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# Recognised but not Acknowledged: Searching for the Bad Leader in Theory and Text

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Tuomo Takala

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to qualitatively explain different elements of bad leadership, especially elements relating to the leader her/himself. The study reported here consists of a literature review and an empirical analysis. The literature review covers the most important trends and theories, presenting scientific articles during the last 15 years. The aim of the literature review is to synthesize the core elements of the bad leader. The empirical analysis consists of three different analysis methods to one volume of *Talouselämä* (The Economic Life), a leading Finnish business magazine. Methodologically the study proceeds from content analysis via interpretative discourse analysis to critical discourse analysis. The combination and phased application of the three approaches to discourse analysis produces a novel way of exposing the layered structure of the studied phenomenon. The most important result is that bad leadership and bad leaders are recognized but not genuinely acknowledged. Bad leaders are a secondary and silenced phenomenon, used mainly as a point of comparison and for highlighting good leaders. Marginalization and silence are methods of exercising power and building the accepted impression of leaders and leadership in the society.

## Keywords

leadership, bad leader, discourse

analysis, representation, deconstruction

## Introduction

Understanding possibly destructive leader behavior is essential in the globalized and complex business life. Unethical behavior can have deteriorating effects on businesses, clients and even societies. Structural changes and economic restrictions create a fertile ground for misbehavior. Within this turbulence organizations seem to have developed a culture where ends justify the means: leaders can use any methods suitable to utilize human resources. In Finland every fifth employee was a victim of workplace bullying or mental abuse in 2005. (Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2008; Bassman & London, 1993; Sheehan, 1999; Parviainen, 2008.)

Bad leaders have consequences beyond their effect on followers<sup>1</sup>. The secondary effects of bad leadership can reflect themselves on the culture and the whole organization. The costs of abusive behavior can be high. It is therefore important to put emphasis on the relations and behavior in the essential environment of human life: the working environment. The very possibility of such consequences should be a warning signal for organizations to be aware of such leadership. (Keashly, Trott & MacLean, 1994; Tepper, 2000; Vega & Comer, 2005.)

The word "leader" has positive emotional and normative connotations. By becoming a leader a person forms a unique and moral kind of relationship to others. One essential element of this relationship is power, which has potential for ethical difficulties to develop. Even though our assumption of leaders is positive, bad leaders have always existed: personal ambition and greed have paved their way for illegalities and wrongdoings. Bad people seem to get to powerful positions but even monsters can teach us something about leading people. Science should remind us that leadership in itself is not a moral concept but that

<sup>1</sup> The terms "follower" and "subordinate" are used as synonyms.

leaders are ordinary people: trustworthy and deceitful, brave and cowardly, greedy and generous. Only by recognizing and controlling our faults and failures can we achieve something better. (Ciulla, 2011; Kellerman, 2004.)

## The aim of the study

The aim of this article is to search for and qualitatively explain the phenomenon of bad leadership. The study consists of two parts, the first of which is a literary review. The literary review aims at synthesizing relevant research on different approaches to bad leadership and at forming a list of core elements relating to the bad leader himself. The second part of the study is a three-step empirical analysis, based on one volume of *Talouselämä* (The Economic Life) which is the leading magazine for business leaders in Finland.

## Basic assumptions and research questions

Leadership can be divided into three basic elements: the leader, the followers and the contextual factors.

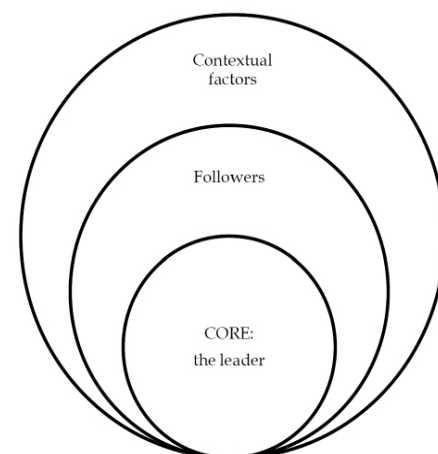


Figure 1: Layers of leadership

The basic assumption of this research is the leader as *primus motor* of leadership behavior. This assumption reminds the toxic triangle theory (Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007), with the exception that the leader is clearly considered as the centre of the process.

The research aimed at answering five research questions:

1. What explanations are given to bad leadership in theoretical literature?

2. What kind of synthesis can be formed of the factors relating to the bad leader himself?
3. Which of the factors are expressed in the media texts?
4. How is the bad leader represented in a leadership discourse?
5. From the recognition and acknowledgment point of view, what kind conclusions can be made on the basis of this representation?

The first two questions are approached and answered through the literature review while answers to the last three questions are to be found through different empirical discourse analysis methods. In addition, we try to sketch a new form of qualitative research method called the three - phase discourse analysis.

### Searching in theory: literature review

There is no clear or unambiguous definition for bad leadership. The different definitions usually share the negativity of consequences and some form of wrongdoing or abuse. Bad leadership can be categorized according to different factors, e.g. whether the abuse is physical or mental and whether it is intentional or not. Different kind of typologies can be formed on the basis of these elements. One way of categorizing is to divide the schools of research into three main groups: 1) tyranny, despotism and abusive supervision, 2) different kinds of destructive leadership styles and 3) research related to personalized charisma and pseudotransformational leadership. Other research themes contain victimization, supervisor undermining, supervisor aggression and negative mentoring experiences. Leadership failures can also be regarded as consequences of incompetence, a form of which can be a dominating personality feature. (Schilling, 2009; Tepper, 2007; Hogan & Hogan, 2001.)

For the purposes of this study, the theoretical framework of the research is based on the above three major approaches to bad leadership: the approach of position and power, the approach of lacking constructive behavior and the approach of the dark side. Figure 2 shows the theories within these approaches. The fourth approach is a combination of the three, the negative

leadership framework. In addition to these four angles, ethical leadership is considered as a magnifying glass for all leadership behavior in general. The theories and their origins are presented in the following review.

#### Position and power: tyrants and despots

Tyrannical leadership (Ashforth, 1994; 1997) and despotic leadership (Schilling, 2009) are forms of bad leadership that are based on the power difference between the leader and the follower. Tyrannical leadership means the oppressive, unpredictable and vindictive use of power and authority. The behavior of tyrants is arbitrary and aims at serving their own interests. Tyrants belittle their subordinates and criticize them in public, lack empathy and consideration for others, apply force to resolve conflicts, and use arbitrary punishments. "Petty tyranny" as a term describes this type of leadership well. (Ashforth, 1994; 1997.)

Tyrants may have a good organizational cause for their behavior. However, they usually achieve their results at the expense and not with the help of their subordinates. They use building distrust, propaganda and scapegoats as methods of leadership. This type of leadership typically appears in a supervisor-subordinate-relationship and is therefore difficult to detect. (Tepper, 2007; Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007.)

Despotic leadership is a near synonym for tyrannical leadership. Despotic leadership has been studied from the ethical point of view, bringing the altruistic vs. egoistic motives of the leader into focus. Despotic leaders do not care for others or act in socially constructive ways. They lack the inner need to do the right thing and probably have low moral standards. They are exploitative and also lack both the ability and the will for self-reflection. Despotic leadership is often related to organizational structure: a hierarchical top-down organization supports despotic leadership. (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008.)

#### Position and power: abusive supervisors and bullies

Abusive supervision is behavior perceived and experienced by the subordinate. This form of bad leadership is also typical of



Figure 2: Approaches to theoretical literature on bad leadership

the supervisor-subordinate relationship and it is characterized by the differences in power, status and resources. Abusive supervision presents itself in the form of continuous hostile behavior, which can be either verbal or nonverbal. The main elements of abusive supervision include subjectivity (perception and evaluation by the subordinate), consistency (the behavior is continuous) and intentionality (even though not always negative). The concrete forms of abusive supervision may be bullying, aggressive outbursts, belittling and name-calling. The possibility of abusive supervision can be enhanced and accelerated by the characteristics of the subordinate: appearing as a victim may lead to becoming one. (Tepper, 2000, 2007; Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Keashly et al., 1994; Starratt & Grandy, 2010.)

