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# **Leadership and Leadership Communication in a Matrix Structured Organization**

Some Critical Factors

Doctoral thesis  
for the degree of doctor rerum politicarum

Trondheim, 2005

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Department of Education



**NTNU**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a case study conducted within a Norwegian, middle sized, matrix structured organization. The study was mainly initiated by an earlier study, a communication audit, conducted in the same organization. The results from that study concluded that for the organization in question, the main challenges in terms of internal communication flow were related to the choice of the organization structure that this organization has chosen. Thus the management of the organization wanted a more thorough investigation of the effectiveness of the organization structure in terms of communication and leadership, to be conducted.

In order to meet the request from the management in the best way possible, a qualitative approach was chosen. The data gathering has been through semi-structured interviews and direct-observations. The intent of this methodological approach has been to get an understanding of what the leaders and employees of the present organization perceived to be important in relation to a well-functioning matrix structured organization in terms of communication and leadership.

The main findings were that the truly effective matrix organization constitutes first of all of socially skilled leaders on *all* levels who are effective persuaders, who are willing to respect the formal rules of the matrix structured organization, and who are able to alter their leadership style depending on the context. All this indicates the importance and need of a stronger focus on leader communication and behaviour.

The study presented has sought to contribute to increased knowledge about organizational communication and leadership communication in a Norwegian context, as well as more insight into the matrix organization in terms of leadership and communication.



## PREFACE

Most of us take part in some kinds of organizational arrangement, at least during periods of our life. My interest in organizations was evoked during my last years as a student, during which I also entered work life. I met different kinds of people who I was supposed to cooperate with in order to meet some set goals. Sometimes we managed to reach those goals, sometimes not. Why is it that we as employees sometimes succeed together with our colleagues, and sometimes not? Why do organizations reach their goals, and why do they not? What are the decisive factors? These are questions that in my case eventually led to this thesis, and the research process has led to a somewhat deeper understanding of some of the crucial factors needed in order for an organization to be successful.

Many are the people that in some way or another have contributed to the realization of this thesis. First and most I want to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Ragnheidur Karlsdottir. She has been just exceptional! She has been there for me, always. Holidays and weekends no exception. If every doctoral student in Norway had a supervisor like her, so many more would actually finish their thesis.

My gratitude towards my supervisor Professor Owen Hargie is unquestionable. Without his expertise and knowledge and most valuable feedback, the present work would not have been complete.

I would like to thank the leaders and employees at Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace, Segment X, for letting me take part in their organizational life with such kindness.

I would like to thank the Norwegian Research Council for, through P2005, the finance of my three year scholarship.

Ingunn Hybertsen Lysø has been a great friend and discussion partner every time I have been in Trondheim. She has asked me those critical questions that really made me think. Thank you for that, Ingunn. In like vein, I am really grateful to all my good friends in Oslo for being so understanding the last year. Now, I'm back!

Although my colleagues at NIFU STEP have not contributed to my thesis as such, I would like to thank them for being so understanding and supportive during a hectic finish. You have been great! I would like to thank the librarian at NIFU STEP, Kirsten Fuglestved, for helping me complete my list of references.

Last, but not least I would like to thank my family for the great support I have received from you all. Without you I would not have managed this.

Finally, my deepest and warmest gratitude goes to my best friend and partner for life, John Inge. He has believed in me and comforted me, and the last year he has more or less raised up our son Eirik all by him self. My gratitude towards you can not be expressed in words.

Oslo, October 2005

Trude Røsdal



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*To John Inge and Eirik,  
to my mother and my sister*



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter will first give an overview of the research area of interest for the study presented in this thesis, where the focus will be on the importance of organizational communication, as well as shortly describe each of the different topics in relation to organizational communication and leadership that this thesis will cover.

Second, this chapter will present the actual background for the conducting of this study. As this present study was initiated as a result of the findings from another, previous study in the same organization a short presentation of that former study will be given. The organization in question and the research program P2005 are important parts of the background for the study to be presented in this thesis, thus a short presentation of both will also be part of this chapter.

### **1.2 Presentation of research area**

Organizational communication has been defined by Goldhaber (1993) as “the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty” (p. 15). In times like the present where the surrounding environment is changing at a faster and faster pace, organizational communication seems more important than ever. Good internal communication is needed to handle for instance uncertainty in relation to introduction of new technology, globalization and the New Economy. Reviews of organizational communication literature conclude that benefits from quality internal communication include:

- Improved productivity
- Higher quality (of services and products)

- Increased levels of innovation
- Greater employee job satisfaction
- Decreased absenteeism
- Reduced staff turnover
- Fewer strikes
- Reduced costs (Clampitt and Downs, 1993).

Organizational communication is increasingly recognized as one of the keys to organizational success (Tourish & Hargie, 2004). In Norway though, little research on organizational communication in particular, has been conducted. In Norwegian organizational life and thinking terms such as team work, participation and democracy have a prominent place (Rørvik, 1998). It would be fair to say that these terms are important aspects in relation to organizational communication, but nevertheless research directed specifically towards the core issue of organizational communication is somewhat difficult to find in Norwegian literature. One of the goals of the study that this thesis presents has been to shed some light on *this part* of Norwegian organizational life.

The role of the leader is a vital link in the organizational communication chain (i.e. Hargie et al. 2004). The first recognition of the importance of the communicating leader came with the Human Relation movement in the 30s and 40s. Organizational theorists realized that leaders should take time to communicate *with*, not only *to* their employees. The advocates for this movement saw that in the end that would make more satisfied and more productive workers. This knowledge came first of all from the so-called Hawthorne studies, conducted in the late 20s and early 30s, under the direction of Elton Mayo (Rosengren, 2000). The interesting thing about the Hawthorne studies, which actually was supposed to support scientific management theories, was that the researchers discovered that the factory workers worked harder just because they were under observation and that someone cared about how they were doing. This was one of the first notions that interpersonal relationships in the workplace have an impact on productivity. These studies formed the basis for the human relations

movement, and the findings from the Hawthorne studies have ever since had a central place in management and leadership theory (Miller, 1999).

This thesis sets out to examine the role of leadership communication in a real-world context, and in this context the real world is represented by a Norwegian middle sized organization. It is important to emphasise that the focus is on managerial leadership, as opposed to other forms of leadership such as parliamentary leadership, leadership of social movements or emergent leadership in informal groups. In order to get an understanding of what is meant by leadership traits and styles and how traits and choice of leadership style will influence the surrounding environment, a review of the most significant leadership theories developed during the last 50 years will be given.

All management activities are in some way or another related to communication. Schermerhorn (1996) divides management into four functions, which all can easily be related to communication: planning, organizing, leading and controlling. In this thesis the main interest will evolve around the organizing and leading activities of the managerial leader in this Norwegian middle sized organization.

Most definitions of what leadership is contain the three concepts of *influence*, *group* and *goal*. One definition used by Yukl (2002) is as follows:

*Leadership is the process of **influencing** others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the **process of facilitating** individual and collective efforts to accomplish **shared objectives** (p. 7, my emphasis).*

By emphasizing some of the words in this definition of leadership it becomes very clear how important the communication skills of the leader are, and how important good communication practices are in order to accomplish shared objectives. To get a better understanding of leadership communication a review of relevant literature on persuasion, influence, feedback and effectiveness of communication practises will be given in chapter 2b.

The matrix structure, which in this case represents an important part of the real-world context, is today a widely used organizational structure, also in Norway. Further, there will in particular be a focus on the role of leadership within a *matrix* organisation.

The matrix structure grew out of developments in the U.S. aerospace industry during and after World War II. This organization structure is often referred to as the “two-boss” structure (Schermerhorn, 1996), because each employee always belongs to two groups at the same time: one functional group and one project group. Thus the employee has to relate to two leaders at the same time: the functional leader and the project leader (a detailed description of the matrix structure will be given in chapter 2a). A complex organizational structure like the matrix will demand good leadership practises in relation to communication in order to make this structure work in an effective way.

There have been some efforts to study the use of matrix structures in Norwegian organizations, especially in relation to the restructuring of Telenor (the largest telephone company in Norway) during the first years of this century, but never with an extended focus on communication and leadership in relation to the matrix structure (i.e. Hovde et.al., 2002). This relationship is one of the main interests of this study.

Organizational structure is supposed to help the organization reach its goals (Goldhaber, 1993) as are both leadership and leadership communication. Therefore, some questions specifically related to the issue of organization structure need to be addressed. A review of relevant literature on organizational structure and relating this to the organization at issue will be given in chapter 2a and 2b.

The projects in the matrix organization in question are divided into smaller units called work packages or work teams, due to their size and length (in time). In a matrix organization teams like these will be cross-functional, and both because of this and the overall complexity of the matrix structure, managing these teams could be difficult. Nevertheless; these teams are important in reaching organizational goals. A review of the literature on team management



will be presented in chapter 2b, and the main themes emanating from this will be related to the matrix structure in the company under focus.

From this presentation of the research area it becomes clear that this thesis seeks to cover many aspects of organizational life. Nevertheless, there are some areas which stand out and as a result the literature review will be divided in two main parts:

1. Organizational structure and –communication, and
2. Leadership and leadership communication.

The findings from another study – my master thesis<sup>1</sup> (Røsdal, 1999) led directly to the decision to carry out this present study. In the following section the most important findings from the master thesis will therefore be presented.

### **1.3 Background**

The specific background for the study presented in this thesis is to be found in a survey conducted in relation to my master thesis during 1998 and 1999. This survey was carried out in the same organization as the present study. The former survey was conducted as a so-called communication audit (Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979), and the main focus was organizational communication in general.

A communication audit is a method often used in studies of internal communication flow in organisations. The general focus of a communication audit is to evaluate the organisation's communication system and provide information and recommendations that can help the organisation improve both its general communication practices and general efficiency (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). In the US this method is known as The Communication Audit Approach. At that time (and also at present time), no known communication audits of this kind had been conducted in Norway. Because of this it was decided to conduct a study focusing on the efficiency and inefficiency of internal communications in a Norwegian company addressing the following main research question:

---

<sup>1</sup> In Norway a master thesis will correspond to a master study, where the writing of the thesis is supposed to take approximately 10 – 12 months.

*How does the existing, internal communication flow in a medium-sized Norwegian company work?*

The main data gathering instrument was a standardized questionnaire (Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979; Hargie & Tourish, 2000), by which quantitative data was collected. The questionnaire covered the following areas:

1. Amount of information received and requested on particular topics/areas
2. Amount of information sent and requested on the same topics/areas
3. Amount of follow-up on information given, and amount of follow-up requested from colleagues on different levels
4. Amount of information received and requested from relevant sources in the work place
5. Whether information from sources is timely received
6. Trust inside the organization
7. Key information topics particularly relevant to the company
8. Amount of information received and requested from relevant channels in the work place

All in all this questionnaire covered 25 information topics/areas, 19 information channels and 7 information sources.

Ideally several data gathering procedures should be utilised in a communication audit, as this is likely to produce a more complete picture of the situation. As part of this communication audit several interviews with both employees and managers were also conducted, gathering qualitative data. The information from the interviews was mainly used to extend and deepen the interpretation of the findings from the questionnaire.

The most important findings from the questionnaire were:

- Compared with the 24 other information topics/areas the employees on average perceived that they received most information on the topic of *Regulations and decisions regarding projects I work on.*
- The second most information the employees felt they received was on *Regulations and decisions made by project management.*

- Also the topic of *Distribution of responsibility in projects* was high on this list.
- When it comes to amount of information *requested* about the same 24 topics the employees requested the most information about the same topics as they *received* the most information on.
- *Regulations and decisions regarding projects I work on* was the topic the employees in average requested the most information on.
- The gap between how much information received and how much requested was large for every topic.
- In relation to information received through different sources, on average the employees felt they received the most information from *Colleagues on the same level*.
- In relation to information channels, the employees felt they received the most information through *Face to face contact with people within my work area*.
- The information channel that the employees wanted to receive the most information from was *Project meetings*.
- Overall the employees in this organization trusted each other. The highest level of trust was for their *Colleagues on the same level*.

The results from the questionnaire showed that the information area regarded as the most important was the project each employee worked on. Also, project meetings were perceived to be the most important information channel.

The findings from the interviews in particular pointed out that the most protruding area employees had difficulty dealing with regarding information flow was the relationship between the functional- and project organisation. Both project managers and project employees need to assume responsibility for informing the functional management. Goldhaber (1993) emphasises the importance of information flow across the project- and functional organisation for a matrix structure to function effectively.

The company studied is a matrix organisation, thus employees deal with two managers: The personnel responsibility is with the functional manager, and the project manager is responsible for the work tasks. Employees work in projects but belong to groups in the functional organisation. Such an organisation

has communication challenges, and matrix organisations are often characterised by a low degree of stability, confidence and predictability (Erlie, 1997).

The informal organisational structure is prominent, which is clearly visible in the results from the questionnaire. The most important source of information was quoted to be colleagues on the same level. In addition, face-to-face relations were very important in the exchange of information. An informal tone and absence of particular obstacles to the free flow of information were stressed during the interviews. This can be a result of the company's structure as communication climate will affect and be affected by organisational structure (Erlie, 1997).

The main findings from this communication audit showed that the issues identified as positive, and also issues perceived as difficult, to a large degree can be attributed to the company's chosen organisational structure.

The management of this organization is of course concerned by the efficiency and productivity of their organization. The conclusion made from this communication audit did convince the organization to conduct a more thorough investigation of the organization – in particular an investigation of organizational communication in relation to organization structure.

### **1.4 Themes of the Study**

The research area is placed well within the study of organizations – organizational science. The main interest of this study lies with the issues of *communication* and *leadership* in relation to organizational structure. The importance of both *organizational communication* and *leadership communication* in relation to the successful organization will be emphasized. In like vein, the core issue of leadership has also been stressed as being of vital importance for the well functioning organization.

The context of the study has been put forward as of major importance: The study is situated in a Norwegian, middle sized organization, which has chosen a matrix structure. The *Norwegian* aspect of this study will also be

emphasized as an important reason for the choice of focus for the study to be presented in the following chapters.

The results from the communication audit pointed especially to the chosen organization structure as being the cause of both positive- and difficult issues in relation to communication. One consequence of this conclusion was that the management of the organization expressed a wish to make a more thorough investigation of the organization, especially in relation to communication and organization structure.

### **1.5 The organization Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace AS (KDA)**

The government directed organization Norsk Forsvarsteknologi<sup>2</sup>, former known as Kongsberg Våpenfabrikk<sup>3</sup> was partly privatised in 1993. In 1996 the corporation changed name to Kongsberg Gruppen ASA (KOG), and it is within KOG that the study presented in this thesis took place.

KOG is one of the leading technology corporations in Norway, and has also developed into an international corporation of some significance. Of a total of approximately 4000 employees, about 900 are stationed abroad (2004). KOG mainly focuses on the markets for maritime electronics and defence systems. The bulk of KOG's activities address international markets, the most important of which are Europe, the USA, the Middle East and the Far East ([www.kongsberg.com](http://www.kongsberg.com)).

