

Rethinking authenticity and accountability:

Facing up to the conflicting expectations of media leaders

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Abstract:

Our research is focused on understanding the ethical implications of conflicting expectations faced by leaders in the media industries. We acknowledge that systemic leadership theories, and also the ‘blended leadership’ approach proposed by Collinson and Collinson (2009) discuss the existence of these conflicting expectations, but we argue that work remains to be done on how this impacts ethical notions such as authenticity and accountability. Some of the conflicting demands that media leaders face include: the need to take firm decisions to generate profit, while creating spaces for experimentation, and at the same time maintaining the professional duty to produce high quality editorial content. The pursuit of profit does not always sit comfortably with the insistence on journalistic integrity, and decisiveness does not always foster openness towards experimentation. Can leaders who respond to these varied demands still be considered authentic and accountable? To deal with these challenges, we argue for ‘relational responsiveness’ as a core component of maintaining authenticity and accountability within leadership in the media industries.

Keywords: Ethics, accountability, media

1) Introduction:

In this research project, we explore leadership ethics in the media industries. By means of a reflective interpretation of data emerging from interviews in Paris and Chicago, we analyze the way in which media executives understand their role within their organizations and society, the ethical challenges they confront, and how they deal with the demands of increasingly complex organizational environments. One of the main questions that arise is whether the conflicting expectations that media executives face, compromises their authenticity and integrity.

Within contemporary studies in leadership, there seems to be at least two general approaches to leadership: one which focuses on the leader as an individual who displays certain traits and behaviors, often exemplified in the so-called 'heroic-leadership' approaches, and the other which emphasizes that leadership is a social, relational phenomenon, which characterizes post-heroic leadership theories. We make this broad distinction being fully aware of the risk of overgeneralization and ignoring the complexity of defining and describing leadership (Harding et al. 2011: 928). As Alvesson & Spicer correctly observe, "people construct or invent a version of leadership through drawing on their assumptions, expectations, selective perceptions, sense-making and imaginations of the subject matter" (2011: 20). In this paper, we come to

challenge common assumptions about integrity, authenticity and accountability by interpreting the way our interviewees speak about leadership in the media industries.

We believe that some important ethical questions emerging from the lived leadership dynamic within media organizations remain unaddressed in both post-heroic leadership theories and heroic leadership approaches, largely because it cannot properly address the interface between individual leaders and broader leadership dynamics. We then point out that though the existence of conflicting expectations of leaders is acknowledged within systemic leadership theories, as well as in Collinson and Collinson's (2009) blended leadership theory, some reflection is needed on its ethical implications. We also draw on the discussion paradox within the systemic leadership literature to highlight the ethical challenges this poses. In response, we argue for 'relational responsiveness' as a core component of maintaining authenticity and accountability within leadership in the media industries.

2) Methodology

Leadership within the media environment remains relatively unexplored (Küng, 2008). This may be because there are a number of significant methodological difficulties specific to the study of this topic. For instance, it is sometimes difficult

to determine who the leaders in media organizations are. This is the case because several “powers” coexist in media organizations: political power (shareholders), managerial power, and editorial power, all of which are legitimate (Lavine & Wackman, 1988; Cohen, 1999). From a legal standpoint, the newspaper editor, for example, has considerable power; the editor can activate a confidence clause if he/she feels that his/her professional independence has been impaired; an editor also enjoys a certain aura in the public opinion. Next, there is a problem of interlocutor availability and confidentiality in the data collection phase (Cohen, 1999). In the media professions the role of information is critical, and very few media leaders feel sufficiently comfortable with the subtleties of management research to be willing to disclose strategic information. Last but not least, the observation of leadership in the media sector is not easy if only, as Bryman puts it, “what formally designated leaders (such as managers) do entails the enactment of leadership as such” (2004: 750).

The study we conducted can be located in the realm of qualitative leadership research, drawing on grounded theory (Hunt & Ropo, 1995; Conger, 1998; Parry, 1998). However, we remain distinctly aware of the limitations that a purely inductive approach like grounded theory entails (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2012: 4). We therefore attempt to use empirical data that we have gathered in an abductive, rather than strictly inductive manner. As such, we engage with the data we gathered in an interpretative way, trying to understand how what we hear

our interviewees say relates to already established theories. We tend to agree with Alvesson and Skoldberg (2012: 5) that theory is poetry in and through the 'facts' – facts that are always value-laden. We also believe that 'facts' serve to occasion the theory, and allow us to fine-tune and criticize existing theory.