The leader-related reasons for abusive supervision can be psychopathological, sociocultural or a combination of the two. Abuse can be seen as a negative organizational chain or as a domino effect, as transference of the supervisor's own experience, which again is produced by the supervisor's own supervisor. Narcissistic tendencies of the leader and neglecting morality support this type of behavior. Sociocultural explanations include background factors of the leader, e.g. childhood and family models. Stress is another explanation and it can be caused by shortage of resources, by the lack of top executive support or the culture of the work society. (Bassman & London, 1993; Tepper, 2007; Wayne, Hoobler, Marinova & Johnson, 2008.)

Workplace bullying can be defined as a form of abusive supervision. The bullies are often leaders and supervisors, enabled by their status and power. In general, bullying means being the target of repetitive or continuous negative acts (oppression, threats, harassment, social exclusion) performed by others. These acts aim at humiliating, intimidating or punishing the victim. They can also take more subtle forms, e.g. giving meaningless tasks, withholding information or deliberately giving confusing and contradicting orders. Usually the victim feels incapable of defending himself. (Zapf, 1999; Zapf & Einarsen, 2001; Vega & Comer, 2005; Harvey, Buckley, Heames, Zinko, Brouer & Ferris, 2007.)

The reasons for bullying are related to the bully, the victim and the organization. The bullying leader may have a personality problem (destructive narcissism) or a hostile and envious attitude. The victim's personality (passivity, being different), competence, social skills and victimization may have an influence on the bullying. On the organizational level leadership, structures, culture, stress factors and organization of work produce elements that enable bullying. Fear is a motivating factor: in order to control one's fear one starts to bully others. The utmost category of bullies are organizational psychopaths, who are toxic leaders serving their own narcissistic needs by manipulating others to become bullies. (Zapf, 1999; Salin, 2003; Harvey et al., 2007; Boddy, 2010.)

### Destructive leaders

Destructive leadership as a concept is based on the lack of constructive activities and behavior. Destructive leadership can be negative in two dimensions, from the individual's point of view and from the organization's point of view. Destructivity is, however, primarily considered as systematic and repeated behavior, which damages or sabotages the aims and goals, tasks and resources of the organization. Destructive leaders violate the interests of their organizations by pursuing their own benefits and interests. These violations may not be intentional but due to e.g. incompetence of the leader. Explanations for destructive leader behavior include alienation, lack of family support, negative role models and general stress factors. Destructive nar-

cissism, fear, power motives and lack of self-control are personality features of destructive leaders. Forms of behavior consist of aggressive behavior but also repeated mistakes and failures. (Schilling, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2007; Harvey et al., 2007.)

Destructive leadership can be the result of three factors: the leader, the subordinates and the environment (context). This toxic triangle includes a charismatic leader with personalized power, a narcissistic character and a negative view of life. It also includes followers who are either conspirators or compliers. In addition, the environment has to provide a fertile ground, which it does if there are threats and uncertainty, control systems are missing and the cultural values are pro-destructive. (Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007).

The research on destructive leadership has developed four different destructive leadership styles: 1) tyrannical leadership<sup>2</sup>, 2) laissez-faire, 3) popular-disloyal leadership and 4) derailed leadership. Two of these, namely tyrannical and derailed leadership, are negative towards other people, while the remaining two, laissez-faire and popular-disloyal, have negative consequences from the organization's point of view. Derailed leadership is behavior detrimental to both the subordinate's interests and to the targets of the organization. The negative behavior towards subordinates can contain bullying, humiliation, manipulation, deceit or harassment. The derailed leader fails to combine his personal skills and the demands of work. Derailed leaders may have had a successful career in a task-oriented environment but when the work becomes more human-oriented, the leader's skills and the demands of leadership do not meet. Lack of communication and communicative skills, as well as of human relation skills, affect the leader's work especially in changing conditions. Derailed leaders are often ambitious lonely riders who unfortunately are unwilling or unable to learn and change their leadership style. (Einarsen et al., 2007; Parviainen, 2008; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995.)

Laissez-faire is a form of ineffective leadership, characterized by the lack of leadership and responsibility. The leader fails to fill his role and position as a leader and neglects both the interest of the organization and the subordinates. The void left by the leader creates role ambiguity and conflicts. Even though laissez-faire does not involve direct abuse or destructive behavior, the lack and weakness of leadership characteristic to laissez-faire give space for other forms of negative behavior, e.g. workplace bullying. (Einarsen et al., 2007; Aronson, 2001; Salin, 2003; Skogstad, Einarsen, Aasland & Hetland, 2007.)

Popular-disloyal leadership is positive towards the subordinates but negative towards the organization. The leader focuses on the well-being of the subordinates and neglects the aims and targets of work. The leader may also be an active actor in sabotage against the organization, not with the intention of damaging it but for the sake of the leader's preferred own vision. (Einarsen et al., 2007.)

### The possible dark side: charisma and personality

The leader's personality or defects in it (personality disorders) can be the cause of bad leadership. Personal characteristics make all the difference in being on the dark side, while ethics and motives define the line between the good and the bad. Leaders who are motivated by their inner opportunistic motives and values have a greater tendency to be destructive and use their power for personal benefit. The inability to reflect one's behavior and the unwillingness for self-evaluation, an overgrown ego and emotional inabilities create the circumstances for negative outcomes. (Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2008; Aaltio-Marjosola &

<sup>2</sup> Discussed above

Takala, 2000; Schilling, 2009; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999.)

Charisma in itself is a neutral concept but personalized charisma is clearly a negative one. Personalized charisma means abusive, self-centered behavior which serves the leader's own interests and low self-esteem. The leader feels the need to dominate and control, which leads to destructive behavior. He has a strong object belief about other people, enabling him to use others as instruments for achieving his own goals. Unethical charismatic leaders have moral norms that support these self-interests, and they use power authoritatively and manipulatively. Narcissism and fear of losing power, both originating from lacking or undeveloped self-esteem, enhance the probability of a charismatic leader to personalize the charisma. Narcissists overestimate their own characteristics and achievements, and are focused on their own well-being and need-fulfillment. The source of the inability to appreciate others as individuals can be the product of negative life history and themes. Low self-control enables the need of power to submerge in destructive decision-making. Personalized charismatic leaders can also be defined as unethical charismatic leaders, whose use of power is characterized by domination, status and prestige. (O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner & Connelly, 1995; Howell & Avolio, 1992.)

Charismatic leaders, who often appear at a crossroads or crisis situation, have strong and infallible visions. The context of change or threat creates the need for strong leadership which the charismatic leader satisfies. The power of charisma is created by the emotionally-laden relationship of the leader and the follower. The strong vision can, however, be based on solely the needs of the leader and will therefore become destructive for the organization and the people involved. In addition to being abusive, controlling and manipulative towards the followers, the management practices of a charismatic leader can contain other risks. The behavior of the leader may result in weak or poor results in the management of networks, the occurrence of insider-outsider groups and lack of responsibility. These types of behavior can result in decision-making failures, dysfunctional organizations and wasted resources. (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala, 2000; Conger, 1990; Clements & Washbush, 1999; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006.)

Charismatic leaders are skillful in communicating their visions and gathering idealizing followers. One of the main explanations for personalized charismatic and pseudotransformational leaders is the audience: uncritical, compliant and unquestioning followers offer their admiration to the leader who needs it for egoistic reasons. The blind admiration insulates the leader effectively from the environment and supports the fulfillment of the leader's own interests. If the leader has an overgrown ego, he will use his communicative skills to manipulate and create illusions of his own achievements and blame solely external factors in case of failure. In addition, the leadership style itself may be harmful: authoritarian, controlling or superficial, arrogant and even aggressive. (Offermann, 2004; Conger, 1990.)

Pseudotransformational leadership is a concept related to personalized charisma. As a term it refers to unauthentic and unethical transformational leadership. Pseudotransformational leaders are narcissistic, authoritarian and manipulative. They are after power, status and success and press agendas which are based on their own interests. They design pompous visions but avoid all responsibility. As skillful communicators and manipulators they advance their mission by motivating their followers through false promises and betrayal. The inspirational motivation (based on egoistic values) they create through communication, rhetoric and visions makes people follow the

pseudotransformational leaders. They build on the ignorance of their followers, making the contesting of the leader's decisions and solutions difficult. The authority of the leader is more important than reason. In their relationship to their followers, pseudotransformational leaders are interested in building a dependency, reminding the one between a child and a parent. The leader expects blind compliance, behaves incoherently and inconsistently, and supports his position by keeping their distance. Systems of favoritism and the enhancement of competition among followers are methods of individual appreciation. Pretence and acting are characteristics of a pseudotransformational leader: an authentic front covers the self-interested core. The actions of these leaders may not cross the line of illegality and they may consider themselves as honest. Even though the façade looks fine, this type of behavior is still unethical and as such, represents a type of bad leadership. (Aronson, 2001; Toor & Ofori, 2009; Barling, Christie & Turner, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999.)