KOG's range of products is characterized by a high technology content and they range from equipment for viewing the seabed down to depths of 11 000 metres to advanced equipment for satellites orbiting through outer space. The making of these products is divided between two business areas: Kongsberg Maritime and Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace.

Kongsberg Maritime is the largest of these two business areas, and are perceived to be world class within maritime technology related to areas such as

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<sup>2</sup> In English the name of the organization would be: Norwegian Defence Technology

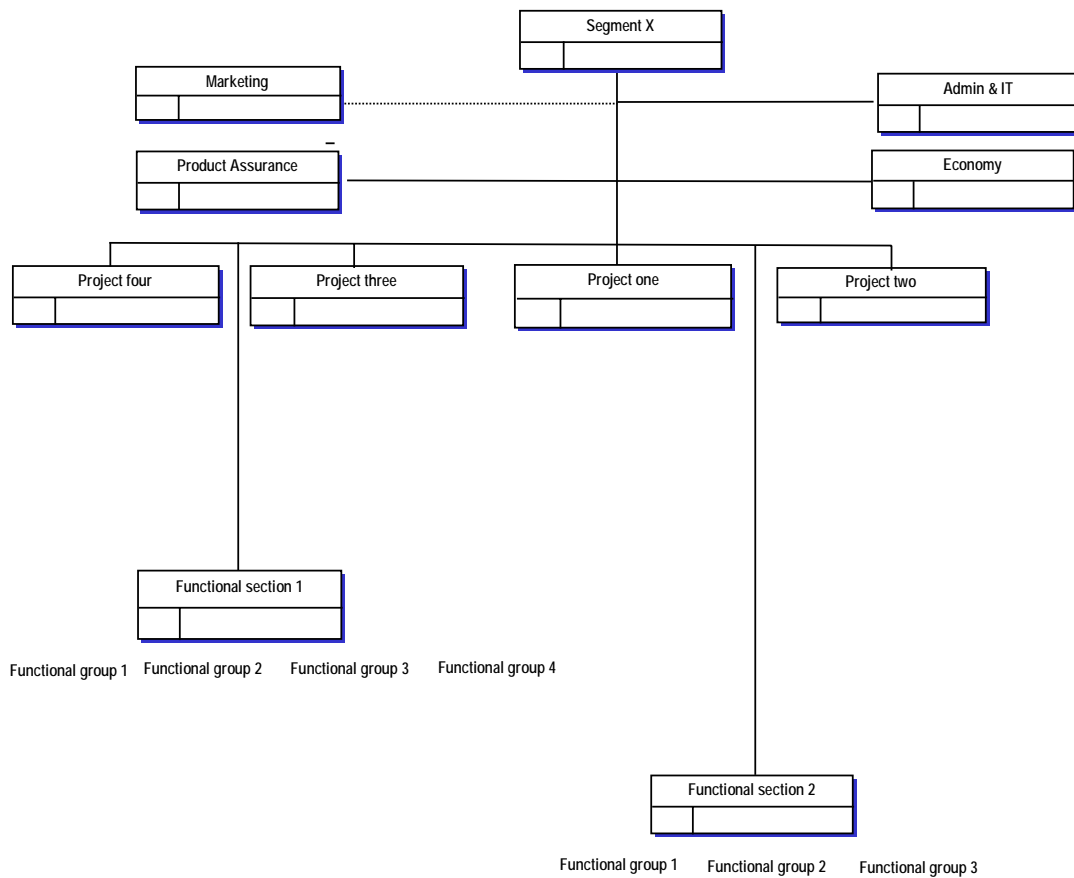
<sup>3</sup> The English translation of the Norwegian name will be: Kongsberg Weapon Factory

position, detection, communication, control, navigation and automation. Per 01.01.05 there were approximately 2 400 employees in Kongsberg Maritime.

Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace (KDA) is the other business area and this present study was situated within this area. KDA is Norway's largest defence equipment manufacturer and its diversified activities cover a number of markets related to the high-tech defence and aerospace industries. The company has some 1 500 (2004) employees and has a wealth of expertise and application knowledge gained over many years from managing demanding and complex projects. KDA cooperates extensively with leading global companies that work in the defence and aerospace industries.

The main areas of activity of KDA are divided into five segments. The study described in this thesis was placed within Segment X, and more accurate: within one of KDA's most valuable and prestigious project which segment X was responsible for. This was a project that would provide jobs for approximately 80 of KDA's employees for a period of five years.

At the start of this study there were approximately 170 employees in Segment X.



**Figure 1 Segment X**

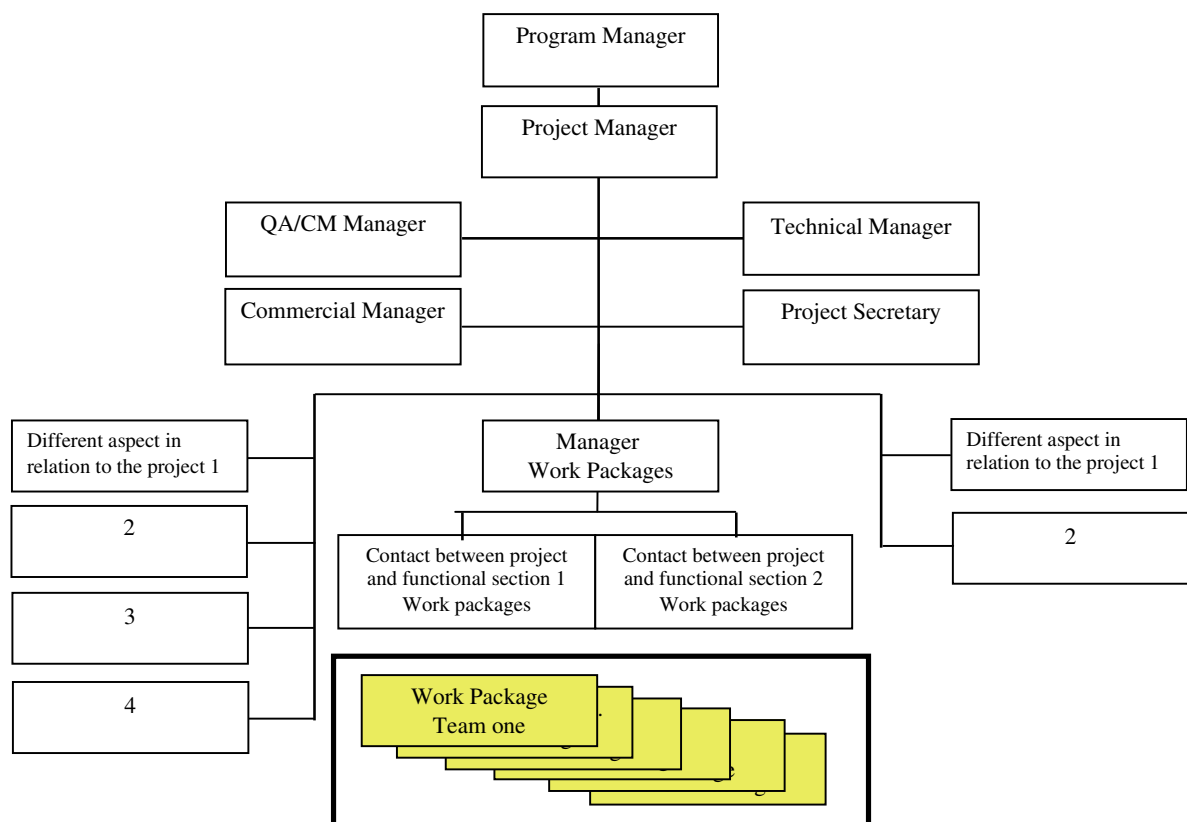
Figure 1 show how Segment X was organized during the time that the data gathering was conducted. From the organization chart it is to a certain degree possible to read that this is a matrix structured organization. A matrix structure is, broadly speaking, an organizational structure that operates with two organizations at the same time – one functional organization and one project organization. All the employees belong to one of the groups in the functional organization, but most of them work within one of the projects. The matrix structure will be more thoroughly described in the literature review (chapter 2a). Segment X is divided into several projects (one, two, three and four) and one functional organization represented by two sections/departments (functional

section 1 and 2). Figure 1 show how the sections that take care of administrative-related issues of the organization are kept outside the matrix structuring. These sections were also kept out of the present study.

The functional organization has three levels of leadership:

1. The manager of segment X,
2. Leader of functional section, and
3. Leader of functional group.

Thus, the functional organization has adopted quite a flat structure. The different projects have their own structuring. Project I represents the project of main interest in this thesis, and the structuring of project one is shown in Figure 2.



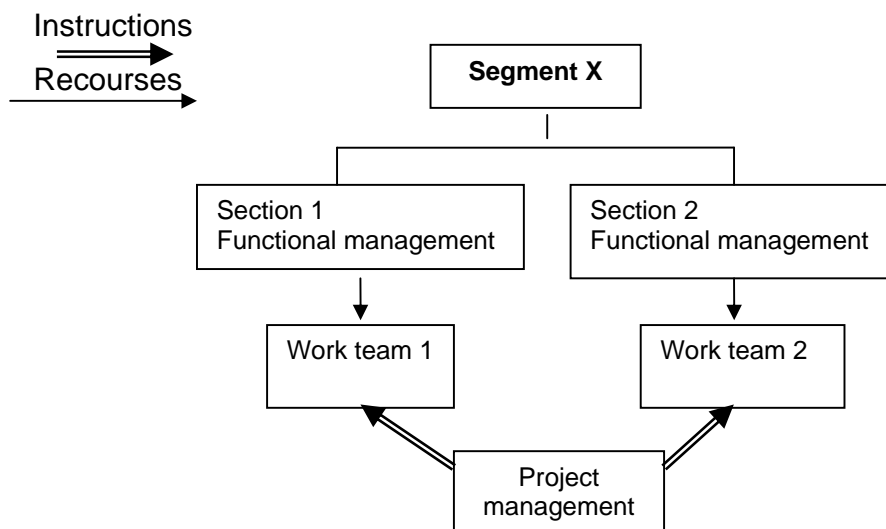
**Figure 2 The Project Organization**



Figure 2 illustrate how project one was organized at the time the data gathering started. Each box represents one person employed in the project office, and each of these persons has some sort of management responsibility. The boxes at the bottom of this chart illustrate the different work packages (teams). Most of the employees in a project like this will have their work task within one of the teams. The importance of these teams will be discussed further both in chapter 2a and in chapter 7. Figure 2 provides an example of how complex a project, like project one can be.

The main interest of this study was with the project office of Project I and two of the work packages –Team one and Team two. The number of persons working in team one was approximately 20 at the time of the data gathering, while team two engaged approximately 25 persons.

In addition this study did also concern the functional management in the two sections within Segment X, sections 1 and 2 (see figure 1). About 80 persons were employed in section 1 and 50 in section 2. One third of all the employees in section 1 were engaged in project one and half of the employees in section 2 were engaged in project one.



**Figure 3 The Case study**

Figure 3 shows the different parts of this study and how these parts were connected. In order to illustrate the special situation the work teams, and in particular the team leaders, were in, the teams are placed between the functional management and the project management. The arrows set out to illustrate that decisions regarding recourses is made by the functional management, while the teams receive their work instructions from the project management. In addition the team leaders have to keep both the functional management and the project management informed about the present situation. The situation of the team leader in a matrix organization will also be commented upon more thoroughly both in the literature review (chapter 2b) and in chapter 7.

### **1.6 Productivity 2005**

Productivity 2005 (P2005) is a Norwegian Research Council initiative to strengthen the competitiveness of the Norwegian manufacturing industry. The Productivity 2005 programme is based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and has the following philosophy:

*Developing competence in the Norwegian manufacturing industry to recognized international standards will be one of the most important competitive advantages for the Norwegian industrial community in the future. NTNU will work closely with partners in research institutes and industry in setting the pace for these developments in Norway.*

P2005 main multidisciplinary activities focus on: globalization, environmental issues, process mind-set, multidisciplinary approaches and team work and strategic alliances. Through close international cooperation, the Norwegian manufacturing industry together with NTNU form a first class research community in the following priority areas:

- Corporate alliances (Bedrifter I Nettverk, BIN)
- Industrial ecology (Industriell Økologi, IØK)

- Product development and production (Produktutvikling og produksjon, POP).

The study presented in this thesis has been part of the priority area of Corporate alliances (BIN). BIN focuses in particular on how Norwegian industry can adapt in the most effective way possible to increasing global competition in terms of market, products, technology and new forms of organization.

The research within BIN concentrates around three core overlapping areas which emphasize the problematic around corporate alliances from three specific points of view:

- Production and logistics (Produksjons- og logistikknettverk, PLOG), which focuses on the evolution, development and management of parallel production systems and integrated value chains.
- Learning in networks (Læring i nettverk, LÆN) which focuses on the improving learning and communication processes in the network.
- Companies and Regions (Bedrift og region, B&R), which concentrates in the importance of the company's regional network.

The present research was carried out within the Learning in networks (LÆN) area.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review, examining the literature within the areas of organization science most relevant to this study, is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on organizations and organizational structure, and communication and organizational communication. The second chapter deals with leadership and leadership communication. The selected literature will give an overall picture of recent and older research and theories within these areas. However, the introduction to the literature review applies to both chapters.

The literature review will start with a brief look at theoretical approaches to social research and organization science, where there is a wide range of disciplines. For example, Burrell & Morgan (2000) have identified four paradigms encompassing all the theoretical approaches within social research: Functionalistic, interpretive, radical humanist and structural humanist.

*The functionalistic paradigm* generates regulative sociology in its most fully developed form. In its overarching approach it seeks to provide essentially rational explanations for social affairs. It is a perspective which is highly pragmatic in orientation. The approach to social science characteristic of the functionalist paradigm is rooted in the tradition of sociological positivism. This reflects the attempt to apply the models and methods of natural science to the study of human affairs (p. 112). From the perspective of communication, studies within the functionalistic tradition focus on issues such as the causal relationship between communication satisfaction and organizational productivity, and are characterized by questionnaire-based data collection and rigorous quantitative analysis (Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

*The interpretive paradigm* is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participants

as opposed to the observer of action (p.114). Burrell and Morgan (2000) believe the interpretive paradigm to be of limited significance to the study of organizations because the premises of the interpretive paradigm question whether organizations actually exist in anything but a conceptual sense. Nevertheless, in the field of organizational communication, many researchers believe in the interpretive paradigm (e.g. Cheney, 2000; Miller, 2000). Interpretive communication scholars are interested in what sense *members* of organizations make of communication processes, and how *they* understand or misunderstand messages from management. It is likely that data will be obtained through qualitative methods (Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

The *radical humanist paradigm* and the *humanist structuralist paradigm* both aim to develop a sociology of radical change. The humanists would do this from a subjectivist standpoint while the structuralists would use an objectivist standpoint (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). Communication scholars within the humanist paradigm would tend to ask how communication processes in organizations reinforce systems of domination and exploitation, and data would most likely be obtained through qualitative methods. Scholars within the structuralist paradigm would also be inclined to look into issues of domination and power, but they would be more likely to use quantitative methods in the data collection and look for explicitly causal relationships between variables (Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

Although there are many different views on how to approach organizational science on a metatheoretical level, efforts are also being made to find common ground (see for instance: Corman & Poole (eds), 2000 and Frost, Lewin & Daft (eds), 2000).

