activities are more favourable in which situation, Grint (2005a), too, highlights that leaders are not only shaped by context but also actively shape it. It is thus a recursive relationship that resonates not only with Schatzki's (2002) site ontology, but also Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. I have made a similar point in Chapter 5.1, by arguing that power dynamics are derived from practices and at the same time act on these very practices. Endrissat and Arx's claim that leadership creates context, however, implicitly resonates with conventional studies I perceive critically that suggest leaders to 'manage meaning' and 'frame realities'.

Moreover, suggesting that leadership as a phenomenon to produce context per se is problematic. The issue is not that activity is influenced by and is simultaneously influencing context. Instead, it is the argument that allegedly leadership per se does so, connoting that the notion of leadership is somehow 'more special' than other activities (e.g. strategizing), or more special than ordinary enactments of practice themselves. As I have argued in Chapter 2.2, ontologically leadership is not different to 'ordinary' enactments – from a practice perspective it is merely a concept used to make sure to speak about the same thing and thus to make a meaningful contribution to a field of study that is interested in this particular *variation of organising* (Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). At the same time, oddly, Endrissat and Arx do not provide any criteria as to delimit what may or may not constitute leadership. The practice literature Endrissat and Arx (2013) base their ideas on, in fact, precisely suggests so; namely that *any* activity as an enactment of practice is shaped by and concurrently shapes context (see Chapter, 2.1; Schatzki, 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed also in Chapter 2.1, the recursive relationship between practice and context is very well outlined in Schatzki's work. Endrissat and Arx's (2013) study, meanwhile, merely illustrates this empirically rather than making new strides conceptually.

Although it is not my focus in this thesis to examine how ‘leaders’, or leadership produces context, Endrissat and Arx’s study is nonetheless insightful considering that it underscores the notion of practices hanging together and that practicing has effects. Leadership, in that sense, is produced through other instances of practicing; it is indeed a product of collective activity (Sergi, 2015). Although, unlike my approach in this thesis, Endrissat and Arx (2013) do not focus on, but they insinuate power dynamics mainly in terms of ‘leaders’ as presumably powerful agents framing context. They do not, however, take into account how power dynamics may enable leadership to be produced to begin with.

Crevani (2015), who makes an important contribution to the LAP field with a rare study that explores the production of direction using an ontological approach to practice, makes a similar point by introducing her concept of ‘clearing for action’. Clearing for action, she argues, is supposed to convey the ‘reality constructing character’ of leadership. The concept “resonates with conceptualizations that see actors and their world as constructed in certain ways that *expand or contract the space of possible action*” (Crevani, 2015: 20, my italics). In other words, clearing for action resonates with my argument of enablement and constraint, and hence mirrors my definition of power; namely that the exercise thereof, based on practices, allows for some but denies other activities. Similarly, although the practice literature provides the clue that practices prefigure action, Crevani sees the origin in leadership instead. On the contrary, clearing for action suggests that it is leadership that expands or contracts the possible space of future actions rather than power or indeed ‘ordinary’ action – a point that I have criticised above and which I am going to address further towards the end of this section.

Similar to Endrissat and Arx (2013), moreover, Crevani suggests that the process of clearing for action is inherently contested – an interesting hint that whets the appetite for further discussion. Questions along the lines of why some courses of action might be produced instead of others, who may or may not have a say in said production of direction, or the ways in which direction may or may not be produced (e.g. in a dictatorial or inclusive fashion), however, remain open.

In the previous section (5.1), I have begun to address these questions by showing how normativity, constructed through an interplay between practices and power

dynamics (practices producing certain power relations which in turn affect practices, particularly normativity), guide the ways in which direction may be produced, and which courses of action might materialise instead of others. In this section, meanwhile, I have gone on to argue that power dynamics fundamentally enable and constrain the field of possible actions by empowering or disempowering actors. So far, I have illustrated this mainly by reference to empirical examples that display *enablement*. However, power dynamics are also evident, perhaps even more profoundly, in the sense of constraining the field of possible action. Earlier I referred to Vignette 6, ‘Gallows Humour’, and reiterated that there were multiple readings of this vignette. An alternative to the one I presented above entails recognising Garry as reluctant to help carry the burden of making a judgement call, so much so that Patrick forced Garry to participate. Rather than simply being empowered and enabled to participate in the work of leadership, therefore, Garry is *constrained* in his ability to *not* engage in leadership work, and is ‘made to lead’ by Patrick.

On the contrary, the exercise of power may also constrain the opportunity to partake in the work of leadership by shutting down certain leadership moments. As Patrick once commented, if the situation dictated it, he would not even entertain the thought of involving others in deciding a course of action. In Vignette 10, ‘Diverging Concerns’, for example, Igor was outraged by a machine operator altering a product specification. Igor was so livid, in fact, that he hijacked the meeting to discuss this issue, thus attempting to set a different course of action, namely holding the operator accountable and ensuring that this will not happen again – a course of action, in fact, Patrick agrees is important. Meanwhile, however, Patrick, who as the POD manager chaired the meeting, deemed the quality issue they were analysing more important. After several attempts, he forcefully demanded the debate to focus on the ‘more important issue’. By reinforcing ‘his’ course of action, Patrick shut down the production of a turning point, so to speak. What transpires, therefore, is a power imbalance that allows some actors to choose to involve and thus enable others, or, in contrast, to actively exclude them and constrain their ability to engage in the work of leadership (which will be discussed further in Section 5.3).

A final example in the data that illustrates nicely how power dynamics enable *and* constrain action I have mentioned at the beginning of this section: the incident in which

Jack was approached by a group of machine operators discontented by their colleagues acting unsafely on the shop floor. Although previously I argued that Jack *enabled* his staff members to act autonomously thereby granting them a mandate for action, he simultaneously perpetuated the expectation towards employees doing exactly so: working autonomously, which renders relying on formal authority to solve issues unacceptable, is hence *constraining* actors in their ability to act differently (see Chapter 5.1).