Personality disorders are a source of poisonous organizational behavior. For example abusive supervision can be a symptom of a personality disorder, an element of which is the inability to control aggressive impulses. Narcissism in its negative form is one of the most destructive personality disorders effecting leadership. It is psychologically characterized by pomposity, arrogance, envy, self-absorption, feelings of entitlement, weak self-esteem, oversensitivity and hostility. In addition, destructive narcissism includes amorality, irrationality, inflexibility and even schizophrenic behavior. Motivated by his egoistic need for power and admiration, the leader neglects the needs of others. The lack of empathy is one focal element in narcissism: interpersonal relationships are typically abusive, exploitative and instrumental. The narcissist is incapable of reflecting and evaluating his own actions and behavior. His egocentric motivation initiates decisions and actions which may seem irrational to others. The basis of narcissism lies within the leader's weak self-esteem which needs to be compensated for through other people. Narcissists are incapable of the responsible use of authority or treating other people as individuals. Especially prone ground for narcissistic leaders are workplaces and other contexts which offer possibilities for social status and prestige. (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Samier & Atkins, 2010; Goldman, 2006; Bassman & London, 1993.)

Destructive narcissism is not the only personality disorder which may cause bad leadership although it is present as an element in various forms of the phenomenon. The leader might have a neurotic style that stigmatizes not only the behavior of the individual, but also the whole organization. These neurotic styles are rather permanent and dominating ways of behaving, and they may become dysfunctional. The neurotic styles can be classified into five types, namely suspicious, depressive, dramatic, compulsive and detached. The more centralized the organization and the more power the leader has, the more influence his neurotic style may have on the culture, strategy and structure of the organization. A less dominant type of disorder is related to the incompetence of leaders. These are lacking personality features which are hard to detect but affect the behavior of the individual. This typology includes the types of excitable, cautious, reserved, skeptical, leisurely, mischievous, bold, colorful, imaginative, diligent and dutiful leaders. The common denominators of these incompetence types are the inability to handle pressure and stress, the crumbling effect they have on trust and a certain degree of self-centeredness which may lead to action primarily motivated and guided by the leader's own needs. (Kets de Vries, 1986; Hogan & Hogan, 2001.)

### The negative leadership framework

Schilling (2009) has developed a framework which combines several of the bad leadership types described in theoretical literature. The empirically tested framework consists of eight behavioral categories, covering both destructive and ineffective leadership. The first two categories are according to Schilling the most common ones and could therefore be considered as prototypes of negative leadership. The eight categories include

1. insincere leadership
2. despotic leadership
3. exploitative leadership
4. restrictive leadership
5. failed leadership
6. avoiding leadership, active
7. avoiding leadership, passive
8. laissez-faire leadership

Insincere leadership consists of deceitful and dishonest behavior, distortion of information or withholding it. Subordinates are being treated unfairly and unequally, while behind their backs the leader concentrates on achieving his own goals and benefits. Despotic leadership manifests itself as authoritarian and inconsiderate behavior. The despotic leader is aggressive, difficult to approach and requires obedience and compliance. The third category is exploitative leadership, the focus of which is forcing the subordinate to accomplish tasks by threatening and external motivating. The restrictive leader, in turn, does not allow the subordinates space or possibilities but sets targets and restrictions, without empowering others. The ideas or demands of others are not discussed. These four first categories fill the characteristics of abusive supervision. (Schilling, 2009.)

The last four categories are forms of inefficient leadership. A failed leader focuses on daily operative work and neglects leading. Avoiding leadership actively takes the form of complying and creating alliances with the subordinates, being overly positive in feedback and rewards, and following the wishes of the subordinates. Avoiding leadership passively presents itself in avoiding responsibility and decision-making, behaving inconsistently and lacking authenticity. A laissez-faire leader does not communicate or set goals. Neither does he give feedback or motivate others but merely shows indifference to the responsibilities of leadership. (Schilling, 2009.)

The explanations of negative leadership are related to the leader's personality, interaction and communication, and to the environment. Personality-related explanations include personality features and certain defects within the personality, e.g. cynicism, stubbornness and egoism. Also the lack of knowhow and competence, too much operational work and lack of (internal) entrepreneurship attitude may influence negative leadership on the personal level. Interaction-related reasons for negative leadership are conflicts between the leader and the subordinate. Environment-related factors include the leader's own supervisor, number of subordinates as well as structures, resources, processes and cultural attributes. Personality-related and organizational factors may negatively reinforce each other, thus creating a tendency for negative leadership. (Schilling, 2009.)

### Ethics as a magnifying glass for bad leadership

Ethics can be defined as a discipline studying behavior, actions and their consequences, the distinctions and discourses of good and bad, right and wrong. We assume that leaders must follow and exemplify high moral standards and ethics every day in their talk, acts, decisions and behavior: ethics and moral are the basis for good leadership. Ethical leadership means demon-

strating normatively appropriate behavior in personal acts and interpersonal relationships. Ethical leadership behavior can be defined as organizational action in which norms of character, integrity and decency are followed. The morality of action can be evaluated on the basis of three elements: the ends, the means and the consequences. (Aronson, 2001; Toor & Ofori, 2009; Chandler, 2009; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Treviño & Brown, 2007.)

One important arena of unethical behavior is the interaction between the leader and the follower. Moral or ethical norms define behavior in human relationships. They are authoritative and thus normative: individuals feel their duty to comply with the norms or if deviated from, to justify or rationalize the deviation. Normative moral standards can be expressed as articulated duties or ideals, social rules, personal values or general principles. In leadership, ethics can be approached through three interrelated dimensions: 1) the ethics of leaders themselves (intentions and personal ethics, moral character of the leader), 2) the ethics of leadership methods and processes, and 3) the ethics of leadership acts (consequences of these acts). The practical ethic discourse concentrates on analyzing two main elements, the moral agent and the type of moral action. Moral action is evaluated on the basis of three basic factors: the aim, the means and the consequences. Also the underlying values and criteria can be evaluated from the ethical point of view. (Bassmann & London, 1993; Bird & Waters, 1987; Bird & Waters, 1989; Ciulla, 2011; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999.)

Destructive leadership behavior can be defined as harming the organizational members or aiming at short term results on the expense of long term consequences. Destructive leadership can also be called unethical leadership. Lack of ethical behavior appears in different types of bad leadership. Unethical directive leadership leads to authoritative-despotic leadership behavior and laissez-faire, where the leader is interested only in achieving his personal aims. The need for self-enhancement is related to the need for power, status, authority and achievement. The individual value structure of the leader influences the tendency to act destructively: if the leader is motivated by ethical values, he is unlikely to act according to his own interests or to a need for power or social status. In addition, the values of the organization affect the ethical activities and behavior within the working community. (Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2008; Aronson, 2001.)

One way of understanding ethics is volition and the possibility to choose: bad leaders may be considered to consciously choose an unethical way to act due to their egoistic interests. The power of the leader in a way insulates him from morality and gives justification to act on the basis of his own needs. The very position as a leader may give the impression that since the leader is in many ways privileged, he is not restricted by moral norms either. Ethical leadership requires the ability and will for self-reflection, the lack of which can be considered as a leader's incompetence. (Price, 2000; Ciulla, 2011.)

In addition to the values of the leader, organizational values and goals affect ethical behavior. If the organization aims at short-term profits, leaders will act accordingly. The example set by the top manager is the clue in building a culture, where ethical considerations are balanced with strategic and economic aims. In ethics, deeds speak louder than words or texts: written policies are only realized in practice, in acts and decisions. Leaders must walk the talk. (Andrews, 1989; Treviño, Hartman & Brown, 2000.)

### Synthesis of the elements of bad leadership

The basic assumption of this study was to divide elements of bad leadership into three groups: features of the leader, elements relating to the followers (subordinates) and factors of the leadership context. On the basis of the scientific articles forming the theoretical framework, each of these elements is synthesized<sup>3</sup> in the following chapter. My first research question - what explanations are given to bad leadership in theoretical literature - has its answer in this synthesis.