Nevertheless, many studies of organizational communication straddle the typology of the four paradigms from Burrell and Morgan. It could be suggested this is taking the easy way out, not taking a standpoint, but according to Fairhurst (2000), the reason for this straddling between typologies is that the world of organizations is often experienced as far too complex for any single theoretical approach to fully grasp. Other researchers advocate a state of co-existence and

mutual support between the alternative paradigms (Putnam, 1982). This particular case study is conducted in the light of the interpretive approach as it seeks explanations within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participants as opposed to the observer of action, while the data is obtained through qualitative data methods. But there is also a touch of functionalism to this study in that it seeks to find the relationship between internal communication issues and a well-functioning matrix organization. Thus, as with most recent investigations, it has been hard to place this case study within one of the above-mentioned paradigms.

## ***CHAPTER 2a Organizational structure and communication***

### **2a.1 Theories on organizations**

Organizations are everywhere, and they come in all shapes and sizes, old ones and new ones. One organization might be spread around the world and one might be located in a single building (Hargie et al., 2004). We are all members of a host of different organizations on different levels. In this chapter the focus will be upon work organizations. Huczynski & Buchanan (2001, p. 5) define an organization as follows: 'An organization is a social arrangement for achieving controlled performance in pursuit of collective goals'. Thus, organizations involve:

- Social arrangements, which is to say that organizations consist of groups of people who interact with each other as a consequence of their membership.
- Collective goals, which is to say that common membership of an organization implies some shared objectives.
- Controlled performance, which means setting performance standards, measuring actual performance, comparing actual with standard performance and taking corrective action when necessary.

It is this preoccupation with performance and the need for control that distinguish organizations from other social arrangements (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001).

There has not always been great interest in organizations as such. Organization was perceived as something about charts and job descriptions – necessary evils or bureaucratic activities. Then the basis of competition shifted and organizing slowly moved to the top of management's agenda (Galbraith, 2002).

The history of organizational theory is new in relation to how long organizations have been a part of human life. According to Hargie, Dickson & Tourish (2004) the oldest, still existing company is the Weihenstephan Brewery, founded in Germany in 1040, while organizational theory as a field first began to develop at the start of the last century. As a consequence of the industrialization

process running faster and faster and the organizations becoming larger and more complex, there was an urgent need to start studying organizations in terms of economic, social and political theory (Rosengren, 2000). Frederic Winslow Taylor, who published *The Principles of Scientific Management in 1911*, has commonly been viewed as the originator of organizational theory. Other important theories on organizations at this early stage were Max Weber's theory on bureaucracy and Henri Fayol's theory on classical management (Miller, 1999). These three theories form the foundation of the so-called classical approaches. Here the classical approaches will be discussed together.

These first efforts towards understanding organizational processes to increase productivity mainly focused on breaking work processes into small, individual tasks. Within classical management, it was not seen as necessary or important to explain the relationship between the different tasks to the workers. A worker should concentrate on and learn his task and not waste time on any other tasks as it was not seen as particularly efficient. Workers were perceived as lazy and not particularly bright and mainly motivated by money.

One way to approach the concept of organization has been to use metaphors to illustrate what an organization is. The classical approaches used the machine as a metaphor for the organization, and this metaphor can explain some of the views that management had on employees. According to Miller (1999) there are three aspects of the machine metaphor which are especially prominent:

- The importance of *specialization*. In a machine every component has its own specific function. In an organization, seen through the lens of the machine metaphor, every employee has a specialized task, for instance putting every order into a bag at McDonald's. This has also been called alienation in that none of the workers take part in the whole production process and are thus not familiar with anything else but their own specialized task. This phenomena is described for instance by Charlie Chaplin in the movie *Modern Times* (1936).



- The second aspect is *standardization*, which also includes the notion of *replaceability*. Most components in machines are standardized to facilitate replacing one when defective. Thus, when conceptualizing organizations as machines, the same principle holds for the human 'parts' that work in the organization. At McDonald's the employees working on their standardized tasks can easily be replaced.
- Finally, machines are *predictable*. Rules govern the way a machine is put together and rules govern the way it operates. If a machine fails to work there are rules to follow to make it work again. Thus if an organization is to function there are special rules that have to be followed (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001; Miller, 1999).

Although some organizations might still be run according to some of the ideas from the classical school (e.g. a McDonald's burger shop), the classical approach had its peak from the start of the 20th century until the 1930s. As a consequence of the continued development of the rationalization of industrial production, as productivity increased and as the workforce became increasingly better educated, better off, and consequently more demanding, the classical organizational theories had to be revised (Rosengren, 2000).

The Hawthorne studies played an important part in changing organizational thinking, and in fact these studies were one of the major reasons why organizational managers had to start thinking of organizational processes in other terms than machines. The studies were conducted during a period of nine years – from 1924 to 1933 at the Hawthorne Western Electric plant in the USA (Garrison & Bly, 1997). Elton Mayo is the name which most people associate with the Hawthorne studies. From the beginning his main interest was in how the *physical* working environment influenced productivity, and thus his theories were very much in line with the existing classical theories on how to increase productivity.

Mayo and his co-researchers wanted to change one variable at a time in relation to the working environment. The variables could be the length of the

lunch break, or whether coffee or soup was served during the workers' morning break (Garrison & Bly, 1997). The real turning point came when the researchers experimented with the lighting in the working area. Sometimes they would put more light on than normal, sometimes less. What came as a real surprise to the researchers was that the workers were more productive independent of the amount of light, and what was even more striking was that those workers who experienced the same amount of light all the time (the control group) were more productive just the same. This effect has later become known as the Hawthorne effect – that mere attention to individuals leads to changes in behaviour (Miller, 1999).

Elton Mayo and his colleagues conducted other experiments as well, and through these studies they pinpointed variables such as worker attitude, morale, informal work groups and social relations. As a result of the Hawthorne studies it was no longer satisfactory to claim that production is totally a function of the structure and design of formal organizations. Neither could workers and their feelings, attitudes, capabilities and perceptions continue to be ignored (Goldhaber, 1993).

Later quite an extensive amount of criticism has been levelled against the findings of the Hawthorne studies, implying a lack of scientific value and interpretive rigor (Miller, 1999). Nevertheless, the importance of these studies can never be underestimated.

The Hawthorne studies formed the basis for the human relations movement. The basic logic of the human relations approach was to increase concern for workers by empowering them to participate in decision making, by being friendlier and by calling them by their first names. These measures would then improve worker satisfaction and morale. Many managers saw this approach as an opportunity to manipulate their employees: "if I'm nice to you, you'll feel happy and do what I want" (Goldhaber, 1993). Because of this perceived possibility of manipulating employees which the human relations approach offered, the human relations movement has been highly criticised (Miles, 1965). Nevertheless, the Hawthorne studies and the resulting human relations

movement have forever changed the way we look at and understand organizations.

As mentioned above, one important outgrowth of the human relations movement was the human resources approach. The main difference between these two approaches is that while the human relations movement focused only on people-oriented variables, the human resources approach also focuses on production variables, in addition to the human variables (Goldhaber, 1993). The human resources approach will not be commented on any further in this section, but all the leadership theories reviewed later in this chapter more or less belong under this approach.

If the classical approaches to organizations were narrow and rigid in their emphasis on structure and function, the human relations movement was rigid in its concern for people. Huczynskis & Buchanan (2001) define an organization as a social arrangement, which is to say that organizations consist of groups of people who interact with each other as a consequence of their membership. Today it would appear that most organizational researchers look at the organization as a social and open *system*. Looking at the organization as a social system implies that structural and human variables assume new importance. System theory sees relations and mutual influence instead of linear chains of causes and effects (Senge, 1990). In relation to the organization this would mean that changes in one part of the organization would affect all the other parts of the organization. Nothing exists without eventual impact on something else (Goldhaber, 1993):

*No longer can the job function of a machine riveter be divorced from the successful functioning of the entire organization; nor can the morale of one employee be a minor point of concern (p. 47).*

Along with system thinking came an understanding of how the surrounding environment affects the organization. It was a major advance in the study of organizations when it was realized that organizations are not (and cannot be)

closed systems. The organization is dependent on the energy input from the external environment. Without that input the organization will run out of energy and eventually collapse (Hodge, Anthony & Gales, 2003). According to Scott (1998), the environment supports, forms and infiltrates the organization:

*Organizations are systems of interdependent activities linking shifting coalitions of participants; the systems are embedded in – dependent on continuing exchanges with and constituted by – the environments in which they operate (p. 29).*

When seeing the organization as a system the fact has to be accepted that everything in the organization is dependent on everything else. One important implication of seeing the organization as a system is the understanding that the employees will participate or leave the organization depending on what they will gain (Scott, 1998). As one of the main objectives for an organization is to make everyone pursue the same goals, this realization is important for management. Managers and leaders of today have to consider the organization as both a social and open system, where everything is connected with everything else. The employee's individual goals will have an impact on his or her search for the common goals of the organization. If the organization is not willing to make an effort to satisfy the personal goals of its employees, they will not see any point in staying with that organization. In newer leadership theories this notion becomes more and more apparent. However, before going on to discuss leadership theories, some aspects of organizational structure will be reviewed. Perceiving the organization as a *system* will probably make it easier to understand and also design the *structure* of the organization.

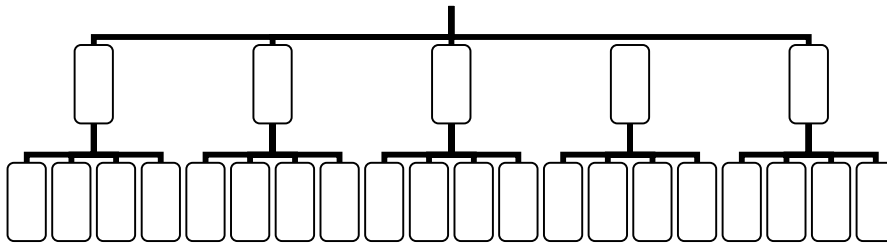
## 2a.2 Organization structure

As in every other area of organizational science, different theoretical approaches are used to examine organizational structure. However, it would appear that all the approaches have an underlying premise in common, that context (the organization's culture, environment, technology, size or task) and structure must somehow fit together if the organization is to perform well (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985). As the focus of this study has been on practical communication issues related to an already existing organizational structure, the focus of this paper will be on what is especially important for this organizational structure so that it functions in the best way possible. Thus, meta-theoretical issues in relation to structure will not be discussed.

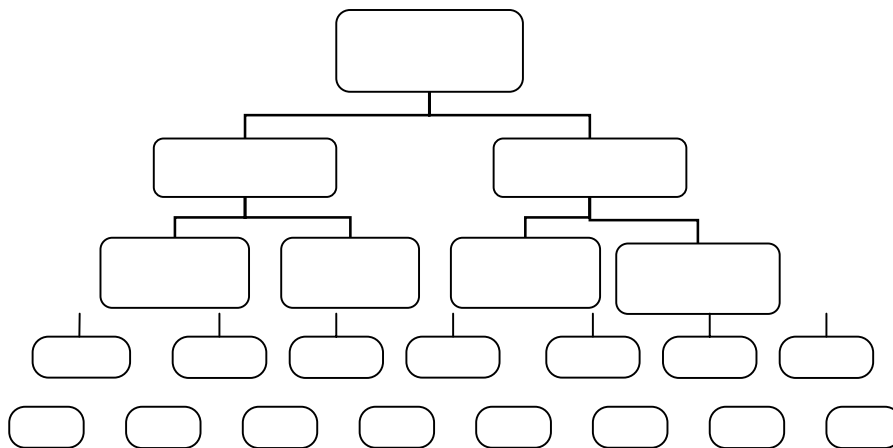
The purpose of organization structure is, first, to divide organizational activities and allocate them to subunits; second, to coordinate and control these activities so they achieve the aims of the organization (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). Hence structure includes such factors as where decisions are to be made (degree of centralization), how labour is divided and how departments are formed (differentiation), and the extent to which rules, policies and procedures govern activities (formalization) (Hodge, Anthony & Gales, 2003). To summarise: organizational structure describes the internal relationships, division of labour, and means of coordinating labour within the organization. An organization can be defined as a *social structure* in terms of the relations between a number of more or less interrelated *positions*, where the individual incumbents have to play social roles more or less distinctly defined by the *position* in question (Rosengren, 2000). The various roles and positions of an organization structure will be discussed later in this chapter.

Organizational structure can have many forms, but every type of organizational structure will be founded on either a *flat organization structure* (Fig. 4) or a *tall organization structure* (Fig. 5). An organization with a flat structure has few hierarchical levels and decentralized authority. An organization with a tall structure, on the other hand, will typically have many hierarchical levels

and centralized authority. The army and the police are examples of typically tall organizations (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001).



**Figure 4 Flat organization structure**



**Figure 5 Tall organization structure**

However, whether the organization has chosen a tall or flat organization structure, adjustments will be made to the chosen structure in accordance with the structure's purpose, namely to facilitate achievement of the organizational goals. When adjusting an organization structure, one important issue to consider is *span of control*. Span of control refers to the number of subordinates who

report directly to a single manager or supervisor (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). From Figures 4 and 5 we can see that with a flat organization structure many employees will report to each supervisor (one supervisor has to relate to many employees). In a tall organization structure fewer employees will report to each manager. The greater the number of employees reporting to a single manager, the more difficult it will be for this manager to supervise and co-ordinate them effectively. If an organization wants to keep its structure flat and at the same time handle the span of control issue in the most effective way possible, adjustments to the structure have to be made. One way to deal with the span of control issue might be to use a so-called matrix structure, which will be examined more closely in the next section of this chapter.

One of the most important outgrowths of the human-relations movement was the identification of the *informal* organization *not* shown on the organization charts. The informal organization has a structure of its own. Davis (1993) defines an informal organization as based on people and their relationships rather than on positions and their functions, as would be the case with the formal organization. The study of personal and informal relationships emerged after the Hawthorne studies first demonstrated that certain relationships arise that are not linked to formal authority and job functions (Goldhaber, 1993). Studies on personal and informal relationships have also had impact on the formation of different organizational structures. Some organizational structures will, for instance, facilitate informal communication, while others will not.

Awareness of the informal organization is also of great importance for contemporary leaders. When putting employees into teams or assigning them to projects, the managers have to particularly take the informal organization into consideration to make the composition of the team as effective as possible. Such issues as who can and cannot work together and who is the informal leader and thus has quite extensive power are factors that should be taken into consideration. Informal communication, management and leadership will be discussed further below, where I will also give a brief review of an organizational structure which has been found (Davis & Lawrence, 1977) to facilitate informal

communication, and in which the team plays a very important role, the matrix structure.