Power thus appears to be simultaneously restrictive *and* productive. Power is productive (Foucault, 1980; Hardy and Thomas, 2014) as it produces practices by shaping normativity, and, as argued above, contributes to connecting practices by producing a field of action that enables actors to do certain things. At the same time, however, the exercise of power restricts from doing other things (or not doing things, like Adrian), therefore operating in a repressive (e.g. Lukes, 2005) fashion in the sense that its exercise *induces certain expectations* as well – as argued in particular in Chapter 5.1. Despite all empowerment and autonomy to ‘take initiative’ and ‘make an impact’, actors yet have to ‘move within the parameters of the business’, as Phil once remarked, thus actually being *constrained* in their ability to pursue alternative practices. Foucault (1977) makes a similar point by introducing his idea of disciplinary power (see Chapter 2.3), which suggests, “that by shaping identity formation, power is enabling and productive as well as *subordinating*” (Collinson, 2011: 185). In other words, as the case of Abigail or Adrian show, power is exercised in order to ‘regulate’ what are legitimate ways of being and practicing. Alvesson and Willmott (2002), meanwhile, pick up the idea of identity regulation, and suggest this to be a central feature of organisational control in so-called ‘post-bureaucratic’ organisations (Collinson, 2011).

These types of ‘post-bureaucratic’ organisations rely less on bureaucracy, hierarchy, and tightly defined departmental functions. The dominant ‘organising vehicle’ is project teams as self-governing entities. A post-bureaucratic organisation, moreover, supports empowerment of practitioners, multidisciplinary teams, and lateral and mutual rather than linear managerial control. Conduct of leadership in these organisations, moreover, is argued to be concertive and collective (see Raelin, 2011a, 2012). To describe these kinds of organisations, Mintzberg (1980) has coined the term ‘adhocracy’, which is supposed to denote that work has become more self-organising

and discretionary, and thereby less routinized (Raelin, 2014). TexCo indeed appears to reflect in the characteristics of such a ‘post-bureaucratic’ organisation.

In spite of these characteristics, however, control may still remain intact, indeed inevitable, by relying “on sophisticated methods of unobtrusive ideational appraisal, that according to some critical observers, not only reduces discretion but centralizes decision-making into the hands of the information-rich elite” (Raelin, 2012: 8). Post-bureaucracy can thus in fact lead to the restriction of voice through censorship, and hence *disempowerment* rather than empowerment (Raelin, 2011b). For instance, via ‘soft control through culture’, employees may feel like having great autonomy, yet paradoxically conform much more (O’Reilly, 1989; Raelin, 2011b). It is thus an ‘illusion of empowerment’, arguably created by managers in order to align actors to the motivations and goals of the organisation (Raelin, 2011b) – also referred to as an ‘autonomy-control paradox’ (Schad et al., 2016).

The notion of an empowerment illusion is indeed clearly evident in the data, especially so in Chapter 4.2. There, I critically examined the notion of empowerment at TexCo, and have gone on to argue the expectation towards actors to ‘make an impact’ and ‘take initiative’ may in fact portray an *obligation* rather than empowerment to engage in the work of leadership (see also Chapter 5.1). In addition, I have referred to ‘power, perhaps *camouflaged*, but power no less’, in order to denote that at TexCo *power over* operates through a ‘cloak of empowerment’. Others in the literature use similar terms, albeit in different contexts, such as Collinson’s (2011) ‘disguised dissent’, which describes covert resistance to dominant views, or Carroll’s (2015) reference to power as hidden and disguised.

The efforts of engendering ‘culture of innovation’ as part of the NOW initiative, therefore, seem to have yielded unintended consequences. Collinson’s (e.g. 2011) research at a UK manufacturer has shown a comparable phenomenon. Efforts of a corporate culture campaign, similar to the NOW initiative, had the opposite effect of what had been the desired outcome. Particularly shop floor workers rejected senior management’s definition of the company as a team. Because of managers’ discrepancy between words and action and their disregard for workers’ views, employees began to resist by ‘distancing’ themselves in the sense of restricting output and effort, thus creating a counter-culture. Collinson has used these insights to argue that control and

resistance are embedded in a mutually reinforcing vicious cycle. Although the interplay between control and resistance is not the focus of this thesis, it is fruitful to consider Collinson's idea in relation to leadership, and particularly the expression of power as enablement and constraint. Specifically, based on my findings I suggest that, seemingly, the more people get empowered and thus enabled to engage in the work of leadership, the more they are disempowered, thus constrained, to engage in alternative practices that leave 'taking initiative' to others – recall, for instance, the cases of Abigail and Adrian. Empowerment, in this scenario, actually takes away agency – understood as the possibility to 'act otherwise' (Giddens 1984) – because power is exercised to make sure actors operate within the boundaries of common values and philosophy (cf. Raelin, 2011b). Actors, it seems, are indeed *simultaneously* enabled and constrained.

The paradox of enablement and constraint is particularly evident in the data when considering several statements made by actors at TexCo. It has been said, for instance, that 'there is nothing one cannot say to a manager', or that 'everybody has got a voice'. At the same time though, these people also stated specifically that 'everybody is responsible for making an impact'. As a case in point, when Jack heard about Madeleine struggling with her workload, he simply pointed out that due to the economic climate 'everybody's got to stretch', simply dismissing Madeleine's concerns. These variations of language are indeed interesting, since others suggest that corporate power structures may promote said illusion of empowerment through the manipulation of language. The word 'control', for instance, may be replaced with 'commitment' (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1987; Raelin, 2011b). In Chapter 5.1 I have already suggested a subtle manipulation of discourse, when notions of employee ownership were indeed used in an effort to convince staff that TexCo was 'their' company to foster commitment, and that 'making an impact' means doing so for the betterment of the company that yet ultimately benefits the actors themselves.

To summarise, this section has argued that power dynamics are enabling and constraining how actors may engage in the work of leadership. Power, therefore, is not only *implicated* in leadership in terms of shaping what is seen as legitimate and acceptable, it is also enabling and constraining leadership by shaping the field of possible action (see also Chapter 5.1). Others in the literature have made similar assertions, such as practices being inextricably connected (e.g. Schatzki, 2002; Nicolini,

2009a, 2013), leadership and context being mutually constitutive (Schatzki, 2002; Endrissat and Arx, 2013), or leadership to be 'clearing for action' (Crevani, 2015). What all these ideas have in common is that they suggest that an enactment of practice in the here and now may set up another enactment in the there and then. However, as with the idea of prefiguration, the role of power dynamics in the ways in which practices are connected has not been highlighted yet. This is where my study makes another important contribution; i.e. highlighting how power dynamics are at play connecting different practices. To LAP studies, meanwhile, this adds by showing how power dynamics enables, or at times constrains, the field of possible action and thus how other actors may engage in the work of leadership.