We selected twelve high-level interlocutors representative of various activities in the media industry in Europe and the United States, focusing on finding right quality of interlocutor than a large number of respondents (Kauffman, 2011). Our interviewees reflect a broad spectrum of professions involved in the production (stock and flow) of audiovisual, digital, print and radio press contents. Following Cohen's (1999) advice, our approach included active listening, non-directivity, adopting an empathetic attitude. Our in-depth interviews can be likened to a discussion, "a scene for a conversation" (Alvesson, 1996: 465), or better still a "co-production meeting", enabling us to tease out the discourse, both the representations and the practices (Blanchet & Gottman, 2006).

We tried to escape the risk of 'hierarchy credibility' by doubting what a person of authority says (Becker 2002: 154). We also gave careful consideration to Cohen's article, which provides an interesting testimony about how to conduct an interview with worldwide leaders. To make good use of the data we gathered, we analyzed the transcribed interviews using Nvivo 8.0 with a thematic purpose: using the interview data, we created categories (Conger, 1998: 107) in order to

reflect on existing theoretical frameworks, in order to refine them, or to produce new ones (Locke, 2001). The most important part of the methodology however centers in the interpretation of the data. We believe that our engagement with the data is characteristic of reflexive/ reflective research, which requires careful interpretation and reflection (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2012: 9). We acknowledge that we came to the interviews with certain theoretical understandings and presuppositions, and that our reflection on what was said is a conversation with the broader community of leadership scholars. It is also important to acknowledge the unique context within which we conducted the interviews, and the linguistic, cultural and conceptual specificities that shaped the engagement we have with our interviewees.

Our interpretation of the interview data emerges from our own understanding of contemporary leadership theory and way in which tends to gloss over some of its own implications for ethical theory and practice. Leadership in the media industries challenges us to do more work in understanding how leadership practice puts constructs like 'integrity', 'authenticity' and 'accountability' under pressure. We therefore start a description of the unique challenges of leadership in the media industries. We then move on to a brief sketch of the available approaches to leadership, as we understand them. We believe that the contextual specifics of the media industries put into sharp relief certain questions that remain unanswered by current leadership theory. With this in mind, we then

seek to interpret certain patterns that we have identified within our interview data, acknowledging that the identification of such patterns does not constitute 'facts'. Instead, we believe it highlights the intricacies of our own engagement with our field of research, and the questions we bring to it. In the case of this paper, we hope to understand how certain ethical constructs, such as authenticity, integrity and accountability function within media leadership.

3) The context: the character of the media industry

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

pressure and media professionals have to redefine their role in maintaining accountability and trust in the profession.

Furthermore, the media sector presents singular features in terms of leadership. Historically, media “leaders” – called “tycoons” or “moguls” – have played an undeniable role. Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Michael Bloomberg in the United States, Leo Kirch in Germany, and Robert Hersant in France are symbols which show that the power of the media are in the hands of entrepreneurs who built personal fortunes from it. In short, the impact of the entrepreneurial model in the media plays a preeminent role, and the personification of the sector is particularly compelling.

Media industries satisfy the requirements of a “reactive economy” (Garel, 2003) where organizations are subject to constant reappraisal and the need to reconfigure resources to optimize their responses to demand in short time frames. Indeed, the very nature of their activity exposes these organizations to all sorts of economic, political, and technological pressures. This makes them an especially interesting field of investigation, notably for how “to manage the different levels of conflicting demands, stresses and difficulties that characterize contemporary organizations (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). In light of the strategic and technological transformations that the sector has undergone since the digital revolution,, it is fair to say that the sector is particularly well suited for an

investigation of business organizations from the perspective of leadership.

It is also worth noting here that media projects lend themselves well to the transition from a traditional project management model – based on procedures of manual operation, linear phasing, emphasis on rules – towards an opposite model, allowing for general guidelines, contingent decisions, and structures of integration-cooperation (see Giard & Midler, 1996). Similarly, co-development and networking among partners, for example, is now a common practice in media organizations (Sydow, Lindkvist & DeFillipi 2004; Sydow, 2006). In short, the media world also appears to be highly decentralized, hyper-reactive i.e. less hierarchical. In the end, it reflects Benghozi's "agility paradox" (i.e. a space of flexibility and stability) and Feigleson & Lamberbourg's "paradoxical consent" (2008) where the logic of cooperation and the logic of confrontation coexist.