### **The matrix structure**

The development of a coherent organizational structure is a key function structure of the organization (Rosengren, 2000), which is to say that the structure of an organization is supposed to make it easier to attain the objectives of the organization. The great challenge is to create the optimal pattern of vertical and horizontal relationships among roles, functions, teams and divisions that will enable an organization to best coordinate and motivate its employees to achieve its goals (Jones, 2004). The organization in question has chosen to use a matrix structure to meet its objectives.

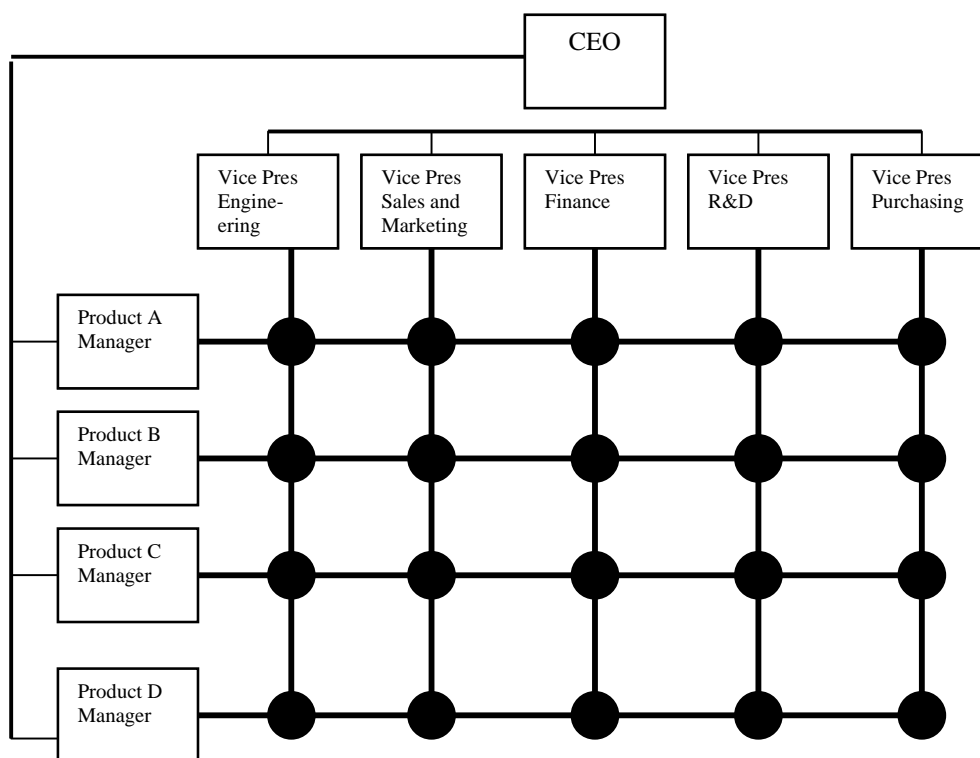
The term matrix was coined in the American aerospace industry. It was most likely found to be a fitting term for mathematically trained engineers in that industry to apply to the grid-like structure that was evolving from its project management origins during the 1950s (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). Although the matrix structure has received some bad reviews, almost from the moment it appeared on the organizational structure arena (e.g. Peters & Waterman, 1982), organizations continue to use it. Galbraith & Kazanjian (1986) conclude that in cases where the matrix has failed, it has not been because of the matrix structure itself, but rather because management has failed to implement the matrix in an appropriate way. Although *implementation* of the matrix structure is not an issue here, the conclusion of Galbraith & Kazanjian (1986) is an important indicator of the fact that a well-functioning matrix organization requires a lot of effort. Some of those factors that have been found to influence the effectiveness of the matrix structure have been the main interest of this particular study.

A matrix structure is especially used for large, specialized projects that temporarily require large numbers of technical people with varying skills (Newstrom & Davis, 1993). In fact researchers have found the use of this structure to be contingent upon such conditions as the following:



- Special projects, particularly major ones
- Need for diverse occupational skills, particularly higher-level ones
- Conditions of change during project operation
- Complex issues of coordination, problem solving and scheduling
- High degree of need for authority of knowledge and expertise compared with existing functional authority (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985; Kazanjian & Drazin, 1987)

A matrix is often depicted as a rectangular grid that shows a *vertical* flow of *functional* responsibility and a *horizontal* flow of *product* responsibility (Jones, 2004).



**Figure 6 Matrix structure (Jones, 2004, p. 184).**

Figure 6 illustrates a matrix organization. The vertical lines represent the grouping of tasks by function, and the horizontal lines represent the grouping of

tasks by product. There can of course be minor deviations in how each organization adjusts the matrix to fit it into the rest of the context, but Figure 6 shows the basic structure of all matrix organizations. A matrix organization consists of two organizations of equal power – the functional organization and the project organization. The organization is simultaneously functional and product oriented (Galbraith & Kazanjian, 1986). This simultaneity might lead to conflict between the functional and project organizations. Functional and project managers are jointly responsible for timely and efficient execution of the organization's projects. Both functional and project managers are dependent upon each other, and such dependency may be difficult to live up to without some irritation: project managers feel unduly restricted by the functional managers' firm grip on departmental resources, while functional managers experience leadership as a form of enlarged control from 'above' (de Laat, 1994).

Apart from the two equally powerful organizations there is one other important characteristic of the matrix organization, namely the two-boss command structure. As the employee belongs to both the functional and project organizations at the same time, he or she will experience two reporting relationships – reporting to the functional manager and reporting to the project manager (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). Within the two-boss command structure there will also be the two-boss *manager*. A team manager in a matrix organization would for instance be a two-boss manager, in that he or she has to report to both the functional manager and the project manager. The two-boss manager has quite an exposed role, and will often experience stress as a result of conflicting demands placed on him or her by the functional and project managers (Hodge, Anthony & Gales, 2003). Needless to say, in general the two-boss command structure will have important implications for the internal communication in a matrix structured organization. These implications will be discussed later in this chapter.

One of the things that Figure 6 points out is that a matrix organization is very flat, in the sense of having minimal hierarchical levels within each function (Jones, 2004), which is also to say that the authority is decentralized. Another

implication of the two-boss command structure is that it will result in less pressure on each manager as the responsibility for each employee is divided between the functional manager and project manager.

However, authority is a central and also difficult issue in the matrix organization, and not only in relation to each employee. The matrix organization consists of two organizations of *equal* power but this is not always how the matrix will function. It has been possible to distinguish between three types of matrix dependent on where the authority lies: 1) A coordination matrix, in which the project manager does not have any authority at all, 2) A balanced matrix where there is an evenly balanced compromise between functional and project organization, and 3) A project matrix in which the project manager obtains complete authority (de Laat, 1994).

The organization in question in this particular study operates with a balanced matrix, and to make the balanced matrix structure function, recognition of and respect for the equal power between the two organizations is of vital importance. The equal power is usually obtained through multiple authority relations (Galbraith & Kazanjian, 1986). These relations will be considered later in this chapter.

There are of course both advantages and disadvantages to using a matrix structure. According to Burns (1989) the matrix structure has four significant advantages:

- The matrix enables an organization to maximize its use of skilled professionals, who move from product to product as needed.
- The dual functional and product focus promotes concern for both cost and quality, in that the goals of the functional specialists are likely to be technical in nature and the goals of the product managers are likely to involve cost and speed of development.
- The use of cross-functional teams is supposed to reduce functional barriers and overcome the problem of subunit orientation. With differentiation between

functions kept to a minimum, integration becomes easier to achieve. The team structure also facilitates adaptation and learning for the whole organization.

- The matrix structure opens up communication between functional specialists and provides an opportunity for team members from different functions to learn from one another and develop their skills, which might be an advantage for innovation processes in the organization.

As the use of cross-functional teams is associated with some of the most important advantages of the matrix structure, teams in the matrix organization will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Although the logic behind the matrix structure seems very appealing, it is not unproblematic to employ a matrix structure in an organization. Most of the problems that might arise as a consequence of the use of a structure like this will stem from, ironically, all the potential benefits of the matrix structure. Constant and rapid changes, shifting project personnel, overlapping roles and responsibilities create an environment with a high potential for conflict (Kezsbom, 1989). Conflicts might result in a malfunctioning matrix organization, which again might lead to what Davis and Lawrence (1977) called the potential illnesses of the matrix organization. They were able to identify nine such illnesses, which will be listed briefly:

1. Tendency towards anarchy – which has been defined as a formless state of confusion where people do not recognize a boss to whom they feel responsible.
2. Power struggles – when managers jockey for power.
3. Severe "groupitis" – the mistaken belief that matrix management is the same as group decision making.
4. Collapse during economic crunch – when a business declines, the matrix becomes the scapegoat for poor management and is discarded.
5. Excessive overheads – the fear of high costs associated with a matrix.

6. Sinking to lower levels – the matrix has some difficulty surviving at higher levels in a corporation, and a corresponding tendency to sink to group and division levels where it thrives.
7. Uncontrolled layering – matrices which lie within matrices which lie within matrices result frequently from the dynamics of power rather than from the logic of design.
8. Navel gazing – managers in a matrix can succumb to excessive internal preoccupation and lose touch with the marketplace.
9. Decision strangulation – too much democracy, not enough action.

Avoiding these illnesses and achieving a well functioning matrix organization is dependent to a large degree on managerial behaviour. Each of the managers in the matrix has to develop some special skills and address some special issues if the matrix is to live up to its potential (Lawrence & Davis, 1977).

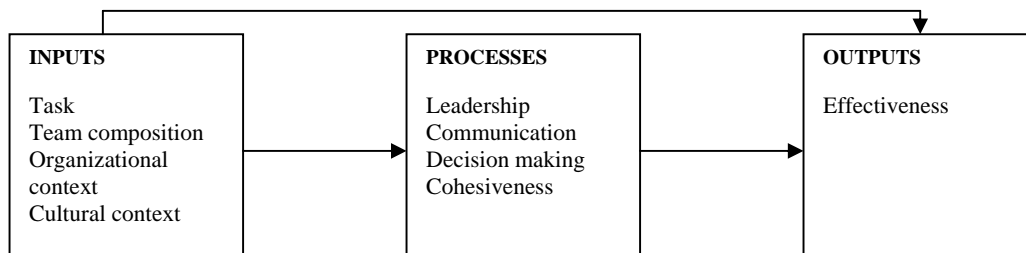
### **Groups and teams in the matrix organization**

Most organizations have small subunits (departments, sections) that perform a functional task (e.g. production, sales, operations, accounting, research) under the supervision of an accounted manager (Yukl, 2002). In subunits like these the members will often work alone on tasks that are independent of other tasks. Work units like these might be called coacting groups.

The coacting group is also present in the matrix organization, but it is the *team* that actually does the job in the matrix structured organization. The team is both the basic building block of the matrix and the principal mechanism for coordination and integration (Jones, 2004). Before looking more closely into teams in the matrix organization, it is natural to examine some of the more general features of the work team.

Compared to a coacting group, a team consists of members who need to interact with each other to achieve some shared goals. The team members have well defined and *interdependent* roles, and they have an organizational identity

as a team, with a defined organizational function (Unsworth & West, 2000). Thus a team is often viewed as an interactive group.



**Figure 7 The input-process-output model (Unsworth & West, 2000).**

Team working can help to improve productivity, but the effectiveness of a team is dependent on several issues. The input-process-output model illustrated in Figure 7 is a useful framework for examining teams. Both the input issues and process issues will impact the team's effectiveness.

One of the important inputs shown in the figure from Unsworth & West is *team composition*. There are different types of teams with different composition, including functional teams, cross-functional teams, self-managed teams, self-defining teams and executive teams (Yukl, 2002). The teams in the matrix organization will typically be cross-functional. A cross-functional team is characterized by the following:

- The team members have a low to moderate autonomy to determine mission and objectives.
- The team members have a high autonomy to determine work procedures.
- The authority of the internal leader is high.
- The lifespan of the team is low to moderate.
- The stability of membership for the team members is low to moderate.
- The diversity of the members' functional background is high (Yukl, 2002).

As mentioned above, one of the perceived advantages of the matrix structure is that it opens up communication between functional specialists and provides an opportunity for team members from different functions to learn from one another and develop their skills (Jones, 2004). Communication is one of the important *processes* necessary to make a team perform in an effective way. Nevertheless, if the communication processes of the team in the matrix structure are supposed to be an advantage of the matrix structure, they need to be handled in a skilled way. Much of the responsibility for this lies with the team manager. The communication skills of leaders in general and the team manager in the matrix organization will be discussed in the next chapter.

Most of the general characteristics of the cross-functional team will also typify the team in the matrix organization, perhaps with an exception for the duration of membership, which for the cross-functional team usually will be low to moderate (Yukl, 2002). In a matrix organization the projects might last for years, thus the duration of the team membership can sometimes be quite high. The members of the cross-functional team will typically have low to moderate autonomy in determining the mission and objectives of the team. On the other hand, their autonomy in determining work procedures will usually be high. In relation to the team in the matrix, Jones (2004) argues that role and authority relationships are deliberately vague because the underlying assumption of the matrix structure is that when team members are given responsibility without being given more authority, they are forced to cooperate to get the job done (p. 185).

Another important characteristic of the team in the matrix organization, which also represents one of the greatest challenges in relation to communication, is that the team members and also the team leader report to two bosses. These multiple reporting relationships might create role conflict, conflicting and confusing expectations and excessive demands (Barker et al, 1988; Ford & Randolph, 1992). Communication is therefore of paramount importance and so it will be examined in the next sections of this chapter.

### 2a.3 Organizational communication

#### Communication

To better understand the concept of organizational communication, some important aspects of communication in general will be examined in this section. As the focus in this thesis is on *organizational* communication and *interpersonal* communication, communication in relation to mass media or policy will not be considered here.

The word 'communicate' derives from the Latin word *communicare* which means 'to share' or 'to make common'. Thus when we communicate we make things common and we increase our mutual knowledge. Communication or the sharing of knowledge is the basic precondition for all communities (Rosengren, 2000).

There seems to be overall agreement among writers in this field that communication can be conceptualized as a process in which two or more people or communicators have to be involved (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). One of the first attempts to explain communication as a process was made by Shannon & Weaver in 1947. Their mathematical approach to visualising communication focused on the logical aspects of a communication process. They regarded communication as a linear process, taking place in only one direction in which both the sender and the receiver would be neutral. This approach might hold for a computer but for human communication, and especially interpersonal communication, the mathematical approach is simply too simple (Hargie & Dickson, 2004).

An overall and more up-to-date explanation of the communication process is transmission of information or a message from a source to a receiver, after which the receiver of the information will decode the message and inform the sender that the message has been received and understood (Garrison & Bly, 1997). This last aspect is of pivotal importance for the communication process. Without proper feedback from the receiver of the message it will never be clear whether communication took place or not. Communication is never one-



directional, but rather a circular process. Thus every actor in a communication process is both sender and receiver (Dickson, 1995).