### The leader

The tyrannical and despotic leaders as well as abusive supervisors have in common the position and power difference. In abusive supervision the power is created by hierarchical position while in despotic and tyrannical leadership the power originates from arbitrariness. Leader-related reasons for these types of bad leadership include egoistic motives and narcissism, which cause indifference towards other people. The same narcissistic features are an essential element also in destructive leadership, in which also the ideology of hate and a negative life attitude have a central role.

Both abusive supervision and destructive leadership emphasize the leader's negative life history which is interpreted to influence his behavior. The abusive supervisor is considered a possible victim transferring aggression and having a learnt way of behaving badly. Destructive leadership, on the other hand, brings up alienation, lack of family support, stress and negative role models as reasons for the negative life attitude, which is typical for destructive leaders.

The connecting factor of popular-disloyal leadership and *laissez faire* is the unfulfilled leader role. The popular-disloyal leader is driven by his need to please his subordinates and to pursue his own goals at the expense of the organization. *Laissez-faire* leaders fail to take responsibility or participate. They are indifferent to everything, a feature common with failed leadership of the negative leadership typology. Another type from the same typology, derailed leadership, is focused on the ability of the leader to adapt and learn. Difficulties in personal relationships in connection with lack of will and ability to communicate derail the leader who is ambitious but used to working alone.

Leaders who are workplace bullies use their power difference to tackle their fear and envy. A bully is a narcissist without empathy and driven by his need for greatness and admiration. Arrogance and inability to appreciate others are caused by insecurity of oneself. The lack of self-control leads to bullying while under feelings of stress and frustration.

The personalized charisma and pseudotransformational leadership are both possible types of unethical leadership. Leaders with personalized charisma are power-hungry, abusive, self-interested narcissists with a deficient self-esteem. They have an authoritative leadership style and the need to control others. Their negative life stories and themes reflect themselves in the leadership while a strong personal vision, belief in the justification of that vision and good communicative skills make the personalized charismatic leader a dangerous one. The pseudotransformational leader appears to be good but acting and pretence are methods of hiding the real motives, which include domination, control, striving for success and avoiding responsibility. These motives are created by the leader's egoistic values.

Personality disorders have a profound effect on the actions of the leader. Narcissistic leaders are arrogant, pompous, envious and self-centered. The narcissism is caused by a low self-esteem

and sense of inferiority, which are compensated for by striving for superiority and by satisfying the need for power and admiration. The lack of empathy and hostility, which are typical features of the narcissist, affect his relationships to other people.

The negative leadership typology contains four destructive leadership styles, which each have their own leader-related elements. Insincere leadership has in its core deceitfulness, unfairness and pursuit of personal goals. Despotic leadership presents an authoritative, ruthless and merciless leader who is difficult to approach. The exploitative leader threatens, intimidates and uses his position at the expense of others. Restrictive leadership is realized as authoritative and restrictive behavior.

Ethics can be considered as a magnifying glass for assessing the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, in general and in certain circumstances. Ethical leadership means evaluating the aims, means and consequences of leadership behavior. All the above types of bad leadership are unethical in at least one of these evaluative dimensions, most towards other individuals and people in general while others are more harmful towards organizational goals. The unethical leader is characterized by the need for power, self-absorption and weakness of moral character. Destructive narcissism, arrogance and pompousness support egoistic motives, accompanied by lack of interpersonal skills and of taking responsibility. In its worst form unethical behavior is intentional harming of others.

### Followers and subordinates

The different types of bad leadership present the enabling or supporting role of subordinates to a varying degree. Tyrannical and despotic leadership do not mention subordinates as enablers or explanations of bad leadership. From the features of tyranny and despotism it is, however, possible to detect that followers have to comply and they cannot question or undermine the leader's authority. The same applies to followers of destructive leaders, who, in addition to compliers, can also be conspirators, active followers sharing the leader's bad values, ambition and opinions.

In abusive supervision, the subordinates are targets. The whole type of bad leadership is based on their perceptions and experiences. The characteristics of subordinates are used as an explanation for bad leadership: being or appearing weak, an outsider or otherwise different can affect becoming the target. These same subordinate-related explanations appear in workplace bullying. Both these types of bad leadership focus on features which affect victimization. In the case of workplace bullying, the subordinate can be either too incompetent or too competent for the leader to tolerate.

Personalized charismatic leaders need followers, who are loyal and who idealize the leader. They identify themselves with the leader's personal characteristics and being dependent on the leader, obediently follow his whims. Followers of pseudotransformational leaders may be ignorant and therefore blinded by the leader's vision. They may be tempted to obey and implement because of inner competition for pet positions. This is a type of relationship policy typically used by pseudo-transformational leaders and it is a way to personal benefits.

Personality disorders of the leader do not require subordinate-related elements. For this type of leaders to maintain their position, the subordinates have to, however, in some way accept the situation. In unethical leadership the self-concept and awareness of subordinates are mentioned as possible co-factors of bad leadership: the subordinates' locus of control, values, beliefs and social identities can either support or prevent the occurrence of unethical behavior.

<sup>3</sup> References to the articles are not repeated here but presented in the corresponding chapters above. Anyone using this synthesis should refer to the original sources explained in the previous chapters.

**Context: environment, situation, issue and other explanations**

The context of leadership is often used as an explanation for bad behavior and bad decisions. However, popular-disloyal or laissez-faire do not define contextual factors as explanations. Rationally the lack of control systems and acceptance of top management must be an explanatory factor also for these types of bad leadership. Even previous organizational success can be a factor which reinforces the temptation to act unethically while striving for further success.

In despotic and tyrannical leadership as well as in abusive supervision the authoritarian organization and hierarchy are structural elements supporting bad leadership. The atmosphere and culture of the organization may contain (even business related) practices that enable these leadership types to prevail. Destructive leadership, on the other hand, flourishes in environments of uncertainty and threats. It is enhanced by the lack of control systems and cultural values that support destructivity.

The emergence and prevalence of unethical leadership requires lack of organizational control. Workplace bullying is a phenomenon related to weaknesses in the organization of work and control systems. If bullying is not punished and reward systems are built on mutual competition, the contextual factors offer a possibility for bullies. Low moral norms enable bullying which can start for example in a reorganizational change phase.

Change seems to be the core contextual denominator for derailed leadership. Derailed leadership takes place within the very context of change, when the leader cannot adjust to the new situation or learn new skills. The emergence of personalized charisma is also related to changes when the context and environment become uncertain and strong visionary leaders are needed.

**The core: leader-related factor**

Concentrating on the leader as the central element in negative leadership outcomes may lead to a situation where important contextual factors, affecting the leadership process, are neglected. This kind of analysis may hinder the "big picture" of bad leadership. (Thoroughgood, Hunter & Sawyer, 2011.) Acknowledging this criticism I, however, consider the leader as "primus motor" of leadership and want to summarize the leader-related explanations of different types of bad leadership. The aim of this study is to find the bad leader behind different kinds of explanatory factors. The second research question - what kind of synthesis can be formed of the explanatory factors relating to the bad leader himself - is answered next.

On the basis of theoretical information presented above, bad leadership consists of the following (partly overlapping) elements:

- narcissism
- egoistic motives: own benefit and interests
- ideology of hate, envy and fear
- weak / lacking self-esteem
- overgrown need for power and status
- lack of self-control, incl. control of emotions
- lack of will and/or ability to evaluate oneself
- unauthenticity / pseudo
- arrogance and overestimation of own capabilities
- low moral
- insincerity
- lack of empathy and ability to appreciate others

The above factors are on the basis of theoretical literature the elements that have to be avoided or eliminated in order to prevent bad leadership. The recognition of these elements in theory

is, however, a simpler task than acknowledging them in reality, in the actions and behaviors of real-life leaders. The search for bad leaders is therefore continued through the empirical part of this research, described in the following sections.