I have then gone on to emphasise a contradictory phenomenon (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Schad et al., 2016): actors are not merely empowered, they are at the same time profoundly disempowered – which maps nicely onto enablement and constraint. As argued by Collinson (2014), future leadership research would benefit from addressing paradoxes, tensions, or contradictions, which arguably are omnipresent in organisational life. Indeed, centre stage in this section has been the *interplay* between enablement and constraint. So much so that I have argued the two to be in mutually reinforcing relationship (Collinson, 2011) vicious cycle of resistance and control. Others in the literature have addressed this paradox, contending empowerment to be a façade or indeed an illusion. This illusion is present in the data in terms of workers being empowered on the one hand, but being expected to conduct oneself in a particular way on the other. In this sense empowerment to take the lead is in fact rendered as an *obligation* to do so.

Above I have utilised the insight from practice theory that any enactment of practice has certain effects and possibly builds the resource for another practice. If any act of practicing has certain effects, then producing direction, as the epitome of leadership work, certainly enables or constrains future activity as well. Crevani (2015), whose study I referred to above, in fact, does suggest that acts of leadership 'clear for action', which mirrors what other practice scholars are proposing with regard to effects and practices as resources for future action. Although I focus my argument in this thesis on how power is implicated in *producing* the work of leadership, rather than what the work of leadership as such does, this suggests that power dynamics not only contribute

to the production of leadership, but are a central part of the work of leadership itself. In other words, the concepts of power and leadership appear to be deeply intertwined.

While this connection has so far been apparent, it has yet only been hinted at. The leadership literature typically does not delve into the relationship between leadership and power in great detail; an area of research seemingly reserved for Critical Leadership Studies, if at all. In Chapter 2.3 I have briefly addressed how existing research perceives the relationship between the two concepts; namely that power plays an integral part in leadership dynamics insofar that leadership may be a constituent part of power and vice versa (Collinson, 2005, 2011; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Further, mainstream leadership studies per se view leadership in terms of influence (positive) and power as coercion (negative) (Collinson, 2005, 2011). Meanwhile, I have established that power both can be restrictive *and* productive.

According to my definitions of leadership and power, the two concepts might be easily confused. In Chapter 2.3 I have addressed that ontologically, leadership and power describe the same phenomena. They are ontologically equivalent. The key difference, therefore, is on an analytical level (cf. Nicolini, 2011). As suggested in Chapter 2.2, leadership is a signifier, a label *we* attach to an empirical phenomenon. In that sense, leadership is a mere variation of organising with lines to other phenomena – be it power or strategy – being blurred (Kelly, 2008; Crevani and Endrissat, 2015). As I have stated repeatedly, I view leadership as an ontological phenomenon, as the subject of this study, whereas power I perceive as a *conceptual tool* that allows for asking questions about another phenomenon (leadership) in order to yield insights that possibly would not be produced otherwise. My theoretical framework builds on various insights from the power literature (e.g. Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Latour, 1984, 2005; Clegg, 1989; Lukes, 2005; Haugaard, 2010; Hardy and Thomas, 2014) in order to ask questions about inequalities, and why things in social organisational life are the way they are (cf. Nicolini, 2013). Power, in that regard, conceptually helps to appreciate how leadership is *accomplished*.

In two different studies, Nicolini makes similar points, respectively. First, Nicolini (2009a) suggests using practice theory as a ‘toolkit’ by drawing on the family resemblances of different strands of practice, that, depending on what aspects to ‘zoom in’ on, can help understanding social phenomena in a certain way. Second, he (Nicolini,

2011) makes an insightful point about the distinction between knowing and practicing – the former being an integral part, or indeed a variation as well, of the latter. Ontologically, Nicolini argues, knowing is no different than practice. The two concepts' difference is of mere analytical nature, which means that although technically the same phenomena or empirical reality at hand, knowing allows for seeing certain aspects of practicing in a different light.

In the data, several turning points presented in fact map on definitions of both leadership and power. Take, for instance, the analogy of getting to Dundee, supposed to describe the process of goal setting. The quote presented describes direction being set, because an elite team of managers decides what the goals for this year are going to be – i.e. *where* the organisation should go (Dundee). At the same time, this can be seen as an exercise of power, because a goal that needs to be met and to which actors are held accountable fundamentally structures the possible future actions of other employees. A similar argument can be made about 'setting the true north'. Establishing a 'true north' can be seen as leadership on the one hand, because it makes a profound impact on the ways practices are legitimately accomplished (making a difference to organising), and thus concurrently structures actors' possible actions on the other (e.g. working collaboratively, passive working styles are ruled out). In relation to my research questions (Chapter 2.4), the suggestion of this argument is that power is not only implicated in the work of leadership in terms of guiding how and what kinds of turning points may materialise. It is also implicated in leadership work by being an inherent part of the leadership act of producing direction itself (cf. Fletcher, 2004; Collinson, 2011, 2014; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012).

What the argument of this section indicates are fundamental issues of participation. Actors being either enabled or constrained, or indeed both at the same time, insinuates that these actors are *included* or *excluded* from participating in the work of leadership. In the next section of my discussion chapter, therefore, I shall explore a third and final expression of power as it is implicated in the work of leadership: dynamics of exclusion and inclusion.

### 5.3 Inclusion & Exclusion

In the foregoing section, I have explored how power dynamics enable and constrain action, and hence by extension the work of leadership. Inherent in this discussion, as suggested explicitly towards the end of the section, were issues of *access*; namely dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, arguing that inclusion and exclusion fundamentally contributes or interferes with the way the work of leadership is produced. I have indicated previously that in order to be enabled to engage in the work of leadership, actors are *included* in certain practices to do so. At the same time, constraint may well be evident in the form of being *excluded* from practices that result in setting or changing courses of action. In this section, therefore, I investigate these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion as the third and final expression of power. To do so, I shed light on several aspects salient in the findings. Although I will draw on data from all findings chapters, I particularly focus on section 4.3, ‘Inclusive Practice & Elitism’. Similar to the previous section, in chapter 4.3 we can discern a seeming contradiction between ‘inclusive practice’ and ‘elitism’ – or inclusion and exclusion. As part of inclusive practice, TexCo stress that they work in cross-functional teams and that anybody may have a say (‘everybody has got a voice’). Concurrently though, underlining my argument thus far, Chapter 4.3 in particular displays a fundamental imbalance of power with regard to the degree of participation, and who may determine which actors participate how and where.

This interplay between inclusion on the one hand and exclusion on the other is implicitly reflected in an analogy provided by Patrick. He described the notion of inclusive practice in terms of a football team. It is not all about the striker putting the ball in the net, he said, but also about the midfielders setting up plays, and defenders that make sure the team stays in the lead. In other words, *everybody* has got a part to play, and the team only wins if everybody does their job. In organisational parlance, anybody may need to be included in certain discussions in order to set intelligent courses of action, and thus for leadership to be accomplished.