The possibility of providing feedback is one of several components that will influence the communication process. Another component (which has already been mentioned) is the communicators or actors. Five other components have been identified as influencing the communication process: message, medium, channel, noise and context (Gudykunst, 1991). The *message* can be thought of as the content of communication, embodying whatever it is that communicators wish to share. The *medium* is the particular means of conveying the message. The difference between the medium component and the *channel* component is often blurred. Channel refers to that which 'connects' communicators and accommodates the medium. *Code* is the system of meaning shared by a group. The English language is an example of a code. *Noise* is much more than just sound as it refers to any interference with the success of the communicative act. Noise might originate in any or all of the above-mentioned components (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). The last component is the *context*. All communication takes place in a context and is crucially influenced by it (Rosengren, 2000), and communication that takes place in a job-related context will probably differ from communication in another context.

The area of human communication is tremendously complex and for every component that may influence the communication process there will be even more components or aspects to consider. Just imagine all the aspects in relation to the communicators that might influence the quality of the communication process. Their personality, their gender and their age are but a few factors that might affect the process (Hargie, 1997). It is beyond the scope of this section to comment on these possible influences, but it is important to bear in mind that communication is a process and that at all times factors will be present that might threaten the quality of this process.

It is nonetheless possible to control some of the factors, first and foremost ourselves – the communicators. Communication skills can be taught almost in the same way as a footballer can learn to be even better at playing his or her

sport (Hargie, 1997). However, just as some footballers have more talent than others, some communicators are more talented and will always be better than their peers. The main idea behind regarding interpersonal communication as a skill that can be taught is that we all have the chance to get better at it. This will be commented on in a later section – *communication in management*. But from interpersonal communication in general it is natural to move on to organizational communication.

## **Organizational communication in general**

### ***Background***

Before the Hawthorne studies organizational communication had only been seen in terms of rules, orders and prohibitions. Not many leaders had ever taken the time to talk with workers as workers. As a result of the findings from the Hawthorne studies interest grew in regarding psychologically and sociologically based processes of communication as necessary to execute the productive processes as smoothly as possible. Communication in organizations thus became a subject of growing interest (Rosengren, 2000).

### ***Definitions of organizational communication***

There are many approaches to the issue of organizational communication, and many efforts have been made to define organizational communication in a more precise way. Regardless of what approach is chosen, organizational communication incorporates most of the specialized disciplines related to human communication, that is interpersonal communication, small-group communication, information systems, mass communication and nonverbal communication (Greenbaum, 1976). As mass communication and nonverbal communication are not relevant to this particular study, they will not be commented on further here.

Studies of organizational communication look at how people ascribe meaning to messages, verbal and nonverbal communication, communication

skills, the effectiveness of communication in organizations, and how meaning is distorted or changed when people exchange messages, in both formal and informal networks (Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

According to Greenbaum (1976) organizational communication can be defined as a *system* in terms of purpose, operational procedures and structure. The *purpose* of organizational communication is to facilitate the achievement of *organizational goals*. The *operational procedures* involve the utilization of functional communication networks related to organizational goals; the adoption of communication policies appropriate to communicate network objectives; and the implementation of such policies through suitable communication activities. The *structural* elements include a) the organization unit, b) functional communication networks, c) communication policies and d) communication activities.

While Greenbaum sees organizational communication as a means for reaching organizational goals, Goldhaber (1993) views organizational communication as a way of dealing with organizational uncertainty:

*Organizational communication is the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty (p. 15).*

This definition leads to seven key concepts of organizational communication: process, message, network, interdependence, relationship, environment and uncertainty (Goldhaber, 1993). In the following and throughout this chapter these two definitions will be followed a more or less implicitly.

### ***The importance of organizational communication***

The importance of quality organizational communication is widely acknowledged among organizational leaders today. Nevertheless, it appears that the philosophy of some leaders is that organizational communication is what happens to you while you are busy doing other things (Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

It has been suggested that we live in the age of information overload (Goldhaber, 1993). It is impossible to relate to all the information that we have access to, and it might therefore be even more important for organizations to pay extra attention to the quality of organizational communication. If leaders allow organizational communication to be something that just happens, more or less occasionally, the results might be devastating. Problems caused by breakdowns in communication might be job dissatisfaction and stress, damaging strikes, operating losses, bankruptcies and production line injuries (Hargie & Tourish, 1998). In the opposite corner – those organizations that pay extra attention to their organizational communication might experience such benefits as:

- Improved productivity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Higher quality (of services and products)
- Increased levels of innovation
- Fewer strikes, and
- Reduced costs (Clampitt & Downs, 1993).

To illustrate the importance of communication to the organization, organizational communication has been portrayed as:

*Its life blood, its oxygen, its brain, its central nervous system, its arteries, the highways along which business is transacted, the mortar/glue which binds its parts together or the fuel which drives its engine (Hargie & Tourish, 1998, p.4).*

All these metaphors are examples of how vital researchers (and others who work with organizations) believe communication to be to the organization, but in spite of these descriptive metaphors it is still difficult to understand exactly what organizational communication is. One way to arrive at an understanding of this might be to examine the functional processes of organizational communication in more detail.

***Functional processes in relation to organizational communication***

Many will probably think of organizational communication as information – communication that flows in only one direction – from senior management at the top and down. A good illustration of how the organizational communication issue has been dealt with by organizations all over the world is the range of mechanisms organizations use for communicating with employees:

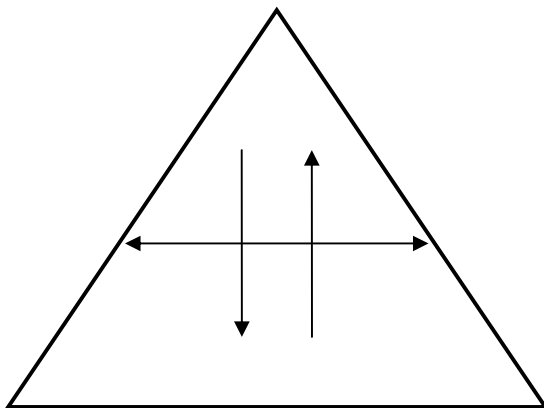
- The management chain
- Regular meetings with senior and/or middle managers
- In-house newspapers and magazines
- Notice boards
- Conferences and seminars
- E-mail and intranets (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001)

These tend to be one-way-downward modes of communication that are used to influence strategies, objectives, instructions, policies and feedback (Shermerhorn, Haunt & Osborn, 2003). Downward communication is of course an important part of organizational communication, but it far from covers the whole picture. As mentioned above, it seems like most writers (Hargie et al, 2004) agree on the fact that for communication to take place two or more persons need to be present. Even more important, all the actors in the communication process have to act as both senders and receivers to make communication happen. This applies to organizational communication as well. The possibilities of feedback on a message sent always need to be present if organizational *communication* is the issue. Two-way exchanges of information are more effectively achieved through methods such as:

- 'Speak-out' programmes, in which problems are taken to counsellors
- Suggestion or 'bright-ideas' schemes
- Open-door policies
- The appraisal system
- Quality circles
- Attitude surveys
- Interactive e-mail (where managers guarantee they will reply) (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001).

Such two-way exchanges of information are usually used to inform about problems, results, suggestions, questions and needs (Shermerhorn, Haunt and Osborn, 2003).

But communication in an organization does not only flow vertically (up and down). It also flows between employees on the same level – in a horizontal direction (Erlie, 1997), as illustrated in Figure 8. This communication normally involves problem solving, coordination, solving conflicts and rumours (Goldhaber, 1993).



**Figure 8 Three-way information flow: up, down and across (Erlie, 1997).**

Some researchers also include external communication, communication with the external environment, in the concept of organizational communication, in that organizational communication will be influenced not only by what happens inside the organization but also by what happens in the external environment

(Goldhaber, 1993). External communication will not be taken into consideration here.

Both the one-way-downward modes of communication and the two-way-upward modes of communication represent some of the information *channels* that might be present in an organization. The chain of command in an organization is a good example of a formal communication channel. A preset meeting would also represent a formal channel. Informal communication channels are often used when communicating on the horizontal level of the organization. One example of such a channel is the grapevine. In spite of what one might believe, the grapevine is a very powerful communication channel. It has the advantage of being able to transmit information quickly and effectively, and the grapevine takes care of information needs of employees when information is not accessible elsewhere (Clampitt, 1991). The primary disadvantage of the grapevine is that it can transmit incorrect or untimely information (Shermerhorn, Haunt and Osborn, 2003). Rumours can be disruptive and prematurely released information can easily be misinterpreted (Shermerhorn, 1996). Misinterpreted information may lead to uncertainty, lower morale among employees and reduced productivity (Clampitt, 1991).

According to Goldhaber (1993) one of the main objectives of organizational communication is to prevent uncertainty caused by the environment. Uncertainty among employees is often a result of changes in the known environment, and employees will usually feel some form of uncertainty in the wake of changes (Hargie & Tourish, 1998). In addition to uncertainty, the introduction of change will also raise resistance among employees, especially among those who feel they have a lot to lose if changes are to take place (Proctor & Dukakis, 2003).

But changes are a necessary although often brutal part of every organization's life. Changes might for instance be technological processes, changes in the market, government directives and mergers between companies (Clampitt, 1991). Quality organizational communication may help to alleviate feelings of uncertainty among employees, but as the pace of organizational

change increases the presumption of total certainty fades. It has been argued that uncertainty is an inherent state of nature and thus an inherent state of people (Clampitt & Williams, 2004). Uncertainty then is probably unavoidable, especially in every-day working life, but organizations have the possibility of dealing with perceived uncertainty, and the resistance to change in the best way possible – through communication. In a more narrow scope, uncertainty can be caused by a lack of personal feedback on the job one is doing. The communication skill of giving feedback will be further examined later in this chapter.

Along the communication channels are people who form communication *networks*, which both Goldhaber (1993) and Greenbaum (1976) see as vital to the understanding of organizational communication. Communication networks are the patterns of contact between communication partners that are created by transmitting and exchanging messages through time and space. These networks assume many forms in contemporary organizations, including personal contact networks, flows of information within and between groups, strategic alliances between firms and global network organizations (Monge & Contractor, 2001). Some of these networks will be formal and some will be informal communication networks. A formal communication network could be the team assigned to do a job. The informal network could be the people gathered around the table at lunch or the people connected through the grapevine (Erlie, 1997). Organizational theorists have long been aware that the formal organization structure fails to capture many of the important aspects of communication in organizations, and have thus discussed the importance of informal communication, such as the grapevine (e.g. Barnard, 1938).

A communication network can be decentralized, centralized or restricted (Shermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn, 2003), and choosing the right communication network can make a big difference in the way groups function and in the performance results they achieve. A decentralized communication network links all group members directly with one another. This network works best for complex and nonroutine tasks and also tends to create high levels of member



satisfaction (Shermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn, 2003). Centralized communication networks link group members through a central control point and work best when tasks are easily subdivided or routinized. A restricted communication network links subgroups that disagree with one another's positions, and it is likely that problems of destructive competition will arise in intergroup dynamics under such circumstances.

While the structure of the communication networks will affect the quality of the organizational communication, the organizational climate will be affected by the organizational communication. According to Huczynski & Buchanan (2001) the communication climate can be defined as:

*The prevailing atmosphere in which ideas and information are exchanged; an open climate promotes collaborative working, which is discouraged by a closed communication climate (p. 203).*

An open communication climate is dependent on what values and decision strategies leaders and managers choose to use and implement (Hargie & Tourish, 1998).

Because leaders and leadership behaviour are the main determinant in relation to the quality of organizational communication, the next chapter will provide an overview of some of the most important approaches to leadership.

## **CHAPTER 2b Leadership**

### **2b.1 Approaches to the question of leadership**

Leadership appears to be a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). However it has been difficult to find out exactly what leadership is. This is one of the most important questions organizational theorists have tried to answer during the last century. It is interesting to note that the subject was of little or no interest before the twentieth century. The research has given us quite a few definitions of leadership, and these definitions all seem to contain at least three common components: *group*, *influence* and *goal* (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). To examine leadership we need some form of a *group*: No group, no need to lead. The leader *influences* the behaviour of the others in the group on their way to accomplishing the group *goal*. If these three components are combined, the result will be a functionalistic definition of what leadership is, namely the process in which an individual influences group members to attain group goals (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). The next question will thus be: *why* is one person more able to influence the group to reach the group goals than the next? This is the question that the various approaches to the study of leadership have tried to answer.

Since the topic of this thesis is communication and leadership, this chapter will focus on communication in leadership, with, among others, thorough investigation of how the leader can use communication to *influence* the *group* in the direction of attaining the group *goals*. Since the case in this particular study is a matrix organization, an effort will be made to see leadership and leadership communication in the light of the matrix structure. But firstly the difference between leadership and management will be examined. Then the most significant of the approaches to the study of leadership will be commented on before moving on to communication in leadership.

**Leadership versus management**

Leadership can be regarded as a part of the management role, while other researchers will look at these as two synonymous terms. One could also claim that leaders and managers play different roles and make different contributions to the organization (Kotter, 2001). The overall consensus seems to be that there are differences. While the manager is concerned with the here-and-now of goal attainment', the leader is more focused on strategy. The manager wants to maintain order and reliability in the organization, while the leader is more oriented towards change (Shackleton & Wale, 2000).

The key point in this discussion according to Kotter (2001) is that only organizations that embrace both sides of this contradiction can thrive in turbulent times. The real challenge for the organization will be to combine strong leadership and strong management and use each to balance the other. Not every strong leader will automatically be a good manager and vice versa. Smart organizations will embrace both good leaders and managers, and work hard to make them part of the team. They are equally important to the organization, especially today when organizations are getting bigger and more complex and the surrounding society is in constant change. In a large, complex collaboration the manager has an important and natural place. Without good management complex organizations tend to be chaotic in ways that threaten their very existence, and without good leadership organizations will have a hard time dealing with the rapid change in technology, competition, markets and the demographics of the workforce (Kotter, 2001).

In general one can say that managers are concerned with running their part of the organization, getting the various tasks done when necessary, while leaders have a view of what is important for the future success of the organization and how to implement change (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). The leadership role has often been seen as having a special mystique. But there is nothing mystic about it (Kotter, 2001). It involves strategy and the willingness to take risks, and being able to communicate these strategies to the employees. The management role has been seen as a more straightforward and defined

task. The importance of communication is nevertheless a prominent aspect of the management role as well. Directions, plans and budgets have to be communicated to employees in a comprehensive way. In the case study which forms the basis for this thesis these two roles overlap on most occasions, and in this chapter the two terms will therefore be used synonymously.

### **Different approaches to leadership**

There are no universal models describing the perfect leader and leadership but there have been many attempts to develop one. The many theories of leadership can be divided into five approaches to the study of leadership (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). 1) Trait spotting, 2) Style counselling, 3) Context fitting, 4) New leadership and 5) Dispersing the role. Within each of these approaches there will be different theories. An overview of each of these approaches, and some of the theories that relate to them, will be given below. *New leadership* and *Dispersing the role* will be discussed together under the heading: *Leadership today*.