Küng summarizes this in the following terms: "the task of leadership in the media sector contains many inherent paradoxes. The span of competencies and talents required is best served by multi-leader structures, yet these complicate and dull decisiveness, the power, influence and responsibility place huge requirements in terms of self-knowledge and emotional maturity, yet individuals possessing such characteristics are unlikely to be able to stomach the temperamental, ego-driven, hard-nosed, power-hungry individuals who populate the sector" (2007: 11). How then can the charisma of the leader be reconciled with the active participation of

teams? How is it possible to point the resilient personification of authority in the sector (e.g. the strong personalities of newspaper editors, film directors, talk show hosts) while noting at the same time the decisive influence of media teams in the success of these specific type of organisations and projects? In this regard, Murphy & Ensher's study (2008), using interviews with directors and producers of television shows, provides the beginnings of an answer by bringing two concepts together that are clearly contrary: charismatic leadership and shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003). For these authors the starting point for these leaders, high-level executives in the audiovisual sector, is their own idea of themselves as leaders (self-schemata leadership) and of their ability to get others to follow and accept a non-vertical style of collaboration, typical of media environments.

In our earlier focus group study (Deslandes & Painter-Morland, 2012), we found that senior media managers describe themselves as 'architects' or 'curators', but at the same time as 'sluts' or the providers of 'fast food'. We were interested in understanding what these metaphors suggest. It seems as if there is the paradoxical need to respond to whatever audience demand, while at the same time maintaining judgment, discretion and self-reflection as professionals. In our earlier focus group studies media professionals reflected on this challenge and it became clear that the speed that characterizes their professional lives complicates this balancing act between discretion and responsiveness to audience demands. They also indicated that their ideal leader must be multi-

skilled and capable of leveraging diverse competencies within his/ her organization.

In the media context, it seems as if power is viewed as a balancing act between conflicting demands; it results from agreements between stakeholders, not from orders 'coming from the top' (Perez-Lattre & Sanchez-Taberno, 2003). Thus, the authority of a single person, particularly on a paternalistic model, can have a negative impact on a changing and creative environment such as that of the media sector (Küng, 2008). As Dal Zotto (2005) demonstrated that leadership can aspire to increase the autonomy of teams; in this case, leadership is no longer a concept, it is a process that extends beyond the leader/followers relationship in favor of a leadership conceived as the coordination of efforts within a community of practice.

In our earlier study, we asked our focus group participants how these challenges posing the media profession are navigated in practice. It became clear that media professionals need a particular kind of leadership. We found that media professionals need the kind of leader who can create a space within which audience demand meets the discretionary responses that display of experience and integrity. The reference made by focus group participants to media leaders as 'chief content architects', is informative here. An architect typically designs a space, not unilaterally, but in interaction with a client. S/he brings professional

experience, expertise and discretion to the design of a space that literally creates a world for others to live in. However, in the case of the media professional, the creation of this world is by no means the brainchild of a single individual, but emerges in the process of leaders juggling many contradictory demands and conflicting stakeholder interests. The challenge that this juggling act presents lies in the fact that it involves conflicting or paradoxical demands, which poses challenges in terms of understanding leaders' authenticity and integrity. In what follows, we explore a number of theoretical perspectives on leadership, and then bring these theories into conversation with our interview data.

4) Overview of available approaches to leadership:

As we suggested in our introduction, there seems to be two general directions in leadership theory. On the one hand, leadership is defined by the individual dimension, often related to the personality and the choices and decisions of those appointed to positions of authority within organizations. Focusing on the traits and behaviours of individuals, scholars interested in individual leaders have identified inspirational, visionary, and charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1998), or authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Within the ethical leadership literature, Ciulla (2002) advocates values-driven leadership. This approach focuses on the character of the individual leader, which makes him/ her both ethical and effective. Responsible leadership theories (Maak and Pless,

2012), propose a more relational understanding of the concept of leadership. They define responsible leadership as the art of building and sustaining relationships with all relevant stakeholders. This requires socialized, not personalized leaders. Other authors draw on political leadership to construct their leadership theories. For instance, Monod's recent book, *Politics of charisma*, addresses the issue of political leadership with reference to Weber, showing that the underlying concern is to promote the leader in order to "avoid an administered, leaderless democracy" (Monod, 2012: 60).