**Following the empirical trail: discourse analysis****Sample**

The empirical part of this research consists of three types of discourse analysis, each answering one of the last three research questions. The material studied and analyzed is one volume (2010) of *Talouselämä*, a leading Finnish business magazine. The volume consists of 42 issues (two issues missing from the complete volume). One of the issues is a special written by business students (issue 28). *Talouselämä* is the only weekly business magazine in Finland and the largest one in the Nordic countries. The typical reader of *Talouselämä* is a well-educated decision-maker and leader. The distribution of *Talouselämä* is about 79,000 issues and estimate of leaders in the 178,000 readers is 84 %. ([www.talouselama.fi](http://www.talouselama.fi))

Media texts are trails of communication processes and by following them, we can study the underlying communicative and signification processes. Media texts take a stand, accentuate some things and points of view at the expense of others. The business media produces meanings to issues and phenomena related to leadership. The media uses power and makes choices (conscious or unconscious), which affect the readers' ideas about the society and leadership. (Väliaverronen, 1999; Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2011.)

The readership of *Talouselämä* suggests that signification processes in this magazine have a larger meaning for the Finnish working life. Thus the way leadership and leaders are presented in this magazine affect the opinions and ideas of the powerful decision-makers. The magazine supposedly reflects and represents the readership's prevailing view of leadership and leaders. This view is constructed and reconstructed through the texts of the magazine.

The volume was scanned for texts related to leadership. The key words used for sampling were "leader" or its synonyms (e.g. boss) or "leadership" in headings and texts. In addition, texts with a probability (on the basis of the subject) of containing comments on leaders and leadership were included in the sample. The final sample consisted of 60 texts.

**Content analysis**

Content analysis is a method used for organizing the studied material into a coherent and clear form, without losing the information within. Methods of content analysis include thematic and type classifications. The aim of the simplification is to increase the informational value of the material by concentrating it into a conclusion-enabling form. The content analysis can be material-based, theory-based or theory-bound. In theory-bound content analysis, the theoretical framework forms the basis for the analysis of the material. (Puusa, 2011.)

The thematic classification of the sample material included dividing the texts into three themes, which are the three elements of bad leadership: the leader, the follower and the context. It was, however, clear from the beginning that the elements are interrelated (as is the case in many of the theories) and that all these three elements appear in the same texts.

In addition to thematic classification, the texts were typified according to genre. The sample consisted of different genres (articles, portraits, news, columns, causeries and letter to the editor). Genre affects the way that we use and interpret language



as well as the way we expect language to be used. Each genre has different goals, tasks and norms. The viewpoint and approach of the author affects the way that leadership is presented and described. Genres are also hierarchical instruments, setting an order to and between media texts. (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009; Väliaverronen, 1999.)

After the classifications, the first phase of the actual analysis consisted of a theory-bound content analysis of the sample texts. The analysis is described in the following sections, accompanied by text samples from *Talouselämä* translated into English.

#### *Leader-related themes*

According to scientific literature, narcissism may be an essential characteristic of a bad leader. Within the texts narcissism is mentioned only a few times:

A female leader doesn't make a fuss about herself ... A narcissistic leader aims at power with all means possible, puts the blame for his failures on others and can't stand criticism. (Issue 11)

Old moral codes have loosened. There is a prevailing bubble that a narcissist would make it. Narcissistic features have become normal and therefore their negative effects on the work society are not immediately noticed. (Issue 25)

Egoistic motives, focusing on own interests and goals, are another typical feature of the bad leader. Yet these features are hardly discussed in the texts.

Females listen to their subordinates, don't steal ideas and treat the subordinates as individuals. (Issue 11)

Because leaders have human characteristics, the answer is clear. ... The supervisor favors his own recruits. ... it is harder to admit that you failed than that your predecessor did. (Issue 25)

An ideology of hate, envy and fear are possible elements of bad leadership. Fear is mentioned only once, envy and hate are missing completely.

Ollila's fear of becoming a laughing-stock is incomprehensibly strong. (Issue 35)

Weak or lacking self-esteem is presented as a part of being Finnish or as an antonym to good leadership:

The good weak self-esteem: The good side of Finns is based on the weak self-esteem. We are not high and mighty, and it is easy for us to adapt... (Issue 40)

Leaders who know themselves well are able to face feedback and have no need to foreground themselves. (Issue 9)

Using features of bad leadership to highlight good leaders is apparent also when discussing the need for power and status.

Don't get blinded by power. You don't have to control or decide everything yourself. (Issue 3)

Not everybody wants power at all costs. Many don't want power at any cost. Soon only psychopaths want to be leaders. (Issue 2)

According to the texts, lack of self control is a rare battle already won.

Realizing one's own speed is an important perception. I have to control it. I hang on to the chair frame and listen if the other person is slower... (Issue 25)

The ability or will to reflect or evaluate one's behavior is mentioned several times. This is not, however, done in public.

Originally the book was intended to describe failures of leaders but it didn't work out. The collection of material for the book proved impossible. "Leaders make mistakes but do not admit them in public". (Issue 26)

... he has to be able to critically evaluate his own work and to tolerate criticism as well as diversity. (Issue 41)

Ungenuineness or pseudo are recognized as features of bad leadership. Pretence, copying leadership styles and smooth talking are issues discussed.

Leadership is related with strong charisma. That means above all the ability to be oneself ... There are also ingratiating male leaders in the world. Watching yourself is fine when you want to improve your results. But changing your appearance too much easily takes your credibility. (Issue 11)

Don't mimic others. Find your own leadership style and practices to suit it. (Issue 3)

Arrogance and overestimating one's own skills are mentioned in the text a few times, moral and ethics in turn only once.

A common mistake of the leader is not to give fast enough up the things that made him successful. (Issue 3)

Many men have fallen into the myth of leading great things and underestimate taking care of details. (Issue 11)

People who want power at all costs, should be kept apart from power, because their moral is unavoidably low.... The need for power and prosperity usually leads to immorality. (Issue 3)

Insincerity is typically mentioned only in news stories. News form a special genre also because in them the person is clearly identified.

First a Ferrari, then to court. Who remembers the Rytsölä brothers? ... In summer 2008 the district court of Helsinki found Jaakko Rytsölä guilty of grave dishonesty.. (Issue 31)

Lack of empathy and of respect for others is another recognized feature of bad leaders. For example the special issue discussed this feature.

THE BULLY. This type has his own favorites. With small things he manages to discriminate others and give the impression that their opinions don't matter. (Issue 28)

In addition to the above theory-bound analysis, other potential features of bad leadership are presented in the texts. Unfortunately one of these features is gender.

An excellent leader has on her way to a top position passed through a very dense sieve. For women this means learning the rules of men. (Issue 11)

Sanoma is one of the few Finnish listed companies where women have been considered good enough for leadership positions. (Issue 3)

Bad leadership is also described as a possible result of lack of competence, capabilities or charisma.

It is not enough to want to develop yourself as a leader. One has to have the ability and the courage to develop ... The leader can't be too colorless because a grey financial mouse is not able to lead ... the leader has to have sensitivity and social intelligence. (Issue 41)

If you have to compete against Apple's Steve Jobs, maybe the right choice would have been Finland's nearest equivalent to Jobs, the technology-enthusiast Vanjoki with inspiring presentation skills? But no. The position was taken by a colorless lawyer and financial officer. (Issue 35)

#### *Subordinate-related explanations*

According to research described in the scientific articles, follower actions, personalities and values can affect the occurrence of bad leadership. These follower-related reasons are presented also in the analyzed texts.

All subordinates aren't good either. People don't always understand that you have to work while at work or that supervisor instruction isn't bullying. (Issue 28)

Now that the line between work and leisure is more blurred, emotions are brought to the workplace. Then people are extremely sensitive to the boss for not giving praise. Gossip and badmouthing are allowed. What kind of a supervisor can handle such work communities. No one. (Issue 25)

Whether you are incompetent, lazy or simply not suitable for the job, dismissing you is practically impossible. ... An alcoholic, a chronic late arrival or a rude customer servant can be dismissed by using written warnings but what if the employee is inefficient or spoils the atmosphere with his negativity? (Issue 28)

#### *Context-related explanations*

In the analyzed texts, bad leadership is frequently explained and justified by demands of efficiency, economics and productivity.

The 1.5 year financial crisis has put the human resources managers to a tough spot. How is one to lead and manage personnel at times like this? Often you have to push noble aims to the background and take up hard tools. (Issue 3)

The last recession left the companies in a nasty mess. When the management has for a couple of years concentrated on saving the profits, strategic future-oriented development has been neglected. (Issue 36).

If failures do happen, the leaders aren't usually named or personified. In these texts the name of the company is mentioned but not the people running it. Often this happens in connection with economic and production-related explanations.