#### ***Trait spotting***

The theory which formed the background for the search of special qualities in effective leaders was the 'great man theory'. This was based on the premise that the fate of societies and organizations was in the hands of key, powerful, idiosyncratic (male) individuals who by force of personality had reached positions of influence from which they could direct and dominate the lives of others (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). This theory claimed that great men were born, not made (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

Early in the 20th century great man theories evolved into trait theories. The role of the leader was viewed as general, depending on certain personality traits. Early trait theories were not concerned with whether these traits were inherited or acquired, they simply asserted that leaders' characteristics are different from non-leaders. It is interesting to note that males were perceived to fit more nicely into a leader's role than females. This was mainly because of the demands that were put on the leader as to the ability to dominate, show a degree

of aggression, show personal strength and make decisions, abilities that supposedly could not be found in a woman (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998).

Trait spotting theory had its peak from the turn of the 20th century until the 1940s. Around 1940 organizational theorists started to question the trait view. One prominent theorist, Stogdill (1948) especially made an effort to question the relevance of traits in leadership. He found no universal trait that was associated with effective leadership, and he concluded that: 'A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combinations of traits' (Stogdill, 1948). Later, however, the trait theory has made something of a comeback, but in a somewhat altered form. Recent research has in fact shown that successful leaders are not like other people (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), and that there are certain traits that can be recognized from one successful leader to another. Sixty years ago researchers were interested in physical characteristics, personality traits and the abilities of people who were believed to be natural leaders (Yukl, 2002), while today the traits we are looking for are somewhat different. For instance traits that in some respect can be associated with the concept of emotional intelligence are of great interest in the search for the effective leader. Emotional intelligence has been described as the ability to recognise one's own emotions and manage them as well as recognise emotions in others; about being able to motivate oneself and to handle relationships (Goleman, 1995). Traits such as emotional self-awareness, trustworthiness, adaptability, empathy, visionary leadership, ability to develop others and being a skilled communicator are just some of the traits that researchers today consider to be of crucial importance in a leader (Goleman, 2000). These traits are in accordance with the traits that Stogdill (1948) and Bass (1990) point to as being typical for an effective leader, namely: being energetic, having stress tolerance and integrity, being emotionally mature and having self-confidence.

Apart from the traits one is looking for, the main difference from 60 years ago is that today it is understood that traits alone are not enough to be a successful leader. Certain actions must be taken as well, such as formulating a vision, role modelling and setting goals. Nonetheless, it is more plausible that

those actions will be taken if the traits are present (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Nor will a successful leader be characterized only by special traits but by special motives and skills as well:

- The *motives* that characterize the effective leader seem to be more oriented towards social rather than personal power. The leader wants to be a leader because of the opportunity to affect and make decisions on important issues, not because of her or his personal needs (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Burnham, 1976).
- When it comes to special *skills*, several are of crucial importance to the effective leader. Usually one distinguishes between *technical*, *cognitive* and *human relations* skills, but it is difficult to put one set of skills above the other as more important in the search for the effective leader (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002).

Questions have been raised as to whether special traits in a person make that person *appear* as a good leader to others, or whether these traits actually *make* her/him an effective leader (Lord, De Vader and Alliger, 1986). These are important questions that will not be discussed any further here.

### *Style counselling*

Style counselling is the search for effective *behaviour patterns* in effective leaders. This approach followed the trait spotting approach and was popular until the late 60s (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). It was easier to *train* and develop leaders in appropriate behaviour patterns than to look for special traits in a person each time a leader was needed. Categories for leadership styles were developed through research but there was still a tendency to view the effective behaviour patterns as general. That is to say that a behaviour pattern found to be effective would be effective independent of the situation (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998).

There are two studies that made important contributions to the style counselling approach; the Ohio and Michigan studies. In the 1940s and 1950s the University of Ohio and the University of Michigan were on the cutting edge of research on leadership. Working independently of each other, the two universities started two projects where the aim of both was to identify effective behaviour patterns in successful leaders (Yukl, 2002).

The researchers from the University of Ohio developed a list of approximately 1800 descriptions of typical leadership behaviour. Examples are: defining goals, encouraging employees to make an effort, giving orders and so on. These descriptions were then grouped, and put into a questionnaire – The Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (Bass, 1990). This questionnaire was handed out to thousands of workers, who were then to refer to the behaviour their own leaders displayed. The subsequent factor analysis of this huge data material found that most variations of leadership behaviour could be put in one of the following two categories: 1) Consideration and 2) Initiating structure (Bass, 1990). Consideration is a pattern of leadership behaviour that demonstrates sensitivity to relationships and to the social needs of employees (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001, p. 716). Initiating structure on the other hand, is a pattern of behaviour that emphasizes performance of the work in hand and the achievement of product and service goals (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001, p. 716).

This categorization also appeared in another major research programme, namely the Michigan studies. Based on a slightly different methodology, researchers at the Survey Research Centre in Michigan managed to identify three types of leadership behaviour which they chose to call: 1) employee centred behaviour, 2) job centred behaviour and 3) participative leadership. Leaders that fit into the first category will show a tendency to focus on relationships and employee needs, and those who belong in the job centred behaviour category are more concerned about getting the work done. The research showed that the most effective leaders were both job centred *and* employee centred. Participative leadership was perceived to be characterized by the use of more group supervision instead of individual supervision. The reason

for using group supervision is that group meetings facilitate subordinate participation in decision making and improve communication between others (Yukl, 2002). Participative leadership will be discussed later in this chapter.

The results from the Ohio and Michigan studies formed the basis for the dichotomy between democratic and autocratic leadership. These dimensions have been found in numerous studies of how leadership behaviour is perceived, e.g. Blake and Mouton (1964). Blake and Mouton developed a leadership grid. Leaders were placed in a two-dimensional grid based on the findings from the Ohio and Michigan studies. The two dimensions were *concern for people* and *concern for production*. The best leaders would probably be those with both a high concern for people and for production (Goldhaber, 1993).

Douglas McGregor is one of the authors to make use of the dichotomy between democratic and autocratic leadership (1960). He argued that managers are guided by the assumptions they make about employees. He identified two perspectives, called theory X and theory Y. Managers who adhere to theory X believe that most people dislike work and are basically lazy. Theory X managers will thus manage in accordance with their belief which would usually mean monitoring and regulating people's work through threats and sanctions. A theory Y manager takes a much more benevolent view of human nature. He or she believes that most people are responsible and are capable of self-direction. A theory Y manager gives the employees encouragement, freedom, delegated power and responsibility (Hargie et al, 2004, p. 10). It is fair to say that even though we do not like to admit it, the theory X manager is still practising in all kinds of organization.

### ***Contingency theories***

The identification of different traits in leaders and the identification of leadership behaviour did not answer the question of what leadership is. When the situation or context in which leadership is being exercised was taken into consideration, this was a major step in the development of leadership research. This was the starting point for several new theories trying to describe how the leader's



behaviour and the situation interact. In this section Fiedler's contingency model, situational leadership theory, path-goal theory and the Vroom-Yetton-Jago normative model will be briefly described.

### *Fiedler's contingency model*

The American researcher Fred Fiedler's (1967) contribution to the study of leadership has had a great impact on how we understand the leadership process. Fiedler argued that to understand and predict effective leadership, one has to look at both the leader's personal qualities and the actual situation (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Fiedler's theory sought to answer two basic questions: 1) Why is it that in a given situation some leaders are effective, while others are not, even though they have the same formal qualifications for the job? And 2) why will a leader function well in one situation and not in another?

To answer these questions he introduced the variable of *the least preferred co-worker* (LPC). This variable forms the basis for a measurement instrument which has the aim of showing if the leader is task or relationship-oriented. Leaders that view their least preferred co-worker in a positive way are seen as more relationship-oriented than those who view their least preferred co-worker in a negative way, who will be defined as task-oriented leaders. These will be the personal qualities, and they will interact with the actual situation. Fiedler introduced three variables that will affect the situation. *Group atmosphere* describes how accepted the leader is by the group. If these relations are bad, there will be a difficult situation in which to exercise leadership. *Task structure* refers to the extent to which the roles of the subordinates and the tasks and goals of the group are clearly defined. Fiedler maintained that an unstructured task will make a difficult situation for the leader. *Position power* refers to the extent to which the leader controls and can administer rewards and sanctions. If these factors can be controlled, the leader will have a more favourable situation (Shackleton & Wale, 2000).

By dividing each aspect of the situation into respectively good or poor, high or low, strong or weak, and then combining these aspects to give a

combined rating, it will be possible to determine how favourable the situation is for the leader. When the relations with subordinates are good, the task is highly structured and the leader has a strong position of power, the situation is at its most favourable for the leader. By being familiar with these aspects, and how to combine them, it will be possible to say something about how the situation will be for the leader. After having decided on the actual situation for the leader, it is time to take personal qualities into consideration. When the situation is either very favourable or unfavourable to the leader, task-oriented leaders will be more effective than relation-oriented leaders. When the situation is a combination or is indeterminate as to favourability, the relation-oriented leader will be the most effective (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). Fiedler assumed that the personal qualities were quite basic and stable and hard to change. It would therefore be difficult for one leader to change his or her leadership style through training, for example. If a leader did not succeed in a situation she or he either had to be moved to another situation or the present situation had to be redefined (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998).

Although some criticism has been levelled at Fiedler's theory, research tends to support the theory, but not for every situation and not as strongly in practice as in laboratory studies (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). There has been criticism of the validity of the instrument used to measure leadership orientation, the focus on goal completion as a measure of group success and the lack of explanation of the relationship between personal and situational variables (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

### *Situational leadership*

Another influential contingency theory is *situational leadership*, a theory developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1969). Several aspects are similar to Fiedler's theory, but unlike Fiedler they believe that leaders can alter their style to fit the context. In this theory the employee's readiness (competence) to follow a direction or complete a task is the key factor regarding which leadership style one should choose. Some authors label this factor maturity

(Vecchio, 1987; Fiore, 2004). Maturity is defined as the capacity to set high but attainable goals, willingness and ability to take responsibility and the education and/or experience of group members (Johnson & Johnson, 2003, p. 206).

Hersey and Blanchard (1969) focused on two kinds of leadership style: task-oriented and relation-oriented leadership. When the leader is practising task-oriented leadership he/she will be focused only on the task the group or the individual is supposed to do. Through one-way communication the leader explains not only what to do, but also includes when, where and how the task is to be carried out. There will be no room for the employees to give any form of feedback (Fiore, 2004). During relationship-oriented leadership the leader and the employees will engage in a two-way communication. The leader's role will be to offer support and guidance and to act like a facilitator (Fiore, 2004). By comparing these two dimensions to each other Hersey and Blanchard came up with four types of leadership orientation: 1) high task orientation and high relation orientation, 2) high task orientation and low relation orientation, 3) low task orientation and high relation orientation and 4) low task orientation and low relation orientation. Through these leadership orientations four leadership styles appeared:

1. Telling: High amounts of task behaviour, telling subordinates what to do, when to do it and how to do it, but with little relationship behaviour.
2. Selling: High amounts of both task and relationship behaviour.
3. Participating: Lots of relationship behaviour and support, but little direction or task behaviour.
4. Delegating: Not much task behaviour or relationship behaviour (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).

The employee's readiness (maturity) to follow a direction or to complete a task will then be classified on four levels: 1) Low (cannot, will not), 2) middle/low (cannot, but willing), 3) middle/high (can, but do not want to) and 4) high (can and willing). According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969) to be an effective leader

she/he has to take both the actual task structure and the amount of readiness and competency the employees show into account, and then decide what leadership style she or he should use.

Although this theory has been very popular in practical leader development, research suggests that it only holds for certain types of employees. For instance there are some indications that recently hired employees may need greater structuring from their superior (Vecchio, 1987).

### *Path-goal theory*

Several other contingency theories appeared during the 1970s and 1980s. One was the path-goal-theory developed by House (House & Mitchell, 1974). The essence of this theory is suggested by its name. The leader's main task is to guide subordinates to find the best way which will lead them to the goal of accomplishing the group's tasks. This is a theory where motivation plays an important role. House suggests that highly motivated employees will make a great effort in their job and also reach their goals. The leader's task will be to map the employees' goals and needs, to reward the employees in a visible way and to ensure that the employees believe that the goals can be reached (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998). This theory suggests that a leader's behaviour is motivating or satisfying to the degree that the behaviour increases subordinate goal attainment and clarifies the paths to these goals (House & Mitchell, 1974). According to House & Mitchell four types of behaviour are suited to motivating subordinates:

1. Directive – giving specific guidance,
2. Supportive – giving consideration to the needs of subordinates,
3. Participative – consulting with subordinates and taking their opinion and suggestions into account and
4. Achievement-oriented leadership which, for instance, is about setting challenging goals.

One feature of the effective leader, according to House & Mitchell, is being flexible enough to use any of the four according to the circumstances, i.e.

depending on who the employees are and how structured the task is (Yukl, 2002).

The path-goal theory has made an important contribution to the study of leadership by providing a conceptual framework to guide researchers in identifying potentially relevant situational variables (Yukl, 2002).

#### *The Vroom-Yetton-Jago normative model*

This theory was developed by Vroom and Yetton in 1973, and then updated and extended by Vroom and Jago in 1988. It has a slightly different approach than the other above-mentioned contingency theories. This theory has not been proposed as a general leadership theory, but it focuses on one important aspect of the role of the leader – namely on decision making and how much leaders should involve subordinates in the decision-making process (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). To make the decision-making process effective, the leader will have to take the various aspects of the situation into consideration (Yukl, 2002). According to Vroom and Yetton leaders will usually choose one of the five following methods for reaching decisions: A1 – Decide alone from personal knowledge without discussion with anyone, A2 – Seek information from one or more subordinates but then decide alone, C1 – Consult with selected individuals and seek information but not solutions, and then still decide alone, C2 – Consult with the whole group together, using them as consultants, but retaining the final decision themselves and G2 – Share the problem with the whole group and mutually decide what to do (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). This theory does not attempt to determine the best way to make decisions, rather it encourages leaders to take several factors into account before deciding on what method to use. These factors relate to the time available, the decision quality, subordinates' commitment and satisfaction and the likely acceptance by them of the decision (Yukl, 2002). It appears that leaders using the five models in this theory appear more effective and also have workers who are more satisfied (Shackleton & Wale, 2000).

The context fitting theories highlight different aspects of leadership, but they have one important goal in common: they all emphasize the need for flexibility in leadership behaviour and the importance of contextual factors. Goleman (2000) found that the most effective leaders use a combination of various leadership styles – each in the right measure, and just at the right time. He uses the metaphor of the array of clubs in the golf pro's bag. Each of the clubs has its own special use, and the conditions decide when to use each club. This is how it is with leadership styles as well. This study, which was conducted by the consulting firm Hay/McBer (where Goleman is participating), involved almost 4000 executives drawn from a worldwide sample. They identified six styles of leadership: 1) *Coercive leaders* demand immediate compliance. 2) *Authoritative leaders* mobilize leaders towards a vision. 3) *Affiliative leaders* create emotional bounds and harmony. 4) *Democratic leaders* build consensus through participation. 5) *Pacesetting leaders* expect excellence and self-direction and 6) *Coaching leaders* develop people for the future.