For researchers interested in broader leadership dynamics, rather than in individual leaders, addressing the individual in isolation of the social phenomena at work around him makes no sense whatsoever (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011: 75). This kind of leadership study involves the analysis of interactions and relations, in particular power relations, between members of a community or an organization (Alvesson, 1996; Collier & Esteban, 2000). In this case, leadership is seen as a social, procedural construct and not as the expression of the particular will of an individual leader inspiring followers. Paradoxically, some see leadership as a dynamic that subjects both leaders and followers to its demands. As Ford *et al.* describe, leadership is a "norm that controls leaders, by making them strive to be something that is utterly unachievable. [...] The very presence of leadership renders others, 'followers', abject" (Ford *et al.*, 2008: 169). However, Alvesson and Spicer (2011) rightly point out that the focus on leadership dynamics can

easily lead us into a situation where everything can be leadership and everyone can be a leader, leaving the construct as such meaningless. Though we certainly need less blind faith in 'leadership', a rejection of the notion as such is not helpful either (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 368).

One can argue that the emergent dichotomy between heroic and post-heroic leadership studies is a result of a unidimensional consideration of leadership (Gronn, 2002). We however also have to acknowledge approaches which try to cast a bridge between heroic and post-heroic leadership constructs, such as, relational and distributed leadership theories, and systemic leadership theories (Collier & Esteban, 2000; Edgeman and Scherer, 1999; Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey 2007, Uhl-Bien 2011).

One of the main contributions of systemic leadership, for example, is the acknowledgement of leadership paradox (Collier & Esteban, 2000). From a systemic leadership perspective, 'leadership' is everyone's responsibility, yet in most cases, it is still exercised by one person at a time. Collier and Esteban use the example of a jazz band, where certain unspoken conventions dictate who will be "soloing", and "comping" (supporting the lead) and how the switch between leading and supporting is initiated. Another paradox relates to the co-existence of unity and diversity within organizations. Though systemic leadership relies on a diversity of ideas and inputs, one cannot deny the need for congruence and a

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

Collinson & Collinson (2009) point out that while leadership studies tend to radically oppose the “heroic” and “post heroic” perspectives – the former putting forward the individual nature of leadership, the second its collective nature – the employees in their study called for a leadership practice that combines the two. They argue that one should avoid opposing in more or less artificial and

ideological fashion traditional forms of leadership and “distributed” forms of leadership, and instead understand their articulation, their complementarity, and their particular effectiveness. Blended leadership meets the demands of employees by combining the particular qualities of a directive leadership approach, favoring “agentic traits”, a leadership approach oriented towards clarifying the big picture and enhancing commitment to it by aligning people (Northouse, 2004), with a shared leadership approach, i.e. “leading by invitation” (Alvesson & Bloom, 2011) which celebrates everyone’s differences and makes room for “dissensus” by favoring availability, deliberation, communication, and proximity. Simply put, blended leadership is concerned with the potential complementarity that emerges from, on the one hand, charismatic forms of exercising authority in a top-down approach, and on the other a relational perspective of peer-leadership.

Though some of the leadership theories mentioned above acknowledge the relational, ‘blended’ and paradoxical nature of leadership, it still does not fully address the implications for our understanding of certain ethical constructs, which emerge as a result. In reflecting on what media executives tell us about their specific view of leading, the need to offer an account of how this may affect leaders’ authenticity and integrity, is long overdue. The specific characteristics of the media industry come into play here, but may also have broader implications for understanding leadership theory in general. We therefore suggest that a

closer discussion of the competing demands that media professionals face may add some valuable perspectives to leadership theory.

5) A reflection on our interview findings:

We found that executives in the media industry report contradictory demands. They have to be able to deal with contradiction, and allow vision to emerge despite, and maybe even because of it. In what follows, we provide overview of some of the emerging leadership paradoxes within the media industries:

5.1 Decisiveness *and* delegation

Media executives are expected to be decisive and display some force of conviction when asked to make their determinations. But on the other hand, they should know when to delegate and keep their distance. This may seem like the characteristic of any good leader, but in the case of the media industries, it is problematized by the fact that the media provides the public with certain services, which raises ethical expectation around accountability, fairness and honesty. The tricky balancing act seems to be when to exercise control, and when to let go.