The construction company Lemminkäinen ... can get anything going right now. The infrastructure construction business had a good season domestically but it is not enough to compensate for the weak profits of the start of the year, caused by the hard winter. (Issue 35)

The structure and size of the organization are also explanations used in the texts.

The CEO admits that it is hard to get the 27,000 people at Stora Enso to listen, to understand, to challenge and to act. A superman fast enough to make all that hasn't even been born. (Issue 18)

During the 1990's recession the organizations were planed so thin that supervisors are crushed by the pressures of everyday work. (Issue 27)

Other context-related explanations include upbringing, schooling and competence that are seen as reasons for leadership behavior. Also cultural factors are described as reasons.

The average supervisor who got his training in the 1980's or 1990's didn't get very much knowhow for leading people. You can't get more out of people by extending their working hours. (Issue 40)

Finnish schools don't teach you how to argue. It is a bloody important skill because it increases the possibilities of reaching a good consensus. ... The school system doesn't prepare you for living with uncertainty and utilizing all career possibilities in life. It does not motivate you to enter your own inconvenience zones. (Issue 27)

Media and publicity get their share of explaining bad leadership.

Olli-Pekka Kallasvuo was sucked by the whirlpool of the Nokia stream. The CEO fought a short fight but the fast spin of publicity pushed him under quickly. The chair Jorma Ollila had no choice. In his dismissal decision Ollila did what he had to do. (Issue 35)

An element typical for this material is the Finnish culture with its institutions.

Finnish leadership can be considered a kind of marathon. The leader runs ahead of others who try to keep up with him. (Issue 22)

One of the critical factors for the future of leadership is to find a gain the authentic ways of people to work as members of their communities ... we don't need powerpoint bunnies blabbering in American English or other foreign miracles. It is enough to visit the Seven Brothers of Aleksis Kivi at Impivaara<sup>4</sup>. ... Maybe we need it even more than the well-advertised Winter War<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Aleksis Kivi is the national author of Finland. His most important book is called the Seven Brothers. Impivaara is a place where the brothers found a will and spirit to work together to reach their goals, building a house and home in the wilderness.

<sup>5</sup> Finland participated in the Second World War against the Soviet Union. The war consisted of two separate periods, the first part of which is called the Winter War. This part of the war was won by the Finns and

spirit of recent economic speeches. (Issue 32)

### *Conclusion to the content analysis*

Content analysis was used in this study to organize and simplify the textual material. The aim of the content analysis was to answer the third research question: which of the factors of bad leadership appear in the texts. On the basis of the analysis it is clear that all layers of bad leadership – the leader, subordinates and context – are found in the material. The layers and elements interact in the material as they did in the theoretical literature. Features relating to the bad leader himself are, however, mentioned only rarely. Since the aim of this research is to find the core, the bad leader, and very little seems to be said about him directly, the analysis is continued in the following sections by using interpretive discourse analysis.

### *The second phase of empirical search: interpretive discourse analysis*

By using language we don't just describe the world but signify, arrange, rearrange and change social reality. The targets of speech and text are signified or constructed. Language is a socially shared system of meanings in which things get their importance and signification in relation to each other. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen, 1993.)

Although there is no general definition of discourse, it can be described as a textual entity and part of socio-cultural practices, an element in building social reality. Interpretive discourse analysis is a method focusing on how and what kind of social reality is actualized in the discourse: the way something is said produces the target of the speech. Interpretive discourse analysis sets out to find general discourses that produce and maintain collective meanings and interpretations. Leadership is considered a complex and socially produced phenomenon, and language has an important role in constructing it. The aim of discourse analysis can for example be to understand, how the phenomenon of good leadership is produced and what kind of stereotypes are connected with it. Language produces action and signification processes of leadership are therefore not meaningless. (Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2011; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000.)

Discourses are produced, reproduced and changed in different social practices. Texts always exist and appear within a context, a specific time and place that affect the interpretation. In discourse analysis of media texts, the context can be the societal or socio-cultural situation, covering the cultural, historical and social environment and practices surrounding the use of language. Intertextuality is a term referring to the relation of the text to previous, prevailing and future language usage. Intertextuality can also refer to polyphony of voices within the texts, often appearing in the form of quotations and references. Giving somebody a voice or denying it is one way of considering power and agency of language use. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen, 1993; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009.)

### *The interpretive discourse analysis: how is the bad leader represented*

In this study, the volume of Talouselämä is defined as one discourse of leadership and bad leadership. The aim of the following sections is to answer the fourth research question: how is the bad leader represented in the discourse.

On the basis of the texts, the general impression is that bad leaders don't really exist. Bad leaders, failures or lacking of leadership are hardly discussed and if so, the text rather implies than describes bad leadership. The bad leader is not personified but camouflaged in the contextual factors. The "lack of bad leaders"

is therefore a source of many heroic stories.

is not a unique feature of this material:

... interviewed business leaders and wrote a book "What I would do differently – wisdom after the events". ... Originally the book was supposed to tell about failures and mistakes of leaders but it didn't work out. The collection of material proved impossible. "Leaders make mistakes but do not admit them in public." (Issue 26)

On the few occasions that features of bad leaders are mentioned in the discourse, the bad leader is described as narcissistic, unauthentic, power-greedy, immoral and even psychopathic. These features are, however, represented using expressions<sup>6</sup> that diminish their meaning. Laughing at narcissism and naming a sentenced person as the writer about morality crumble the foundation of the seriousness that bad leadership should be considered with.

"I have to say that I have met less *narcissistic* female leaders that male ones. But this can be due to female leaders being a minority as a whole", Sinikka Vanhala says and *laughs*. (Issue 11)

*Doctor of law Kari Uoti, who was sentenced to prison, is a busy blogger ...*"People who don't want power, because they have other important things in their lives, are just the ones who should be given power, who should make decisions about common things, because their value structure is healthy. People who want power at any cost should be kept away from power, because their *moral* is unavoidably low compared with the former lot."... Wanting power and prosperity usually leads to immoralities."(Issue 3)

Basically the bad leader and features relating to bad leadership are used to highlight the good, even excellent leader. The features are so extreme that the bad leader becomes nearly abstract, seizes to exist. He represents Otherness, the unspoken and voiceless, yet somehow present.

He is not stained, cynical, skeptical, sarcastic, rude, arrogant, unpleasant, strict or hated. Instead, he is correct, genuinely polite,..., civilized, inherently positive, fluent, fair, very human and warm, extremely intelligent, respected for his professional skills, well-meaning and balanced. He is a man with a very firm heart. (Issue 19)

One element of the discourse is to compare men and women as leaders, especially in articles and portrait stories. This unavoidably brings up the question of gender. The choice of words leads to the conclusion that a good leader is usually male, which leads to an interpretation that femininity is being considered a bad leadership feature.

*Help, a woman at the wheel!*(heading)... Myths related to female managers are dangerous but some of them are true. Talouselämä reveals which ones are. (Issue 11)

Paananen thinks that upbringing creates bigger social pressures *for men* to succeed *whereas a girl* is brought up to say no to temptations. This may present itself in the adulthood in the reluctance of women to take unreasonable risks. (Issue 11)

An excellent leader has on her way to a top position passed through a very dense sieve. *For women* this means *learning the rules of men*. (Issue 11)

<sup>6</sup> Highlights added by the authors.

One of the representations of a bad leader is a bad soldier. The metaphors and intertextual references are typical for Finnish leadership texts and literature. Especially the book “the Unknown Soldier”<sup>7</sup> has archetypes of leaders: Koskela and Lammio. Koskela is a respected, humane leader while Lammio represents a bad, despotic supervisor. The military service and especially ROTC are elements of leadership and features supporting leadership. Usually also these leaders are often men.<sup>8</sup>

Historically it is typical for Finns to admire the Koskela-type leadership of the Unknown Soldier, a down-to-earth way of staying with the men in the frontline. (Issue 36)

It doesn't help if the ROTC trains young people to be *koskelas* – leaders motivating and listening to their subordinates – if they then have to take their influences from *lammios*, inflexible authoritarians... Most of Finnish business leaders have been to the ROTC and so it should be, said Björn Wahroos who also has a ROTC training. Reserve officers run Finland. ... Research by business magazine *Presso* in 2005 showed that seven out of ten CEO's in listed companies are reserve officers. (Issue 28)

Bad leaders and bad leadership is implicitly revealed in the discourse in the form of instructions relating to the behavior, values, personality or activities of the leader. The instructions can be negative, normative or in passive form. One of the genres is thematic articles where these instructions have a central role. It is however possible to interpret that there is somewhere a hidden reader in need of such instructions: the bad leader.