At the same time however, a football team might also display a variety of different interests. A striker may view it as essential to be provided with good balls in order to score easily, whereas the goalkeeper may perceive it as more important that the defence is on top of their game. Moreover, a football team also has star players who

command the ball, are awarded the wealth of attention, and are considerably more influential in determining the direction and type of play of the team than other, ‘ordinary’, or ‘second-tier’, players. In that sense, actors are *included* in a variety of debates and decision-making, and hence are provided with the opportunities to influence the courses of action that are set on a daily basis. At the same time, the findings indeed indicate that there are very few actors that are in more powerful positions to steer direction compared to the majority of the organisation. Yet, as Raelin (2011b) pointedly observes, there is a significant difference between being *consulted* in a decision-making process, and having a certain amount of *control over it*. Therefore, as I have argued, removing layers of hierarchy as part of the NOW initiative may have had the arguably unintended consequence of forming an elite, i.e. very few actors occupying a seemingly more ‘powerful’ social position than most of their colleagues.

Inherent in this discussion are dynamics of power in terms of *access*: who may or may not participate, and hence make a contribution to practice? Or, in relation to leadership, who may or may not contribute to setting direction?

Issues of access to practices – in other words the possibility of participating – are in fact a critical aspect in the literature, especially for the research stream of practice-based learning and knowing (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Gherardi, 2006; Mørk et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2011, 2013; Contu, 2014). For these scholars, participating in local practices is a key factor in order to develop a sense of ‘the way things are done around here’. Stated otherwise, through participating in an organisation’s practices actors become competent practitioners (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Jacobs and Coghlan, 2005).

Issues of power transpire in these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion insofar as some actors, typically ‘oldtimers’, *allow* access to other actors, typically ‘newcomers’ (see Lave and Wenger, 1991). Longer standing employees are thus in an arguably more powerful social position, as they can *choose* to involve others, enabling them to contribute to practice. Or, on the contrary, these ‘more powerful’ actors may also *restrict* access, thus delimiting others’ opportunities to contribute. It should be noted though that, although my theoretical framework considers tenure as a possible source of power (Chapter 2.3), I subject this simplified disparity between ‘oldtimers’ and ‘newcomers’ to the same critique of bringing pre-conceived labels into a situated

empirical setting (see ‘leader’/‘follower dichotomy). Although this is not the focus of neither this section nor this thesis, it is nonetheless interesting to note that Jack, who is considered a profoundly influential actor, joined the organisation relatively recently, and he did not transpire to be subjected to the powers of ‘oldtimers’.

While the notion of access is not a major concern of LAP, some scholars do bring it to bear on the study of practice-based leadership. Kempster (2009), for instance, explored the role of observational learning in the development of leadership practices. Whilst I have argued some actors to be particularly influential when it comes to shaping normativity (acceptability and legitimacy), and ultimately setting direction, Kempster, too, has found that ‘notable people’ like Jack are a critical aspect for leadership practices to develop. Kempster and Stuart (2010), meanwhile, auto-ethnographically examine how the latter author learned the ropes as and became a leader through ongoing participation in situated practices. These insights are particularly brought to bear on the domain of leadership development (e.g. Raelin, 2003; Carroll et al., 2008; Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013; Denyer and Turnbull James, 2015), considering that practice-based theories of learning and knowing fundamentally question the efficacy of abstract, ‘classroom’ type learning. In that regard, these studies challenge the idea of developing ‘leaders’ disentangled from the context in which they operate.

In the findings we can indeed identify several turning points that arguably have materialised through including a variety of actors. The rationale for doing so, I was told repeatedly, is because not everybody can have all the answers. People have different skills, experiences, and areas of expertise, information and insight, because they engage in diverse practices. As I have highlighted in the findings, this is why TexCo embrace working in cross-functional teams. Patrick thus may involve other actors simply because he is not capable of setting an educated and intelligent course of action. Consider, for instance, Vignette 9, ‘Solving Problems Collectively’, where Kacy approached Patrick regarding an unexpected and severe shipping delay for an important customer. Patrick, in turn, decided to call a meeting immediately involving all the relevant stakeholders in order to set a course of action – especially Keith, who is representing the Composites shop floor and is thus aware of shift patterns and can pass on requests regarding overtime to ‘his guys’. In other words, multiple actors were

required in order for leadership to materialise (see also Patrick needing Garry's input, Vignette 6).

Several commentators indeed highlighted the necessity and benefit of involving other actors in setting courses of action. Both Patrick and Maria, for example, stated specifically the importance of ensuring everybody has an equal input into discussions, and that it is not just the POD manager telling people what to do. In Chapter 4.2, this transpired particularly in terms of actors referring to the importance of encouraging people to participate. In order to create an environment of 'collaborative engagement', the modern manager's role can thus be described as a *facilitator*, rather than for instance a dictator (Raelin, 2012). As Raelin adds, a facilitator is supposed to take a neutral stance in discussions allowing for participants to bring forward their points without preconceiving what the outcome should be. Managers as facilitators, in that sense, are 'servants of the group'. This, however, is not entirely substantiated by my findings. There have indeed been instances where supposed facilitators had a rather clear idea of the course of action that should be taken. Consider Maria and Donald's clashes of opinions, or Patrick's remarks that at times he would not entertain the thought of involving others if he felt the urgency of the situation dictated it. In Vignette 7, 'Dismissing concerns', for example, a group of actors pondered once more how to tackle a production delay. Patrick proposed loading up the pallets with more product rolls, asking merely rhetorically whether this would work. Despite Keith and Kacy's overt scepticism he pushed through his agenda of doing a mock loading.

At TexCo, the need for facilitating becomes apparent particularly when unexpected things happen – in other words, when the common flow of practice *breaks down*. Vignette 9 I referred to above, for example, is a vivid testimony, since Kacy was struck by an unexpected event that required her to reflect on the situation, since things did work as anticipated. In chapter 2.2 I have devoted a section to the 'mundaneness' of everyday practicing, and hence leadership. To reiterate, I argued that most leadership occurs through non-deliberate ways of being and doing – an everyday 'practical coping' (Chia and Holt, 2006; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015). In other words, actors are absorbed in what they are doing that they do not pay attention to their actual practices. Nicolini (2013) illustrates this with the example of language: we do not think 'speak words' in order to engage in everyday conversations. Heidegger (1967) described this as a

‘dwelling mode’ that is characterised by immanent and rather mindless activity (Chia and Holt, 2006, 2007; Carroll et al., 2008; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015). Only when the ordinary flow of practice gets interrupted or disturbed, i.e. things become confused or unpredictable, actors move to ‘involved thematic deliberation’ (Dreyfus, 1991, as cited in Carroll, 2015; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), or ‘analytical reflection’ as Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) call it, which suggests actors then pay conscious attention to how and what they are engaging with.