Various interviewees insisted on decisiveness as an important leadership characteristic. JRO, the digital director of a large public radio station in Europe, explains this:

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

In JRO’s opinion, it is also important to recognize that *“people need the traditional frame of the management; they want a reliable person who can take decisions.”*

However, JRO believes that certain editorial decisions – the choice of topics and the designation of the person responsible for covering the topic – cannot be made by committee. For JR, the CEO of a media strategy consultancy based in Europe, this capacity to decide editorial matters also derives from the legal obligation resting on the editor’s shoulders; the editor is legally liable for all information published under his or her authority. While compromises are always possible on marketing and sales issues in management committees, in editorial matters and in terms of content, the editor of the newspaper or the film director (in Europe) or film producer (in the USA) takes the decision on the publication of an article or the filming of a scene. JR continues:

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

At the same time, our interviewees also emphasize the importance of leading by letting one’s followers be, allowing them to experiment freely. Instead of ‘directing’ change, successful leaders seem to be capable of creating spaces for experimentation, which allows for the emergence of a dynamic that facilitates the change that is needed, in a kind of autopoietic fashion. Here the element of ‘decision’ is still there, but it is a decision to create a space for creativity and then to relinquish control. As one of the interviewee says, to be reinvented online the most established brands, like Le Monde, “need incubators with young people... the wild kids”. As ORV, the executive director of a public investment fund for the film industry, says:

“The basis of this activity is really curiosity and the idea that you will meet situations for projects that will make you discover a new world you didn’t expect. The best moment in my professional life, is to meet people that are bringing something really new to you. It can happen if you produce a situation to make that happen. (...) And then diversity, new approaches, new cultures, new relations with cultures, is the most important. (...) Vision

*is to be surprised. Vision is to see something you have not expected.(...)
Then I think there is no power without vision and the capacity of feeling
the potential evolution, which means the active contradictions..”*

What emerges is the seemingly contradictory demand that leaders must be quite decisive, but also able to put their own views aside to let outsiders determine the ‘vision’ of their own organizations. It seems more important to find the right talent and to create the freedom and space these talented individuals need to do their work. This paradox of freedom is indeed an interesting one. As SH, the producer of TV shows in Europe and Asia, explains:

“First of all, I don’t think it necessary comes as a vision. It can come as an experiment. I love the movie about Facebook. You see how it starts with friends; I mean it is not necessarily a vision of “I am going to build an empire”. It starts by trail and error and making something new happen. I don’t think the boss of a big company does a break through. I think society generates the break through and one is able to catch it.”

One can argue that it is a freedom that emerges from the blended leadership phenomenon. It requires a 'heroic' sense of leadership in that it demands strong strategic action and deliberate incentives to attract and manage the right talent. But at the same time, it requires of leaders to design and create spaces within

which others can experiment, to trust others enough to step back and allow them to fail, and to forgive them these failures (Caldwell and Dixon 2010). In reality, it seems that the expectations of leaders are more complex, and that contemporary organizations demand versatility rather than gendered consistency. In fact, Collinson and Collinson's (2009: 377) 'blended leadership' seems to allow space for this subtle gear-changes, in which both delegation and direction are valued, i.e. leaders can be both forceful and enabling, and both strategic and operational. The question that however remains is whether these insights solves the ethical problems of how this is perceived.

5.2 Charisma *and* connectedness

Another conclusion from our interviews is that there is the paradoxical expectation that executives should be both independent, charismatic figures, while being very connected to their different constituencies. They should know their networks of influence so well, that they can navigate their organizations to maintain its public role despite, and often amidst these pressures.

Not only should media leaders avoid micromanaging their organizations, they seem to be required to live beyond it. They must have open ears and eyes for what is to be gauged from the broader networks in which they participate. In fact, it seems to be precisely this connectedness that enables the intuitive, strong

individual, and as we would argue, and *authentic* decision. Leaders are expected to step into the spotlight, while at the same time being willing to share it. This relates to the fact that leaders are expected to have individual charisma and conviction, and sometimes use this to create spaces for new business models and initiative to emerge, which are not the products of their own ingenuity.