Don't get blinded by power. You don't have to control or decide everything yourself. Don't mimic others. Find your own leadership style and practices to suit it. (Issue 3)

The leader can't grumble or question the meaningfulness of operations. The leader has to support the system even if he didn't believe in it. The leader has to be loyal and solidary upwards, downwards, left and right. One has to be always available. (Issue 2)

The effect of genre is rather small in this discourse. All genres of the discourse take part in the thin description of bad leadership that this discourse contains. The strongest descriptions of good leaders are presented in portraits and thematic articles while the mildest and less commentary descriptions appear in editorials. They all have in common the very same feature of implicitness: the bad leaders aren't actively or explicitly discussed.

#### *Conclusion to interpretive discourse analysis*

The aim of the interpretive discourse analysis was to describe how the way that bad leaders are represented in the texts. This was the fourth research question. In addition, the interpretive analysis reveals some signification processes related to good and bad leaders.

On the basis of the analysis we can conclude that the bad leader is hidden and has the position of the Other, the opposite of the good leader who is explicit and visible. The discourse of the good leader is clearly dominating while the features of the bad leader are so extreme that he becomes abstract. The bad

7 A novel by Väinö Linna in 1954, describing the second part of Finland's participation in WW II against the Soviet Union.  
8 A voluntary military service and after that the ROTC have been accessible for women in Finland only after 1995.

leader is a tool for highlighting the good one and when companies fail, the leader in person disappears behind context-related explanations. Even though the bad leader is not explicit in the discourse, the various instructions given imply that he exists. The bad leader is a marginalized phenomenon and represents otherness. Therefore it is necessary to find the bad leader and give him a voice. This will be realized in the following section by a critical discourse analysis and deconstruction of the dominating Good Leader Discourse.

#### *Critical discourse analysis: deconstruction of the Good Leader*

In critical approaches to discourse analysis, the representations produced by language usage are considered as supporting and serving the interests of their users. The main focus is on power: power relations within the society have an important influence on the choice of the dominating significations of reality. These significations or cultural ideologies are commonly accepted ideas that are taken for granted but they support prevailing power relations. The ideas formed on the basis of discourse have an essential role in the forming of this taken-for-grantedness: even the news cannot be considered objective transfer of information. The dominating discourse defines how something is perceived and discussed and also the meanings connected to it. The discourse builds representations of its topics, by revealing and hiding, highlighting and shadowing people and phenomena. In addition to the concrete and visible dimension the discourse has an abstract and ideological dimension: the discourse produces identities and social relationships. Through critical discourse analysis it is possible to question for example different stereotypes relating to leadership and leader behavior. (Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2011; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009.)

#### *The dominating discourse of the Good Leader*

The good leader is superhuman, described by such overpositive terms that hardly can appear in the same person. Even though language is not considered as a reflection of reality, the discourse constructs and reproduces a picturesque impression of the leader as a superior human being.

What kind of a man is this Lauri Lyly? In short: he seems to be an extremely nice man. People who know him have no bad things to say. Easy to approach, pleasant, determined, the colleagues say. Positive, vital, happy ... extremely patient. “He won't get angry about practically anything ... speaks softly, roundly, with a rather silent voice. (Issue 15)

The descriptions of top leaders in international studies are rather similar. These leaders are modest people, down-to-earth but they have a will of iron as professionals. They are efficient, considerate, developing and improving. It is not enough to have the will to develop as a leader. One has to have the ability and the courage to develop. The leader has to lead, he can't any longer be the best expert. (Issue 41)

The good leader is hard-working, shows a good example and doesn't save his own efforts.

Lyly isn't the best example for balancing work and leisure. He comes often first in at seven o'clock to turn the lights on... The work day doesn't end before five, often nine in the evening, until the lights are turned off. (Issue 15)<sup>9</sup>

9 In Finland the office hours are usually between 8 am – 4 pm or 9 am – 5 pm.

She has got hold of things very fast. "Easy to approach. Very hard-working. Enthusiastic", the subordinates say. After asking only half a sentence of criticism: "Maybe Piitu is a bit too enthusiastic. She doesn't consider herself at all, sending emails at midnight" (Issue 3)

The good leader is a military man, a good fighter. He is the forward in front of his team or troops. He is number one, the power user and aggressive when needed. The leadership's shared conventions – soldier, sports and ice-hockey – are used to strengthen the image.

From the Finnish word "johtaja" (leader) one can easily conclude that the leader leads and is not second. Finnish leadership can be considered a sort of a marathon: the leader runs ahead of the others who try to keep up with him. (Issue 22)

In the military organization the superior officer has to be obeyed. This is something envied by every supervisor. (Issue 24)

It is better to defend yourself than to step aside. Fight for your position, defend your way of operating and justify your vision. (Issue 26)

The good leader is exceptional in his performance, whether related to education, sports, social or other types of performance. The good leader is faster and more efficient, knows better, and is able to control himself as well as others. The good leader is competitive, disciplined and not afraid to enter any zones of inconvenience.

What papers does Kivinen read<sup>10</sup>? The Financial Times. His favorite, however, is the Economist. The social contacts? He has plenty. He has over 2300 telephone numbers in his two mobiles. In the Facebook he has a couple of hundreds of friends... Lauri Kivinen is a citizen of the world. ... Orienteering in the wild is of course the best sport for a leader because it requires fast decision-making in a constantly changing environment. In the last years Kivinen has run one street marathon per year ... The CEO's language skills have been given a lot of praise: perfect German and four other foreign languages. (Issue 19)

The sea is already frozen. Arja Talma swims around in the whole in the ice. It is getting freezing on the pier. "I normally take 60-80 strokes", says Talma in the water. (Issue 42)

The good leader has charismatic, even divine features. On the other hand, a certain kind of humbleness and modesty are features of the good leader.

When Kivinen speaks with his velvety voice, the listeners fall into a trance, which is a kind of defenseless hibernation. "He smears his listeners with the oil of vagueness"(Issue 19)

The work of a CEO is a profession based on experience and requiring specialist skills. The abilities of the CEO are based on proof and evidence. The reputation of the CEO and the brick layer are build basically the same way: the results speak for themselves. (Issue 35)

"The best and most successful business leaders that I have come

to know are completely ordinary people" (Issue 9)

In addition, the good leader is often a man. He is competent, demanding, experienced, participating, authentic, loyal and trustworthy. He knows himself well, has good communicative skills and is prepared to take risks. The leadership position is compared to a service providing profession.

"The women who have made to the very top have adopted the male models and leadership culture"... "Women emphasize cooperation and teams in everything. Endlessly soft methods aren't good, they may at their worst be manipulation."(Issue 43)

If the supervisor is authentic and can honestly communicate his goals, he will get the appreciation of his subordinates. "You listen to a person whom you appreciate", says Kuusela. (Issue 43)

Paananen thinks that upbringing creates bigger social pressures for men to succeed whereas a girl is brought up to say no to temptations. This may present itself in the adulthood in the reluctance of women to take unreasonable risks. (Issue 11)

### *Deconstruction of the Good Leader*

The above described good leader is a representation, produced by media texts, of leadership and leaders in the Finnish society. Due to intertextuality and voices of both interviewees and journalists, it is impossible to say whose voice it is that we are hearing. Regardless of this, however, the discourse signifies our understanding of leaders and leadership. In the context of its readership – Finnish business leaders – the representation gains importance in maintaining and reconstructing the idea and conception of the leader as inherently good. The good leader gets to speak, the bad leader is silenced.

Certain discourses can marginalize important "voices" or problems behind them. It is therefore important to make a difference between "knowing" and the "truth" constructed by media. Especially interesting are the taken-for-granted discourses with a hegemonic position. Deconstruction is a method used e.g. in critical feminist research when studying the dominance of masculinity. The basic idea of deconstruction is that the text "tells as much about the topic as it doesn't tell". The silencing in the discourse can be seen as ideological and deconstruction makes the Other visible. Deconstruction can be carried out by picking the descriptive words of the text and finding their antonyms, the constructing another discourse. (Breit, 2010; Ahl, 2008; Jokinen & Juhila, 1993.)