In order to study practices, Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011) in fact suggest actively searching for temporary breakdowns thereof in order to appreciate the underlying dynamics of practices. Attending to practice breakdowns in the empirical setting indeed reveals two intriguing aspects in relation to leadership. First, breakdowns appear to trigger the need for leadership to materialise. Keith, who autonomously addressed a production shortfall he encountered, for instance, faced an unexpected situation and needed to address it in order for *a* flow of action to continue. The same occurred to Kacy in Vignette 9 discussed above, and with the broken down machine in Vignette 6 that required Garry and Patrick to decide how to proceed. In other words, because when practices breakdown the ordinary flow of action is interrupted (Chia and Holt, 2006; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Nicolini, 2013), it is required for actors to *re-set* direction in order for the flow of action to continue. The work of leadership, therefore, is not only utterly trivial and occurs through non-deliberate actions; it is also triggered by breakdowns that require to shift into a mode of operation that entails deliberate coping with the situation at hand – more in line with what Heidegger would describe as ‘involved thematic deliberation’ (cf. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Carroll, 2015; Cunliffe and Hibbert, 2015).

Second and relatedly, when practices break down actors at TexCo seemingly turn to authority figures to provide guidance, or indeed to suggest a course of action – thus ‘taking the lead’. Some of the examples I referred to throughout Chapter 5 portray this nicely. The machine operators who encountered problems with colleagues, for instance, approached Jack to fix it, whereas Garry attempted to shift the burden of making a judgement call in Vignette 6 to Patrick. In Vignette 9, Kacy informed Patrick as the POD manager right away in order to deal with the unexpected production delay. In that sense, actors *rely on formal authority* when unexpected events occur. In my

presentation of how empowerment is limited by authority (chapter 4.2.3.2), Madeleine confirmed that when things run smoothly she works autonomously, but turns to Patrick as an authority figure when problems come up. Patrick meanwhile stated that although the intention is to have democratic system, it is necessary that there are people who can ‘make decisions and run the business’. Indeed, he added, TexCo is a ‘democracy of sorts’ in the sense that some people’s ‘vote’ carries more weight than the one of others – again clearly suggesting a power imbalance through which some actors are privileged.

Although the LAP literature at times gestures towards power dynamics, authority, meanwhile, is not an especially popular notion. Quite the contrary, in order to escape a ‘heroic leadership bias’ (Yukl, 1999) scholars are enthralled with proposals that have everyone be a ‘leader’ (Grint, 2010). Grint and others (e.g. Bolden et al., 2008; Gronn, 2009; Collinson and Collinson et al., 2009), therefore, call for reconsidering the nature of leadership altogether. They propose ‘hybrid’ or ‘blended’ approaches to leadership (mentioned in Chapter 2.2), venturing to re-unite the two competing discourses of heroic and post-heroic leadership. Accordingly, in some practices, or ‘configurations’ as Gronn (2009) calls them, some individuals may feature more strongly by exercising power according to their formal authority position, whereas in other practices leadership activity is indeed dispersed.

The insights of hybrid approaches in fact correspond nicely with my critique of what I called a ‘normative bias’ of LAP studies in Chapter 2.2; namely that LAP displays an inclination to offer normative assumptions about leadership being inherently democratic, free of constraint, and hence good (e.g. Raelin, 2003; 2011a; 2012, 2014; Woods, 2015; See also Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Meanwhile the findings echo the view that some individuals appear to be particularly influential in regard to creating turning points (see Cox et al., 2003; Gronn, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Carroll, 2015; Ramsey, 2015) – by shaping normativity, enabling and constraining action, and ‘regulating’ access – even insofar that the work of leadership may not be democratic at all (Denis et al., 2010; Woods, 2015). In other words, although I agree with LAP proposing an intrinsically collective stance on leadership in the sense that any actor contributes to the work of leadership in one way or another (Crevani et al., 2010), this is not to imply that a practice approach should neglect actors that happen to occupy authority positions.

In the findings, and as described in this section, indeed both ‘versions’ of leadership work are evident (e.g. Vignette 9 for leadership as a collective accomplishment, or Patrick’s comments for more autocratic practices). In fact, my findings indicate that authority, which according to my theoretical framework is a fundamental source of power, *enables* leadership work as a dispersed accomplishment to begin with (see also Chapter 5.2). Similar to empowerment and disempowerment as argued in the previous section, leadership as centralised and as dispersed are thus in a seemingly contradictory, yet mutually reinforcing relationship. In this sense, a paradox, as both ‘versions’ of leadership exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Schad et al., 2016). This insight contributes to the LAP literature by highlighting the benefit of appreciating power dynamics in the form of authority in order to understand how leadership work is accomplished – *despite* its collaborative nature that at times is romanticised by LAP studies (e.g. Raelin, 2003; 2014). In this sense, as also indicated in Chapter 2.2 and 5.1, my thesis adds to studies such as Harter et al. (2006) by indeed foregrounding inequalities in leadership work, yet without retaining ‘artificial’ dualisms of subject/object, i.e. leader/follower, that would bring preconceived power relations into highly contextually dependent practices (Carroll, 2015).

Meanwhile, in the discussion thus far authority not only transpires in terms of seemingly disempowered actors turning to their superiors when practices breakdown. In addition, actors in authority positions appear to *deliberately* involve others, which I have indicated in this section and 5.2. Following from authority being an enabler for leadership being dispersed, actors are capable of participating in the work of leadership because they are *allowed* and *encouraged* to do so by others (see also my discussion of enablement in the previous section). This imbalance, however, is not only evident in the findings in the form of *including* actors. Whilst LAP proposes any actor to partake in the work of leadership in one way or another at any time (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010), my findings suggest that, on the contrary, privileged actors may also choose to deliberately *exclude* others. This has indeed been indicated at several occasions both in the findings chapter and also throughout my discussion chapter thus far. For example, some actors stopped others’ attempts to steer activity into a different direction. I have paraphrased several of such instances from the findings, such as Vignette 10 above, or Maria

ignoring Donald's attempts to change production timelines. Attempts to generate a turning point, therefore, were *shut down*. Others were denied further participation in the work of leadership altogether by restricting access to practices completely. The most prominent examples being Abigail and Adrian, which I have discussed thoroughly in Chapter 5.1 and picked it up in 5.2, arguing the exclusion of actors to prevent undesired practices from being perpetuated, ultimately contributing to establishing a sense of legitimacy and acceptability.