The study also aimed to find links between leadership and emotional intelligence (which is the ability, for example, to control your own feelings, recognize others' feelings, motivate yourself and others and handle relationships), and climate and performance. Climate refers to six factors that will influence an organization's working environment. These six factors are: its *flexibility* – to what extent employees feel free to innovate without someone constantly looking over their shoulder; the employees' sense of *responsibility* to the organization; the level of *standards* that the people set; how accurate they perceive feedback to be and aptness of *rewards*; the *clarity* people have about the organization's mission and values; and the level of *commitment* to a common purpose (Goleman, 2000). The researchers found that all six leadership styles had a measurable effect on each aspect of climate, and that leaders that used a style that had a positive effect on climate had decidedly better financial results than those who did not. The conclusion was that leaders who mastered four or more factors – especially the authoritative, democratic, affiliative and coaching styles – had the best climate and business performance. And most important: the

most effective leaders switch flexibly between the leadership styles as necessary.

### **Leadership today**

Approaches to the question of leadership today contain some of the most important aspects of the above-mentioned theories. It has been recognized that successful leaders probably have certain traits that less successful leaders do not have (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). It is also acknowledged that the most effective leaders use different styles in different situations (Goleman, 2000). However, traits alone are enough to predict effective leadership (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991), and one leadership style in particular is not assumed to be the most effective (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Hargie et al. (1999) point to four considerations they have found to be central when deciding which leadership style to use: 1) the task faced by the group, 2) nature, abilities and characteristics of the members, 3) past history of the group and its members and 4) pressure and demands of the external environment.

In a world that is constantly changing, working life is becoming more complex. Every organization needs to develop flexible organizational forms to have a chance to keep pace with the environment that surrounds the organization. Each individual has more specific competencies, and the leader is no longer the one who always knows the best solutions. Effective leaders therefore need to be flexible. The leader also needs to motivate knowledge professionals and to develop a learning organization. One of America's leadership gurus, Peter Drucker, compares the modern CEO's (corporate chief executive officer) job with that of running an opera:

*You have your stars and you can't give them orders; you have the supporting cast and the orchestra; you have the people who work behind the scenes; and you have your audience. Each group is completely different. But the opera conductor has a score, and everybody has the same score. In a business you*

*have to make sure all the various groups converge to produce the desired result. This is the key to understanding what is ahead (Drucker, 2002, p. 90).*

This implies a leadership style where focus to an even larger degree is placed on the employee. It is not only a question of the way in which the leader's behaviour will affect the employee's behaviour, but also of the effect the employee's behaviour will have on the leader. This has been called transformational leadership as opposed to a transactional form of leadership (e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1994). Most of the earlier approaches on leadership (including those discussed) can be defined as transactional.

The theory of transactional and transformational leadership was developed by James McGregor Burns already in 1978, and this theory forms the basis for the new trends in leadership thinking. Some researchers even talk of a new paradigm in leadership thinking (Bass & Avolio, 1994). A transactional leader has been defined as a leader who treats relationships with followers in terms of an exchange, giving followers what they want in return for what the leader desires, and following prescribed tasks to pursue established goals (Hargie and Dickson, 2004). A transformational leader, on the other hand, is a leader who treats relationships with followers in terms of motivation and commitment, influencing and inspiring followers to give more than mechanical compliance and to improve organizational performance (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). Transformational leadership will inspire followers to reach extraordinary levels of effort (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Through the concept of transformational leadership the recognition of two leader roles is gaining ground in the leadership arena: 1) The heroic, powerful, charismatic and visionary leader and 2) The role of informal leadership, at all levels. These two roles are characterized as respectively the *new leader*, and the *superleader* (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). The new leader is an indispensable and inspirational visionary, a coach, a facilitator concerned with building a shared sense of purpose and mission, with creating a culture which ensures that everyone is aligned with the organization's goals and is skilled and empowered to go and achieve them. Many would argue that the new leader is the



transformational leader (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The new leader could preferably be a woman. It has been argued that given the significance of interpersonal competencies, women are better equipped than men for 'new leadership' roles (Steen Jensen, 2002). This is a discussion which will not be taken any further in this context.

The superleader is able to develop leadership capacity in others, developing them and empowering them, reducing their dependence on formal leaders, stimulating their motivation, commitment and creativity (Manz & Sims, 1980). The superleader will also usually be a part of the transformational leader's role, but the superleader does not necessarily have to be a formally appointed leader. What becomes more and more apparent is that leadership does not only exist through formal management positions, but is rather dispersed on all levels in the organization. Leadership functions are best carried out by people who have the interest, knowledge, skills and motivation to perform them effectively (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). The awareness and acknowledgment of informal leadership is very important in organizational life.

Research on transformational leadership has usually only focused on its positive effects (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002), while research on transactional forms of leadership has usually focused on its negative effects (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, it is important to be aware of the possible detrimental effects of transformational leadership, such as different kinds of brainwashing that have been observed in cults (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). With the transformational leader, the new leader and the superleader the focus of leadership skills is more than ever on 'soft skills' such as *communication*.

## **Communication and leadership**

The characteristics of the effective leader according to the newer leadership theories make it obvious that communication and communication skills are important parts of the leadership role. Good communication skills have in fact always been a characteristic of the effective leader (Bernard, 1938). The difference between earlier leadership theories and more recent ones is that there is a much more conscious and prominent focus on this skill today.

An extensive part of the job of most leaders or managers involves interacting with other people. They spend over 60 per cent of their working time in scheduled and unscheduled meetings with others, about 25 per cent doing desk-based work, seven per cent on the telephone and 3 per cent walking the job (Schermerhorn, 1996). This indicates the importance of communication skills in leadership/management, and the way that leaders/managers interact with people at their workplace is of great importance when it comes to almost every activity that takes place in an organization.

### **The communicating manager**

This section focuses on the importance of communication skills in management at all levels, but as senior-level management (which in this particular case is to say senior management of Segment X) was never the focus of this study, top level management are not studied in the same way as the levels further down the ladder (which is to say head of department, project management, group leaders and team leaders). Nevertheless, the importance of communication skills will be just as important at every level in an organization, perhaps with some differences as to what kind of communication skills will be most important for each leader role.

Leadership communication includes much more than simply delivering information or making effective presentations – thus it is not just a question of talking to employees. It involves all communication that leaders have with people: words spoken, information passed to them and the awareness that although command and authority are conferred, leadership is created jointly, a product of

the words shared and the conversations held that together establish and develop relationships (Mai & Akerson, 2003).

The managers' role covers a broad range of areas. The main task for a manager is to lead people to the organizational goals, but to reach goals, a varied set of challenges has to be met. The manager is supposed to manage the uncertainty that a constantly changing world is creating, give positive and negative feedback to her or his employees, manage an increasing number of knowledge professionals, manage change (Clampitt, 2005) and pass on organizational culture (e.g. Tourish & Hargie, 2004). In all these areas communication skills are of pivotal significance. Although some of these areas will not be commented on in this chapter, the awareness of them is important to the total understanding of the role of the communicating leader.

As a result of decentralization and flatter organizational structures, organizations are experiencing a growing need for leaders: group leaders, team leaders and project managers are some of the terms which are used. The main task of any manager or leader will be very much the same on every level – to lead people toward the organizational goals. It is said that the basis of all management and successful organizational development is good communication and cooperation skills (Hargie et al., 1999). As the number of leaders increases, there will be a growing need for people with good communication and cooperation skills. Managers tend to underestimate the effect their behaviour has on others and thus how their behaviour will also affect whether the organization reaches its goals or not (Hargie, Tourish & Hargie, 1994), and that, needless to say, is the key issue: *to reach the organizational goals through effective employees.*

## How leaders reach organizational goals

### *Organizational commitment*

The main challenge facing most organizational leaders is to persuade employees to work effectively in the interests of the organization as a whole. In fact this seems to be the overall issue for all leadership communication. For instance, Mai and Akerson (2003) point to three critical issues of leadership communication where the focus obviously is the interests of the organization as a whole: 1) Commitment to the organization and its goals, 2) Awareness and understanding of organizational goals and priorities, especially during change and transition and 3) Willingness and ability to help the organization become better (p. 18).

The importance of focusing on organizational goals and making them understandable is of pivotal importance to the communicating leader and his or her task of making each employee feel a commitment to their workplace. In general communication has proved to be of great significance for the employee's feeling of organizational commitment and belonging (Young, Worchel & Woehr, 1998). On a more specific level it has been found that senior management communication behaviour is more strongly associated with organizational commitment than the overall satisfaction with organizational communication (Putti, Aryee & Phua, 1990). It has also been shown that organizational commitment might be an indicator of willingness to share knowledge between employees, and that a low level of commitment will make knowledge management difficult (Hislop, 2003). Another important challenge with respect to employee commitment is that today's employees might never feel committed to any organization, at least not on a long-term basis, and the organization has to make a real effort to keep their employees for longer periods of time (Cappelli, 2000). All this indicates the importance of a stronger focus on management communication and behaviour.

One important issue when it comes to organizational commitment is that it does not necessarily lead to increased productivity (Steers, 1977), but it has been shown that employees who have frequent communication with their nearest

leader are generally more satisfied in their jobs and perform better (Becker et al, 1996). If the aim is better employee performance, it will therefore be wise to ask: "Commitment to what?" Studies on organizational commitment and job performance have revealed that commitment to supervisors was positively related to performance and was more strongly associated with performance than was commitment to organizations as a whole (Becker et al, 1996). One important implication of these results is that senior management looking to improve employee job performance should focus on commitment to supervisors rather than to organizations. This again underscores the importance of the leader's role (at all levels) and the leader's communication skills.

### *Persuasion*

Each and every day we are subjected to any number of efforts to persuade us. Commercials have become an integral part of our lives, and commercials use different techniques to try to persuade us to buy one or the other product. Some commercials will succeed in persuading you, but not another person, and vice versa.

In organizational life managers and leaders on every level are trying to sell the goals of the organization to the employees. Although not always aware of it, managers use the same techniques as used in commercials to persuade their subordinates to work toward organizational goals. Whether they succeed will depend upon their persuasion skills.

The interests of individuals and organizations do not always coincide. How can management channel employee behaviour in the desired directions? The main attribute of good management is the ability to influence and persuade others to behave in certain ways (Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 1999), and today this skill seems more important than ever. Gone are the command-and-control days of executives managing by decree (Conger, 1998). Matrix organizations and other forms of organizations are run largely by cross-functional teams. These teams are populated by people with little tolerance for unquestioned authority.

Employees no longer ask “What should I do?” but “Why should I do it?” Answering the why question is to persuade (Conger, 1998).

The manager has many reasons for trying to persuade a subordinate to complete specific tasks, behave in certain ways and meet set targets (Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 2004). All in all it is about working towards the goals of the organization. Six main reasons for persuasion attempts have been identified (Hargie & Dickson, 2004): 1) *Adoption* – the aim is to encourage the adoption of new responses, to persuade others to start doing something. 2) *Continuance* – reinforces existing responses, the aim is to persuade others to keep doing something. 3) *Improvement* – encourages greater effort, the aim is to get staff to do something better. 4) *Deterrence* – deters others from starting a new practice, the aim is to ensure that they do not start doing something. 5) *Discontinuance* – discourage existing responses, the aim is to persuade others to stop doing something. 6) *Reduction* – the aim is to get them to do something less (p. 66).

Cialdini (2001) claims that no leader can succeed without mastering the art of persuasion. Managers who are only able to use force and threat to get things done in their organization will eventually fail (Huczynski, 1996). Fortunately, skills such as these can be learnt. According to Hargie et al (1999) there are three persuasion techniques which can be used alone or together. The manager can try to persuade his or her employees through logical proof, emotional proof and personal proof. These three persuasion types were first recognized by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He stressed the importance of emphasising the rationality of the message (logos), evoke the emotions of the listener (pathos) and underline the credibility of the persuader (ethos) (Hargie et al, 2004). Although not all researchers in this area use Aristotle's terms (Conger, 1998; Cialdini, 2001), they all stress the use of the same techniques. In this context a brief description of the techniques will be given in the frame of logical proof, emotional proof and personal proof.

*Logical proof:* One way to persuade through logical proof is through an appeal to reason and logic, which actually will be the cornerstone of many persuasion efforts. A *logical argument* is thus based on reason, and reason has

been defined as 'a strategy of influencing which relies on the presentation of data and information as the basis for a logical argument that supports a request' (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001, p. 818). Other forms of logical proof are *repetition*, although repetition needs to be used with care. Too much repetition of the same request will often lead to annoyance and greater resistance (Hargie et al, 2004). *Reciprocity* is another form of logical proof, and the principle of reciprocity is that 'people repay in kind'. The aim of reciprocity is to give what you want to receive, whether it is a piece of information, resources (staff) or a drink in the bar (Cialdini, 2001). If you give something, most people will feel indebted to you, and one way to repay you will be to join your cause. *Scale of the request*, and *scarcity value* are the last two types of logical proof strategies that will be commented on. Two strategies have been identified in scale of request: 1. Door in the face (DITF) and 2. Foot in the door (FITD) (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). The door-in-the-face technique involves making a very large and often unacceptable initial request, and after this first request is rejected offering a more reasonable one. When using the foot-in-the-door technique a small request will be made at first, and when this request is accepted it will be followed by a slightly larger one, and so on. To try to persuade with the help of *scarcity value* will be to highlight unique benefits and exclusive information. The key aspect here is that people want more of what they can have less of (Cialdini, 2001).

*Emotional proof:* When making decisions there will always be emotions at play, even in the business world. Good persuaders have to be aware of emotions and able to use them in their persuasion efforts. There are several emotional aspects associated with persuasion. The first is the *threat/fear* appeal, which depends on four key dimensions (Hargie & Dickson, 2004): 1. It should really scare the target. 2. There should be a specific recommendation for overcoming the fear-arousing threat. 3. This recommended action should be accepted as effective in removing the threat. 4. The target should feel confident about being able to carry out recommended action and willing to do so. All these four factors have to be present to get the full potential out of this technique. It is also important for managers to be aware that threat or fear does not always work,

because fear at high levels will distract the target and increase anxiety, leading to a rejection of the message.

*Consistency* and *commitment* stand out like two twin types of emotional proof (Hargie et al, 2004). The thing is that we all have a strong desire to be regarded as consistent, in other words we would like to show others that we mean what we say and will do what we promise (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). The principle of consistency will therefore be that people align themselves with their clear commitments, and managers should strive to make their subordinate's commitment active, public and voluntary (Cialdini, 2001). A commitment that is voluntary, written down and made public will have a much better chance of being fulfilled than a commitment where these three stages have not been followed (Cialdini, 2001). *Moral appeals* are, needless to say, an important part of the use of emotional proof. Most people are susceptible to appeals to conscience – we have to do the right thing, otherwise we will feel bad about ourselves (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). When using this technique one has to be aware of the fact that people usually do not like a person who makes them feel guilty, and therefore will try to avoid this person in the future. For the future relationship between a manager and a subordinate it could pay to bear this in mind.