Although deconstruction has been criticized as imaginative speculation, I will use the method in the final stage of the discourse analysis. At the beginning of the study my presupposition was that bad leaders will not be discussed in the media text material, which has proven to be correct. The implicit existence of the bad leader behind the dominating Good Leader is too tempting not to be revealed further. The following table is a shortened version of the original antonym list of the study. It gives, however, a view of what the deconstruction is about. Some of the nuances of the language are naturally lost in translation and the structural differences of Finnish and English have some affect on the expressions.

<sup>10</sup> The average Finnish leader does probably not read English newspapers very fluently.

Descriptive expressions of the good leader	Antonyms / opposites
able, potent	unable, impotent
authentic, genuine	unauthentic, unguanine
balanced	unbalanced
brave	coward, afraid
charismatic	ordinary, uncharismatic
competent	incompetent
consistent	inconsistent
determined	undetermined, vague
easy to approach	difficult to approach
efficient	inefficient
energetic	tired, wary
enthusiastic	discouraged
exemplary	can't be used as an example
experienced	inexperienced
fair	unfair
flexible	inflexible, rigid
has a sense of humour	doesn't have a sense of humour
honest	dishonest
humble	proud
in the frontline	protected, safe
just	unjust
loyal	disloyal
modest	arrogant
pleasant	unpleasant
polite	impolite
positive	negative
reliable	unreliable
sensitive	insensitive, harsh
socially intelligent	socially unintelligent, socially clumsy
stout	loose
strong	weak
takes risks	avoids risks
trustworthy	untrustworthy
warm	cold
well-meaning	malevolent

Table 1: Characteristics of a good leader and their opposites.

#### *The bad leader produced by the deconstruction*

The deconstruction reveals several bad leaders, four of whom are presented next. The descriptions are constructed by arbitrarily picking antonyms and opposites from the list and building them into sentences.

The first bad leader is malevolent and negative by nature. He is arrogant, untrustworthy, cold and disloyal. He is easily irritated and can't stand pressure. He is quarrelsome, unbalanced and proud. He wants to boast, show off his intelligence and be in the limelight. He doesn't communicate and considers himself above others. He has a loud and rough way of speaking. He can't take criticism or admit that he doesn't know something.

The second bad leader doesn't make decisions or lead. He is a loner who withdraws to the background and is away. He

is timid and doesn't use power. As a leader he is inefficient, inconsistent and ineffective. As a person he is dull and colorless, depressed and discouraged. He is not interested in the business or the products. He is weak-willed and indecisive, can't give feedback and avoids risks. He surrenders without defending himself, shows weakness and loiters. He can't make demands or get results.

The third bad leader is dishonest and unfair. He can't stand difference and is aggressive. He doesn't justify his decisions and is inauthentic and full of pretence. He doesn't consider the needs of others, listen to them or let them talk. He is even too quick in his moves, doesn't think and wants fast results and decisions. He is without principles, immoral and his image is stained. He can be considered spineless. He doesn't really want to do anything inconvenient. He doesn't evaluate himself or his own work, nor does he learn from his mistakes. He can't be taken as an example.

The fourth bad leader is incompetent and lacks knowhow. He is incorrect, uncivilized and socially clumsy. He has no presentation or professional skills. He is a lazy amateur and people don't respect him. He is stupid, ordinary and inexperienced. He can't read people or situations, neither is he able to combine points of view. He is unrealistic and doesn't even know himself. He can't see ahead, develop or improve his performance.

The first and third of these constructed bad leaders contain features of tyrannical leadership (Ashforth, 1997), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), destructive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007) and restrictive leadership (Schilling, 2009). The same constructions also have narcissistic features (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) and neurotic styles (Kets de Vries, 1986).

The second bad leader reveals elements of failed leadership (Schilling, 2009), laissez-faire (Einarsen et al., 2007) and passive avoiding leadership (Schilling, 2009). The third leader represents a workplace bully (Zapf, 1999) and an unethical leader (Treviño et al., 2000). The essential element of the fourth bad leader is a general lack of competences and leadership skills.

Without doubt these constructed bad leaders are imaginary and present extreme types of behavior. They however show that the bad leaders – as described in the scientific articles – are implicitly present in the leadership discourse. The bad leader is a silenced and marginalized phenomenon but the deconstruction gives him a voice.

#### *Conclusion to the critical discourse analysis*

The critical approach was used in this research to continue analysis after the interpretive approach and to find the hidden elements behind the dominating Good Leader discourse. The analysis aimed at answering the fifth and last research question: from the recognition and acknowledgment point of view, what kind of critical interpretations can be made on the basis of the representation of the bad leader?

The bad leaders produced by the deconstruction match the types of bad leaders presented in scientific articles. It is important to realize that they only become visible and audible through the deconstruction. Even though the features and types of bad leadership are recognized in the discourse, they are not acknowledged or admitted. A bad leader is not a part of the reality that the discourse wants to produce, maintain or reproduce. The Good Leader discourse reinforces and reproduces superhuman, military, masculine and in many ways unachievable ideals. The dominance of the Good Leader discourse leads inevitably to the silencing of bad leadership, which should be an issue and an important topic in developing leadership.

## Conclusions and limitations of the study

This study has two major aims: 1) to produce a synthesis of scientific articles on bad leadership and 2) on the basis of this synthesis, to describe and explain the representation of bad leaders in one leadership discourse. The focus of the study is in recognizing and acknowledging the bad leader. In addition, we wanted to sketch a new three phase- model of discourse analysis. The research consists of two parts: a literary analysis (forming the basis for the empirical part) and a three-step discourse analysis.

The presupposition of the study is the role of the leader as *primus motor* and core of leadership. The other elements or layers of leadership are the subordinates and the context. The study describes the primary elements of the bad leader as narcissism, egoistic motives, ideology of hate, fear, envy, weak self-esteem, overgrown need for power, inability of self-control and self-evaluation, arrogance, inauthenticity, low morale and lack of empathy. Subordinate-related and context-related factors of bad leadership are also studied.

The discourse analyses reveal the dominating discourse of the Good Leader created in the media. Bad leaders are nearly missing from the studied leadership discourse and discussed mainly for highlighting the excellence of leaders. Implicitly the discourse, however, describes the bad leaders as well. The implicit is made explicit in the study through deconstruction as a method of critical discourse analysis. The bad leaders hidden and silenced in the discourse match the types of bad leadership described in the literature review.

This study combines three different approaches to discourse analysis in a creative and unprejudiced way. The three-phase analysis reminds an unfolding or peeling process required to reveal the inner hidden core of the media text discourse. The progressing method of analysis was a result produced by the discourse itself: peeling off the surface level revealed an inside that had to be interpreted and even disintegrated in order to be understood. The methods of analysis reinforced each other, accumulating in the finding of the bad leader. The combination,

even if criticizable by proponents of the different approaches to discourse analysis for its candidness, was successful in this study.

The leader *is* the heart of leadership. Every leader is and should be responsible for his behavior. Explanations and reasons related to the subordinates or the context are of course valid but still, acting on the basis of them is up to the leader. We need not only to recognize bad leaders but also acknowledge their existence. Careers are being extended and the role of work is getting even more important for people. Everybody has the right to a good supervisor and a sound leader. We also need to understand the power of text: discourses created and maintained in public have a great influence in our understanding of reality.

There are naturally *limitations* to this study. The theoretical framework built through the literature review does not include all approaches to bad leadership. Another limitation is that the framework is built on the basis of scientific articles only. The result of the synthesis is however extensive enough for the purposes of this study. In addition, the classification of the theoretical approaches into four categories is artificial since they overlap. The classification is only intended to serve the purpose of organizing a large and complex field of science in this particular research. It is an extended version of Schilling's (2009) typology, which gives it basic credibility.

Concentrating on the leader as the heart of bad leadership is against the principles of many researchers in the field and may thus be considered odd. The presupposition of this study was, however, that without a leader, no leadership activity or behavior would take place. By resolving the primary problems relating to a bad leader it becomes possible to have an improving effect on leadership.

The final limitation is related to the empirical material and analysis. The generalization of the results on the basis of one volume of one magazine would be a mistake. A media text is only one of the forums where leadership discourse is produced, maintained and reproduced. The methods of analysis and especially the deconstruction phase can also be criticized for their reliability.

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