In order to demonstrate that power is exercised to shape the legitimate ways of being and practicing, I have referred to concepts such as 'identity regulation' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2011), 'soft control through culture and norms', or the 'illusion of empowerment' in the sense of actors being seemingly empowered and yet actually conforming much more (Raelin, 2011b) in Chapter 5.2. In relation to dynamics of access, an analogous point can be made. While the practice-based literature argues power dynamics to be at play in terms of determining who may or may not partake in the organisation's practices (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991), others propose the concept of '*clan control*' (Ouchi, 1979, as cited in Raelin, 2011b), which is reflected in a pursuit of 'cultural conformity' (Raelin, 2011b). The idea is that actors in authority positions carefully select individuals that fit into the 'clan', which, in practice-based terms, operates on common understandings, values and philosophies. These dominant actors would then attempt to cultivate these common values by enforcing what they consider acceptable behaviours, making workers get on board with said values, or, as my findings show, remove those actors and their practices who do not get on board.

This idea of clan control is in fact a striking reflection of the dynamics I have been discussing to take place at TexCo. As Abigail was removed, for instance, Lucy, who was considered a highly competent, reliable and hence trusted worker, and who incidentally conformed well to the ways of doing engendered by the NOW initiative, was put in Abigail's stead. Therefore, actors who reflect the views of dominant actors are actively included and provided with opportunities to partake in the work of leadership. Convinced that Lucy would do a good job, Jack gave her freedom to make of the scheduling practices whatever she wanted – knowing she would operate within the parameters of 'culture of innovation'. Indeed, as the 'architect of the scheme' as Jack referred to himself, he perceived it his task to 'put the *troublemakers in the right*

*place*'. Similarly, I have described the goal setting process, in which a selected number of employees (POD managers and the board) would first define who the 'top talents' are, to then allocate these workers to teams as *they* would see fit, while side-lining what could be seen as mediocre workers.

This leads to a final point of this section: practices, as inherently emergent (e.g. Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Nicolini, 2013), allegedly cannot be *easily manipulated*, but designed for; i.e. allowed and encouraged, or denied (Küpers, 2013). While my findings indeed show actors being allowed to partake or engage in certain practices, as discussed above, my findings also suggest what Küpers is rejecting.

Drawing on all three sections of Chapter 5, my findings in fact do indicate that the work of leadership, as emerging from practice, is *partially manipulated*. By referring to *manipulated*, I intend to connote a sense of deliberation, alleging agency to transpire vis-à-vis the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished. In this preceding section, this sense of deliberation was particularly evident (e.g. removing undesired practices, or simultaneously including top talent while sidelining mediocre workers). Similarly, in section 5.1 I discussed how normativity was established according to the views of dominant actors (e.g. by setting of the 'true north'); while in section 5.2 I highlighted how actors encouraged others to practice in a certain way, thus affecting the field of possible actions (e.g. pro-actively engaging in the work of leadership).

The rationale for stating that the work of leadership is *partially* manipulated is because it is supposedly done unwittingly. In other words, I am not suggesting that the work of leadership is constructed as a 'grand scheme', taking place behind the curtains, uncovered by the investigative researcher. Although I am arguing for agency to be involved in shaping the ways in which leadership shall materialise at TexCo – from shaping normativity, enabling and constraining actors, and dynamics of access – I cannot speak to the 'true' intentions of actors. Firstly, because this has not been the focus of this research, and, secondly, because as academics it is a delicate endeavour to unearth such 'true' intentions, as the critique of Lukes' (2005) radical view on power, which rests on alleged 'true interests' of actors, attests (see e.g. Clegg and Haugaard, 2009).

To summarise this final section, in any practice, naturally, there are dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, in other words, access. The leadership literature in general and LAP specifically, however, has not yet examined in detail the effects and implications of such dynamics. A central contribution of this thesis to the LAP literature, therefore, is highlighting the ways in which inclusion and exclusion, as fundamental expressions of power, affect the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished. To do so, I have utilised insights from practice-based studies of learning and knowing (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Mørk et al., 2010). Moreover, I highlighted the implications of practice breakdowns, which turn out to indicate leadership to be especially required when practices breakdown, and that leadership not only occurs through mundane, as suggested by the literature, but also via deliberate coping (see also Carroll, 2015). At the same time, this has problematized the at times overly romantic views on collective leadership (e.g. Raelin, 2003), since actors turned to authority figures for guidance when practices broke down. This section, therefore, contributes to existing LAP studies by suggesting a key role for authority, *in spite of* leadership's inherently collective character, which has not yet featured prominently in LAP studies. In particular, the findings imply that authority is required for leadership to be a dispersed practice *to begin with* – a seemingly contradictory relationship similar to the one described regarding enablement and constraint in the previous section. Echoing Grint (2010), arguably the LAP literature has fallen prey to what can be said about post-heroic leadership studies in general: namely it has moved from a heroic to a post-heroic *bias* of leadership. By using power dynamics as a conceptual tool, I have addressed this bias in order to demonstrate a 'middle-ground' between two competing discourses of leadership (cf. Collinson, 2005).

In the preceding discussion chapter, I have discussed three major expressions of power, which simultaneously constitute my three main findings: shaping normativity, enablement and constraint, as well as inclusion and exclusion. Thereby, I have connected these findings to a number of different concepts and ideas from the literature – particularly practice and LAP. In the following and final chapter, I am going to summarise briefly the ideas I drew on, and how I base my theoretical contributions on them, thereby concluding this thesis.