For MV, the French producer of TV series, this know-how comes from the experience and intuition he calls “feeling”. One has to know how to hold on tight to one’s ideas and to sell them to others. *“My vision, the way I use it in my business, is to have first a gut feeling and intuition”,* he says, *“because I listen to myself and I trust it. The more you grow, the more you know how to listen to yourself and weigh out your bets. (...) You have to trust yourself and make the people trust you. You have a certain type of charisma.”* Here, charisma, the historical value of traditional leadership, is widely tipped as the element that inspires and motivates teams. A leader is someone who convinces others of the right direction to take and does so with panache. JPL, the COO of a large international press group, explains: “A very good example is Steve Jobs. He was a visionary, but he had a way of talking about his products, about the vision he had about media convergence that was incredible. People have to believe in you but you need to create some enthusiasm. If you don’t do this, it is very tough.” This is a reference to the drive and talent to lead teams down a particular path, giving oneself the means to bring it off.

At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, these ‘charismatic’, ‘decisive’ business leaders in the media sector are asked to display humility in making themselves available for connection. As ORV comments:

“What I love about American professionals (...) is the principle of availability. When you are an American tycoon, whatever your status, you try to be in a permanent availability. The new can come from anywhere, and the new talent can come from anywhere and it is not difficult to have a meeting with a great producer. It is easier to have a meeting with a great producer in Hollywood, than to have a meeting with a small producer in Paris.”

SH also emphasizes the need to move beyond the charismatic ‘superman’ culture in leadership. Bosses, she says, like “to be perceived as powerful”, though often this is hardly the case at all. But this desire augurs an inflated ego, fringing at times on a pathological one (SH gives the example of the British publishing baron of the 1980s, Robert Maxwell), though, she hastens to add, it is no longer the typical profile of media leaders today and seems destined to disappear in the future.

For BE, a former CEO of one of the main international news agencies, it is simply

bad strategy to exercise responsibility in the media sector in order to figure among the powerful of the world. When this is the sole aim, “you want to meet the pope, the president, the CEOs, but you don’t have time to work on your industry (...) I mean they are losing their time as far as the industry is concerned.” In BE’s opinion, no one can claim to have “a total and permanent vision. There is no ‘superman’ anymore.”

In the opinion of JC, respected opinion writer and former press baron, the digital universe is a game changer. “You have a different attitude from the younger people. It is not easy for old people – when I say old I mean mature people – for them to relinquish control of what they are doing to younger people. This is extremely difficult. (...) That is the challenge of leadership.” AT, a journalist and former editor in chief of a news magazine in Chicago, observes that the Rupert Murdoch “model” is passé and deserves to be challenged:

“People think of this super rich owner of a giant media conglomerate as a media leader and that that view is about making money, making profit, about having questionable ethics, and not about doing good and solid journalism. (...) I think the lines of leadership have also gotten a little more blurred. Because people are doing multiple kinds of jobs, working with multiple different departments heads and it is not the same kind of direct relationships anymore. I think that leadership is required of a broader

collection of people working in these organizations today and we should all kind of see ourselves playing a leadership role.”

Today’s media universe is indeed decentralized; leadership is distributed across different units and different responsibilities, as BE confirms here: *“You have the structure of the program, and everybody is responsible to deliver in due time, content for this part, for this part, etc... So I think the leadership is very small. (...) The leadership is a slow leadership, step by step, chip by chip, detail by detail.”*

Moreover, networks and professional affinities within media organizations have to be reckoned with. JR provides a description of what he understands to be the management of a personal “network of influence” – or personal power base – in the media industries: *“The network is key word for the leader in media. They shouldn’t be however dependent on this network, they need a network on each field: political, economic, cultural, lobbys. (...) The more you are connected, the more you are efficient.”* In addition to “having a point of view”, charisma, and the force of conviction both inside and outside the organization, leaders must manage the sometimes strong sensitivities of professionals and employees, competitors and partners alike. It is because of this interconnectedness that it becomes unclear who is leading whom. In the words of SH:

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

A more positive interpretation could be that more connected, participatory version of visionary leadership seems to be emerging which AT believes gives to *“voices that normally don’t get heard become heard, creating a space that is really inclusive”*.

5.3 Profit-making *and* traditional professionalism

Media executives are both profit-makers and professionals, with all the tensions implied. The paradoxical charge that those in positions of authority in media companies face, is well described in the words of Gerald Long a former CEO of Reuters, quoted by one of the respondents: *“If we take care only of money, we destroy news, but without money, there is no news”*. This balancing act between money, talent and technology was reiterated by a number of respondents. One could sense an awareness that the “leader” in these contexts was not entirely in the “driving seat”, directing all operations in linear fashion, but responding to the conflicting challenges that characterizes the industry.