## 6. Conclusion

In this thesis I examined through a practice-based view how leadership is implicated with power dynamics, and how these dynamics affect the ways in which leadership is socially accomplished in everyday encounters. To do so, I drew on a toolkit approach (Nicolini, 2009a, 2013) to studying practice – being mindful of the differences of various practice theories and using their nuanced insights in combination. Considering the different applications of the practice concept (see Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011), I adopted a philosophical approach, examining leadership in its relational whole rather than singling out constituent parts – such as certain individuals and their actions. A vital aspect of my approach to practice also entailed foregrounding the utterly contingent and contested character of practices. In other words, I echoed several scholars (e.g. Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Mørk et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2011; Ford, 2015), and contributed to their conversations, that practices are profoundly imbued with *power dynamics*. Applied to LAP, this means that the work of leadership, too, is an essentially contested social affair (see Crevani, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

I argued indeed that studies in both the practice domain in general and LAP particularly are fond of highlighting the omnipresence and utmost importance of power. In spite of power dynamic's supposed significance, however, they remain 'under-researched', or referred to in passing in the footnotes (see Nicolini, 2013). In fact, as some suggest, examining power dynamics in practices constitutes in itself an important contribution (e.g. Heizmann, 2011; Contu, 2014). In this thesis, I therefore added to the literature by asking and subsequently answering first how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership; and, second, how these power dynamics affect the ways in which leadership work gets accomplished. By 'work of leadership', meanwhile, I referred to the idea that leadership may occur through anyone and in any situation (e.g. Crevani et al., 2010), signalling the necessity of examining leadership in its relational whole. Moreover, I argued leadership to *materialise* when direction of the flow of practice was either changed or explicitly reinforced (i.e. at the expense of proposed alternatives), or the ways in which practices get accomplished were altered (see Crevani, 2015; Ramsey, 2015; Simpson, 2015).

As for power dynamics, I contributed to conversations concerned with the relationship between practices and power, by developing a practice-based understanding

that connects systemic, dispositional, and episodic properties of power (cf. Lawrence et al., 2012; Mueller et al., 2016). Specifically, the framework begins with the premise that practices, based on a variety of resources (e.g. tenure, expertise, capital, social position, relations, rules, information, authority), provide for certain power relations (cf. Nicolini, 2011); i.e. ‘systemic power’ (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2008, 2012). These ‘systemic’ power relations then translate into certain dispositions, i.e. ‘dispositional power’, which is the capacity to do certain things, (e.g. Giddens, 1984). Ultimately, dispositional power connects systemic power with what is called ‘episodic power’, which describes the *exercise* of power (see e.g. Dahl, 1957). This exercise I identify empirically by deploying the definition of power that one actor (or a group of actors) structures the possible actions of another actor (or a group of actors) (Foucault, 1982).

With these heuristics I approached my data, gathered ethnographically for five and a half months at a British textiles organisation, *after* I conducted an inductive thematic analysis. This analysis yielded three interrelated ‘expressions of power’ implicated in the work of leadership: *shaping normativity, enablement and constraint*, as well as *inclusion and exclusion*. How these expressions of power are brought to bear on leadership work constitutes the overarching contribution made by this thesis to existing literatures of practice in general and LAP specifically.

Vis-à-vis the first expression, by highlighting various mechanisms of power, such as driving expectations or discursive and material interventions, I have shown how power dynamics are implicated in the work of leadership by shaping and negotiating what are considered legitimate and acceptable ways of practicing. Regarding how the work of leadership is accomplished, this means that some forms of producing direction (i.e. ‘turning points’) are ruled in, whereas other ways to do so are ruled out – addressing the hows and whys of producing direction. Shaping normativity through power dynamics, however, also entails influencing what courses of action may materialise instead of others. This expression of power, thereby, has stressed fundamental power imbalances vis-à-vis who may shape what is seen as legitimate and acceptable. To illustrate this, I have drawn on Foucault’s (1980) idea of power and truth being inextricably intertwined, arguing that although practices get negotiated and exhibit multiple interpretations about the ‘best’ way to practice, dominant views may yet get imposed. This thesis thereby contributes to the literature by demonstrating the

important role of normativity in the work of leadership, and problematizes portrayals of power dynamics in terms of largely one-sided leader-led relations on behalf of conventional leadership studies. By adopting practice as the unit of analysis and hence studying leadership as a collective accomplishment rather than focusing on designated individuals, my approach makes a novel contribution of *methodological* nature, by offering a way to study and theorise inequalities inherent in the work of leadership without falling back on dualisms or ‘methodological individualism’ (Chia and Holt, 2006).

Moreover, I elaborated upon what appears an intimate relationship between the concepts of practice and power, proposing to rethink the ways in which ‘prefiguration’, as enablement and constraint of activity, are conceptualised. Whilst the literature argues practices to produce power relations, my findings in fact reveal that this relationship is not a one-way street. On the contrary, my findings have shown that power, in turn, has effects on the very practices by which it is produced; for instance by shaping practice’s normativity, and thus how leadership may arise. Examining prefiguration also entailed exploring further the connection of practice and power, and how this affects the work of leadership. I argued that power dynamics are not only implicated in the work of leadership by shaping what is seen as legitimate and acceptable, it is also enabling and constraining leadership by shaping the field of possible action. To illustrate this, I proposed the idea that different practices inextricably ‘hang together’. In other words, different practices are connected, as they constitute each other’s resources (e.g. Nicolini, 2009a; Shove et al., 2011; Endrissat and Arx, 2013; Crevani, 2015). The idea that a practice in the here and now may set up another enactment in the there and then, however, has not yet been discussed thoroughly in LAP research. Here, my thesis makes another interesting contribution to the literature, by theorising the role of power dynamics in this process, and by extension how these dynamics contribute to how the work of leadership may arise.

I also emphasised a contradictory phenomenon (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Schad et al., 2016), which, as argued by Collinson (2014), future leadership research would benefit from. That is, actors are not merely empowered, they are at the same time profoundly disempowered, which maps nicely onto enablement and constraint. It is thus a mutually reinforcing relationship, a vicious cycle. Power, therefore, is conceptualised

as simultaneously productive and restrictive (cf. Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Lukes, 2005). Others in the literature have addressed this paradox, contending empowerment to be a façade or indeed an illusion (e.g. Raelin, 2011b). This illusion is present in the data in terms of workers being empowered on the one hand, but being expected to conduct oneself in a particular way on the other. In this sense empowerment to take the lead is in fact rendered as an *obligation* to do so. I then concluded this expression of power by addressing what can be seen as the delicate relationship between the two concepts of leadership and power, addressing my first research question in particular (how power is implicated within leadership). In relation to my first research question in particular, leadership and power, it appears, are two sides of the same coin and thus inextricably intertwined.