We therefore found that media executives are expected to be politicians and money-generators as much as they are professionals who are supposed to serve the public with quality information and generate independent perspectives. The complex power dynamics that this dichotomy presents is something that clearly emerged from the interviews. But we are yet to understand its implications. “All the life of the media is on this conflict between the news people and the money people. It is exactly the same in TV with the other side of the activity with fiction, and the series and so on. You have the “saltimbanques” [acrobats, i.e. “artists” or creators], against the “géomètres” [surveyors, i.e. “experts” or managers].” As JR explains:

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

HP agrees that Rupert Murdoch is interesting in this regard:

“When you take Murdoch, again let us say ten years or fifteen years ago. He happened to be able till that time to keep the good balance between his marketing objectives, his political objectives, and a certain type of acceptable quality of news. This is what I call in my articles or speeches the balance of finalities. (...) I should sum up the ethics of a media leader with the respect of the balance.”¹

An other manner of expressing this “good balance” in different level of responsibilities is stated by AS, the COO of a Public Radio Station : *“Even though individual leaders may have been ethical in what they pursued, or valued the leadership inherent of being at the head of a media property, there is a lot of trade-offs.”* To keep a good balance is difficult since the media people, particularly the journalists, who are traditionalistic about their professional ethics, seem also quite conservative about the way the product itself can evolve and be innovative. For BE it is indeed difficult *“to break the patterns. “La grille de programme, le chemin de fer du journal” (the program grid, the newspaper’s railroad). You have to break that and it is very difficult.”*

The question here is how leaders can also make sure that they can preserve their own professional ethics under the pressure of numbers (especially

¹ BE makes a similar observation: *“He was not able, and maybe it is another point, to keep the good*

objectives in terms of audience). The importance of balancing aims comes to the fore at the moment of deciding on innovation in creation and the respect for media traditions, as JR remarks here:

“For me, the vision of the future of the leadership in media should be based on the conciliation of ethic and success. How to contribute to knowledge as well as entertainment? (...) This is again the role of the leader, he should be gatekeeper of the heritage, be sure that they are going the right way and looking at the future giving the vision. These are three things: the heritage, the current implementation, and the vision to build the future.”

Yet, despite the acknowledgement that concern for profit and financial sustainability has become important, there is still the expectation that leaders in the media industry must display a certain professionalism. For BE, “media people”, especially journalists, are a critical force even inside the organizations that employ them. At *Le Monde* newspaper or at the *Liberation*, for example, the newsroom can take a vote of confidence against the newspaper’s editor or against one of its shareholders. BE points out: “You don’t have this in the chocolate industry or in the automobile industry. The workers in the automobile plants don’t spend their time judging the boss. It is no use. It is not interesting. But in the media industry, it is fun and it is interesting.” For him, what this really

highlights is the issue of managerial legitimacy, because the rule of journalistic self-criticism applies less when the primary director is himself or herself a journalist. He gives the example of Hubert Beuve-Méry, the founder of *Le Monde* newspaper: “(...) *the Hubert Beuve-Méry cult in Le Monde. In the US Media you also have this. The Pulitzer Prize. Once you have a Pulitzer you are a ‘saint’..*”

6. Leadership authenticity and accountability in the media industries

As we have seen, leadership in the media sector cuts across at least three interrelated dimensions: a central imperative is profit-generation, which requires creating spaces for experimentation, whilst maintaining the professional duty to produce high quality editorial content. The fact is that performing in all three areas entails navigating seemingly conflicting demands. The pursuit of profit does not always sit comfortably with the insistence on journalistic integrity. Strong charismatic leaders are not always the most relational individuals. And decisiveness does not always foster openness towards experimentation. We therefore see that ‘blended’ expectations of leadership definitely exist in the media industries, but that reflection on how that impacts leadership authenticity and accountability remains amiss.

These competing demands need to be considered together and at the same time: “*If like Murdoch you think about money before content and ethics, it is*

wrong”, JR comments. *“If you change the content because your team is on the left wing, this won’t respect the balance between the 3 parameters. Of course you have to be successful to be independent. But the business can’t be prominent compared to the content and the team, and with respect to the ethics. The legitimacy is the key.”* It is clear that unless these three aims of media management are in balance, a sense of ‘leadership’ will be absent.