My third and final expression of power examined the notion of access, i.e. inclusion and exclusion, as an expression of power. This dynamic has strongly transpired from the data, but it has not yet been a major concern of leadership in general and LAP specifically – although there are some notable exceptions (e.g. Kempster and Stuart, 2010). Other practice-based literatures, such as knowing and learning (e.g. Gherardi, 2006), meanwhile, have studied participation in, and thus access to, practices as a pivotal prerequisite for everyday practicing. A central contribution of this thesis to the LAP literature, therefore, is highlighting the ways in which inclusion and exclusion, as fundamental expressions of power, are implicated in and affect the ways in which the work of leadership is accomplished. Moreover, I highlighted the implications of practice breakdowns, which turn out to indicate leadership to be especially *required* when practices breakdown, and that leadership not only occurs through mundane, as suggested by the literature, but also via *deliberate coping*. At the same time, this has problematized the at times overly romantic views on collective leadership (e.g. Raelin, 2003), since actors turned to authority figures for guidance when practices broke down. I therefore contribute to existing LAP studies by suggesting a key role for authority, which has not yet featured prominently in LAP studies, *in spite of* leadership's inherently collective character that LAP arguably got enthralled with (see Grint, 2010). In particular, the findings imply that authority is a prerequisite for leadership to be a dispersed practice to begin with – a seemingly contradictory relationship similar to the one described regarding enablement and constraint. By drawing on the other two

expressions of power discussed in Chapter 5, I lastly suggested that the work of leadership gets *manipulated* – through shaping notions of acceptability and legitimacy, enabling and constraining action, and by ‘regulating’ who may or may not be allowed to participate in the leadership work.

As for future research, with these expressions of power dynamics that affect the work of leadership, my thesis constitutes a promising step into a fruitful direction for power-based inquiries vis-à-vis practices generally and LAP in particular. In this sense, I perceive five major areas for future inquiry. First, my expressions of power might be used as a heuristic in future LAP studies. It would be interesting to examine further, for instance, how leadership work in organisations evolves over time, and how power dynamics are involved in such evolution. While my findings hint at changing practices and their effects on leadership work, I was cautious not to make ‘truth’ claims about how the organisation, its practices, and leadership work, has evolved, given my somewhat limited time spent in the field.

A second area of inquiry I perceive worthwhile is the intersection of leadership work, power, and knowledge. As argued elsewhere (Mueller et al., 2016), practice, power, and knowledge are in a deeply intertwined triangular relationship. Similarly, in this thesis I drew on Foucault’s (1980) work that suggests power and knowledge to be two inseparable social phenomena. In this sense, the legitimate and acceptable ways of practicing leadership need to be *known* through continuous engagement in and with said practices, whilst in turn this ‘leadership knowing’ is permeated with power dynamics. Although knowing is implicit in any kind of practicing (see Nicolini, 2011), I have not engaged deeply with literatures of practice-based knowing or theories of knowledge, given the focus of this thesis (e.g. Nicolini et al., 2003; Gherardi, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Nicolini, 2011). Further research, therefore, could take into account the ways in which leadership is known, and how such ‘leadership knowings’ are accomplished in everyday life and are permeated with power dynamics. At the same time, this might have practical implications for leadership development, which, in line with a practice view, should not take place via abstract, classroom-type teaching, but through ongoing engagement in the practices in which actors actually operate (e.g. Raelin, 2003, 2011a; Kempster and Stuart, 2010; Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Denyer and Turnbull James, 2015). Moreover, as I argued in this thesis, from a practice perspective notions of

‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ actually collapse, and that the *practice* of leadership ‘comes first’. This means that development efforts should not merely focus on designated individuals holding certain positions, but on all participants of leadership practice, and attending to what practicing leadership in a given organisation in fact entails. In other words, developing the practice rather than its alleged ‘leaders’.

Third, my expressions of power might be ‘transferred’ to other practice-based phenomena altogether, such as strategy. Carroll and colleagues (2008), for example, make a similar but opposite move by applying Whittington’s (2006) typology of strategy praxis, practice, and practitioners to the study of leadership. In this sense, my three expressions might be used in order to investigate phenomena such as strategy or practice-based knowing, both of which, as fundamental enactments of practice, are permeated with power dynamics just as leadership is (e.g. Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini, 2011; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Fourth, and similarly, my conceptual framework of power dynamics that connects systemic, dispositional, and episodic variants of power in a novel, practice-based sense, might be taken to other contexts to theorise and study the ways in which power dynamics are realised or are at play as part of other social phenomena.

Lastly, I frequently referred to tensions, or paradoxes, occasionally citing key works from the ‘organisational paradox’ literature (e.g. Smith and Lewis, 2011; Schad et al., 2015). I indeed echoed Collinson (2014), suggesting taking into account that the role of paradoxes in the work of leadership may constitute a fruitful endeavour. I have indicated several tensions and indeed paradoxes, such as the illusion of empowerment, or authority being a pre-requisite for leadership work being dispersed. I suggest exploring how paradoxes are brought to bear on leadership work as a promising avenue for future inquiry – with this thesis as an insightful first step.

Naturally, this thesis exhibits limitations. Reflecting on my PhD journey, for instance, I would have liked to remain in the field for a longer amount of time. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, although the recommended amount of time spent in the field is unspecified, and while the ethnographer’s learning curve ultimately flattens, it is commonly agreed to spend as much time in the field as possible as one would not cease to learn new things (see Czarniawska, 2007). Still others (e.g. Nicolini, 2011) strive for ‘theoretical saturation’. However, ethnographers do agree that the fieldworker’s

learning curve ultimately declines after a certain amount of time spent in the field, that observations and interviews become narrower given the focus of the study (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Emerson et al., 1995), and that exit is largely arbitrary (Van Maanen, 2015). For three reasons, I decided to leave the field. First, I noticed a decline in the daily notes I took, representing a flattening learning curve. Second, through going back and forth between theory and data (see Nicolini, 2011), I determined I had gathered a sufficient amount of data to make a novel and interesting contribution to the relevant literature. Third, due to pragmatic constraints regarding the time limitation of the PhD, and given that my access was initially negotiated for five and a half months with Jack, I decided to leave the field in March 2014. That said however, spending more time in the field potentially would have yielded deeper insight.

Moreover, although my access was unrestricted in the sense that I was able to go anywhere and talk to anyone, it was agreed to mainly focus on the ‘commercial part’ – i.e. the office – of the organisation. For example, in spite of this focus I recognised tensions between the office and the shop floor in terms of an ‘us vs. them’ culture. Although possibly revealing for the work of leadership, the limitations of my access prevented me from gaining a thorough enough insight about this tension.

In summary, the main argument of this thesis was that leadership materialises *in and through* practices and their enactments. These practices, on the other hand, are inherently contingent, negotiated, and contested, and therefore permeated with power dynamics. Power dynamics in social life generally and practices (and thus LAP) specifically are widely agreed to be important, which is why in this thesis I asked how power dynamics are implicated in leadership work, and how they affect the ways in which this leadership work might get accomplished; and found that power dynamics are implicated in three major ways: through *shaping normativity* of leadership work, *enabling and constraining* action, as well as *including and excluding* actors from the work of leadership.

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