The question that emerges, is whether the competing demands that media leaders face makes acting with integrity impossible. Integrity can be defined as acting consistently on one’s values, or being ‘true to yourself’. As such it is related to authenticity. The most common understanding of ‘authenticity’ is ‘being real, genuine or true to yourself’. The competing demands that leaders face may bring one to question whether it is possible to ‘be true to yourself’. The problem with this definition is that it assumes that an individual or organization has a unique, fixed identity, and that an authentic agent would display the beliefs and traits that characterize his/ her/ its “self” in everyday behavior.

Ford and Harding (2011: 465) have argued that the idea of ‘authentic leadership’ is based on the assumption that leaders possess an ontologically fixed inner sense of self, separate from an exterior world. This view of self has to be challenged if the ethical dilemma of being responsive towards conflicting demands is to be resolved. If one looks at this from a systemic perspective, one

can also view the adaptations that leaders make as authentic responses to very complex realities. Leaders' 'authenticity' should not be doubted as a result of their continuous adaptation to the variety of roles that they are expected to play. The individual will need to figure out what the appropriate, authentic response would be by asking "Who am I now, in this relationship to the Other(s) that confront me?" This means that the self, and its grasp on what is real or true, is more of a relational "work in progress", being yourself would go hand in hand with a perpetual self-reflexivity. Linstead and Pullen (2006: 1293) echo this insight by pointing out that identity is constituted out of the relational mobility of dispersion, and that each moment of self-identification is therefore also the moment of self-multiplication and dispersal.

This does not mean that one is completely reconfigured and therefore unrecognizable in each situation, nor does entail the kind of compartmentalized role-morality that Werhane (1999) and MacIntyre (1999) would warn against. Since the various dimensions of the leadership role are lasting and coexist with one another, many aspects of the self are present in various instances. It may just be a matter of "changing gears" rather than being a completely different "vehicle" in each case. Each relationship requires a unique responsiveness. The pursuit of a single coherent vision in all aspects of the organization is replaced with an acknowledgement that organizational life may go through many iterations, which all contribute to the sense of normative congruence The

conclusion that we come to, in line with Freeman and Auster (2011) and Auster and Freeman (2013), is that authenticity should be defined not as the simplistic application of a set of core values, but rather a responsiveness to history, relationships, and context, that is shared by all those who participate in the relationship.

In addition to understanding authenticity as relational responsiveness, we need to consider how expectations around accountability could be understood. In our previous research (Painter-Morland, 2007, 2008; Deslandes and Painter-Morland, 2010), we came to the conclusion that complex organizations demand a specific form of accountability, which can deal with the absence of strict cause-and effect relationships, unpredictability, and fast-paced change. The accountability that emerges in such settings, is one which acknowledges that it is less a case of accounting *for* certain decisions, actions or assets, and instead being accountable *towards* various stakeholders, with whom relationships are built over time.

This insight is echoed by Fairhurst (2009: 1611) who argues that relational control patterns of management dominance and control-sharing emerge in a dialogical manner in high-quality leader-member exchanges. She also comments on the ‘relational-rhetorical work’ that is performed by strategists when they “put history to work”. These strategists succeed in drawing on existing forms of

knowledge, mitigate and observe moral protocols, and at the same time managing to question and query (Fairhurst, 2009: 1622). Carroll and Simpson (2012: 1284) describe a similar relational dynamic when reflecting on leadership development taking place through online interactions. Through an ongoing relational process, the social capital that is needed to build the relationships that promote cooperative work is developed (Carroll and Simpson, 2012: 1284). The ongoing practice of relational meaning-making serve reflexive purposes, and challenge participants to stand in the shoes of others (ibid, p.1288). Though relational meanings shift over time, it does not amount to a situation where 'anything goes'. In fact, the relational constraints that emerge can be quite firm.

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

7. Conclusion

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

In order for these relationships to be maintained, accountability *towards* multiple stakeholder groups is required. This requires ongoing conversations, which should be as challenging as they are reassuring. The online environment creates new spaces for these conversations, and though its speed and complexity has created many challenges within the media industries, it has also broadened the relationships within which relational accountability could emerge. Since it is a much more dense network of relationships, it may well be that the accountability that emerges as its product, could offer meaningful measures of constraint. Whether this is a much too optimistic reading of the state of affairs, future research will have to judge.

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