*Personal Proof:* A crucial feature of persuasion is the nature of the persuader. The authority of the persuader and the use of power will of course have an influence on whether the persuasion is a success or not (Hargie, et al, 2004; Cialdini, 2001). Other personal proof, such as the degree to which the subordinate finds the persuader to be an attractive and likeable person will also have an impact on the persuasion process. Cialdini (2001) concluded that we like people that are like us, and are more willing to say yes to their request.

To conduct successful persuasion the manager has to use as many tactics as possible. The strategy, no matter what the request is, will usually involve logical proof and emotional proof along with personal proof. As in every area of business life the successful manager is flexible.



### ***Feedback***

A feeling of uncertainty in a job is often a consequence of the lack of feedback on task performance (Clampitt & Williams, 2004). Communication audits in various organizations have revealed that employees in general feel they receive too little feedback, whether positive or negative, on the job they are doing (Hargie & Tourish, 1996; Røsdal, 1999). We all need to hear how we are doing. Not just once a year, but frequently. No system will survive without feedback, but it seems that employees around the world are expected to do just that – survive without feedback (Clampitt, 1991). Employees need to feel appreciated, and appreciation can only be given through feedback.

For some feedback will provide the recipients with the opportunity to adjust their behaviour, while for some feedback is more of matter of reinforcing self-confidence, or providing reward and motivation (Hargie & Tourish, 1996). Feedback on task performance can have an impact on motivation (Erlie, 1997) and on effectiveness in task performance (Clampitt, 1991). Many studies have been conducted on supervisor feedback and subordinate task performance and motivation (Roberts, 2003; Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). Although these studies investigate different aspects of feedback and outcome, they all find a positive correspondence between feedback and task performance and employee motivation and commitment (Ivancevich & McMahon, 1982; London, Larsen & Thisted, 1999). A lack of feedback from managers or supervisors might give the employees the impression that management does not care about them or how they are doing (Erlie, 1997).

Feedback can be given in many different ways and has many forms. At least six ways of giving feedback have been identified (Neher, 1997): 1. The feedback can be positive or negative. 2. The feedback given should preferably be given on a timely basis. 3. The feedback can be specific or vague like “This is good! Keep up the good work!” 4. The feedback can be given just once in a while or frequently. 5. The manager can take the employee’s feelings into consideration when giving feedback or she/he can choose not to. 6. The

feedback should preferably be given by someone with some form of credibility regarding professional competence.

In order for feedback to be effective, the goal of the feedback act must be identified, and appropriate behaviour chosen from all of these six dimensions will have to be used.

### *Communication climate*

Employee commitment is directly related to how open their organization is with information (Mai & Akerson, 2003). The communication climate is another aspect of organizational life that will be affected by management communication. It can be defined as the prevailing atmosphere in which ideas and information are exchanged; an open climate promotes collaborative working, which, on the other hand, is undermined by a closed communication climate (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). The leadership style which managers choose to exhibit and which in practice will show true values, and decision strategies, will to a large extent influence the way the employees experience the communication climate (Hargie & Tourish, 1996). According to Goldhaber (1993) the communication climate is dependent on four factors: 1) the individual's perception of communication sources and conditions in the organization, 2) the organization members' perception of what and how much of the internal information is accessible, 3) perception of the organization per se and 4) whether the employees are supported and rewarded for their behaviour. All four factors are in their own way dependent on management behaviour. Managers should therefore be encouraged to develop their communication skills and how to use them effectively in the organization (Hargie, Tourish & Hargie, 1994).

### **The communicating leader in the matrix organization**

In the matrix organization the communicating leader will have to be aware of several important aspects and challenges. The communication challenges for the leader will of course be very much the same in every form of organizational structure, but different structures might lead to different focus. The overall challenge in the matrix structure is that as a result of this structure, there will be two organizations for every project: the functional organization and the project organization (see a more accurate description of the organization in question in Chapter 1, and a more thorough description of the matrix structure in the first chapter of this literature review). These two organizations will operate with relatively independent goals as well as their one mutual goal – to make the delivery as effective as possible. Working together towards this mutual goal and at the same time addressing their organization's (whether the project or hierarchical organization) individual goals is probably the most serious challenge for the leaders in the matrix organization. To meet this challenge we need managers with good leadership and communication skills.

In this particular matrix organization each of the ongoing projects consists of several teams. Their choice of structure is mainly due to the size and length (in time) of the projects. Each team will have their team leader who will report to the project manager and the functional manager, as well as address the team members' interests. An organization that chooses to use a matrix structure will experience a need for more employees with management functions. Galbraith (2002) points to the importance of engaging people with high interpersonal-relations skills (such as conflict solving, networking, persuasion skills and so on) in the different leader roles which the matrix structure usually requires. He also says that technical skills are desirable but secondary, which is in accordance with the newer leadership theories (Goleman, 1995).

A comparison was made between attributes of a project manager and attributes of a functional manager. It was found that interpersonal and communication skills were important attributes of both the project and the functional manager role (Dunn, 2001). But there will also be, and probably should

be, distinct differences in the roles of the project and functional managers, and it has been shown that these two managers should influence quite different areas in the matrix organization when conducting effective projects (Katz & Allen, 1985).

There will be many communication challenges for the leader in the matrix organization, and these are challenges that every leader in the matrix has to relate to. It has been said about the matrix structure that the key advantage is the legitimization of direct lateral communication, while the key disadvantage is the creation of two lines of supervision, with the potential for conflict between project team members and between the project and functional managers over skills resources (Dunn, 2001). According to Dunn (2001) the literature cites the two-boss issue as one of the most difficult situations in a matrix (Goldhaber, 1993; Erlie, 1997); with the potential of causing conflicts both with project team members relating to the different managers and dissent between these managers due to differing priorities.

The team leader has to prevent conflicts internally in his team and across teams working in the same project. Ideally there should be processes that describe how to communicate and coordinate across teams, and processes that describe how to resolve inter-team conflicts (Galbraith, 2002). To prevent chain-of-command problems from occurring, a clear directive – not open for interpretation by the informal organization – should be issued to all affected parties (Anderson & Fleming, 1990).

### **Team management and team leader communication**

When it comes to team management, the team composition will be of great importance. Although the various tasks that are to be undertaken by the different teams place some limitations on how to compose it, when putting people together in a team some precautions might pay off.

According to Yukl (2002) there is a growing trend in organizations to give more responsibility for important activities to teams. As a consequence of the

matrix structure, where teams play an important role, the question of teams, especially the management of them, is of great interest in this context.

The word team usually refers to a small task group in which the members have a common purpose, interdependent roles and complementary skills (Yukl, 2002). The members of the team hold each other mutually responsible for success or failure, and the underlying philosophy is that if one of them looks good, they all look good (Hargie et al, 2004). The research literature identifies a number of consistent benefits from team organization. Such benefits are, among others, improved quality of working life for employees, enhanced job satisfaction, heightened levels of worker identification and commitment (Glassop, 2002). But these benefits do not appear automatically. Introducing team working in a successful way requires clear goals, time and supportive communication (Hargie et al, 2004).

There will be different types of teams and they differ, for example, according to how much influence each has over the mission, membership and continued existence of the team. Teams will also differ with respect to the functional diversity of the team members and to the (if any) leader's position and how she or he was chosen. Sundstrom et al. (1990) have described four different teams within organizations: Advice teams, Action teams, Project teams and Production teams. In this context the project team is of greatest interest. One of the best-known and most common types of project team is the cross-functional team (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001), and as the cross-functional team is the most relevant in the matrix organization, this is the type of team which will be focused on here.

Cross-functional teams are being used increasingly in organizations to improve coordination of interdependent activities among specialized subunits (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Typically the team will include representatives from each of the functional subunits involved in an activity or project. This might also involve external representatives (Yukl, 2002), but as this is not relevant for this particular case, this issue will not be discussed here. The cross-functional team offers many potential benefits to the organization (Ford & Randolph, 1992). The

team will allow efficient, flexible deployment of personnel and resources to solve problems as they are discovered. The functional expertise is preserved as the team members are still in contact with their respective functional areas. New skills might be learnt because of the necessary cooperation with the other members of the team, and the team members might also learn to approach a problem or a new task from different angles or with a different perspective because of cooperation with people with other backgrounds (McCauly & Douglas, 2005).

These potential advantages of the cross-functional team can also create difficulties for the team leader. The functional diversity of the team members increases communication barriers. It can be difficult to get enough participation from team members, especially if they have responsibilities in their functional units or if they are members of other teams as well. For the team leader it can be difficult and time consuming to make decisions if functional leaders also have to be involved in the decision making, and this might put great pressure on the team leader as teams like this often work within a tight time frame (Yukl, 2002). To deal with such potential problems in the best way possible the cross-functional team leader needs to be designated, have some position power and be in possession of good interpersonal skills (Yukl, 2002). The challenge for the leaders is to improve communication, transform groups into teams and free the human factor to fulfil its potential as the chief engine of business success (Tourish, 1997).

The leadership skills and behaviour which seem to be of great importance to the team leader are very much in line with the rest of the leadership aspects which have been discussed in this chapter. Yukl (2002) points out five skills which have proved to be relevant for team leaders:

- 1 Technical expertise: the leader needs the ability to communicate about technical matters with team members from various functional backgrounds.

- 2 Administrative skills: the leader needs the ability to plan and organize the project activities, select qualified members of the team, and handle budgeting and financial responsibilities.
- 3 Interpersonal skills: the leader must be able to understand the needs and values of team members to influence them, resolve conflicts and build cohesiveness.
- 4 Cognitive skills: the leader must be able to understand the team's complex internal and external relationships and how the various functions are relevant to the success of the project.
- 5 Political skills: the leader must be able to develop coalitions and gain resources, assistance and approval from senior management and other relevant parties.

Barry (1991) describes four leadership roles that appear to be essential to teams that solve problems, manage projects or develop policy – whether using one or several persons. These four roles are 1) envisioning, 2) organizing, 3) social integrating and 4) external spanning. Envisioning provides a shared objective; organizing helps the team to decide how to attain it, social integrating helps maintain internal cohesiveness, and external spanning helps to keep group decisions compatible with the needs of stakeholders outside the team.

An important part of the organizational life is meetings. Actually, some managers might experience working life as one uninterrupted meeting (Hargie et al., 2004). To make a team work, regular meetings are necessary. Not every meeting is equally successful, and the manager is often to blame.

An effective leader ensures that the group uses a systematic decision process (process control), but does not dominate the discussion (content control). The job of conducting a meeting is a difficult one because the group is likely to be ineffective if the leader is either too passive or too domineering (Yukl, 2002). There are several guidelines for leading and conducting meetings, and they often focus on different aspects of conducting meetings. Two examples of such guidelines will be given here, one focuses particularly on goals in relation to

the objectives of the team, and one is more of a general guideline for conducting the effective meeting:

- What did we achieve last week that contributed directly to the organization's mission?
- What do we want to achieve this week?
- Who is responsible for what, when will it be done, and what will be different when they have finished?
- What specifically can we do better?
- What can we change in how we work?
- What can we change in the organization?
- What added value have we brought to this enterprise this week (Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 2004, p. 104)?

Yukl (2002) offers these guidelines to an effective way of conducting meetings:

- Inform people about necessary preparations for a meeting.
- Share essential information with group members.
- Describe the problem without implying the cause or solution.
- Allow ample time for idea generation and evaluation.
- Separate idea generation from idea evaluation.
- Encourage and facilitate participation.
- Encourage positive restatement and idea building.
- Use systematic procedures for solution evaluation.
- Encourage members to look for an integrative solution.
- Encourage consensus but do not insist on it.
- Clarify responsibilities for implementation (p. 334).

Meetings are necessary but they can introduce more complexity and more problems when improperly used. Some committees are used not to reach decisions but to put them off, not to obtain employee input but to 'sell' a



previously reached conclusion, and not to develop subordinates but to hide incompetence. On occasion, emotional issues overshadow the factual aspects of the decision to be made, and the sensitive interpersonal relations that emerge require understanding and delicate handling (Newstrom & Davis, 1993). Guidelines like the above are highly relevant for every type of meeting conducted by every type of manager, and might help them to prevent the type of problems mentioned by Newstrom & Davis. The conducting of meetings will be an issue for discussion in chapter 8 – Teams in the matrix organization.

### **2b.3 Summary of Chapters 2a and 2b**

This literature review started with an examination of how the view of the organization has changed during the past hundred years or so to provide the necessary background for the study to be presented in this thesis and also for the rest of the literature review.

In a study like the one to be presented in this thesis the organization in question forms the context of the study. In this case a *Norwegian, medium-sized matrix organization* represents the background, and therefore literature had to be reviewed on both organizational structures in general and the matrix structure in particular.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the goals of this thesis has been to shed light on Norwegian organizational life and in particular organizational communication within Norwegian organizations. Thus, a review of relevant literature on both communication in general and organizational communication in particular has been given. One of the things that becomes quite clear is the lack of Norwegian authors, especially within the field of organizational communication. Indeed, it has been impossible to find organizational research conducted in Norway where the *main* focus has been organizational communication. As researchers worldwide agree on the importance of quality organizational communication (Clampitt & Downs, 1993; Hargie et al, 2004), there is a need to look at this phenomenon in a Norwegian context as well.

Quite an extensive review of leadership theories was given. As the leader is recognized as a vital link in the organizational communication chain, it was important to give the literature on leadership a closer look. There has always been an interest in what makes some people better leaders than others. An early branch of leadership research focused on personal *traits* or relatively stable and enduring characteristics as the key to leadership success. Although researchers left behind the idea that physical traits especially had an influence on how well one person performed as a leader a long time ago, the literature review has shown that there is still great interest in different leadership traits and skills.

It is easy to understand the importance of the communication *skills* of the leader when looking at the demands on the contemporary leader. It is also easy to understand that the leader is characterized as the most important link in the organizational communication chain. According to Mai & Akerson (2003) the contributions that the employees make and the likelihood that they will choose to stay with the organization will depend to a great extent on how well the leader *connects* with the people in the organization. Thus, as it seems that effective leadership and communication skills go hand in hand, a review of literature on this last topic was given at the end of the literature review.

In addition to leadership traits and skills, a review of leadership theories concerning leadership *styles* has been given. A number of researchers soon came to the conclusion that traits alone could not account for the success of a leader. A leader has to alter his or her style according to both situation and people, and the successful leader knows when to use each different styles. Current leadership research focuses on all of these aspects, and the ability to be flexible is emphasized. What seems to be clear from the review is that the leadership role is in many ways becoming more demanding. Employees are better educated and thus place more demands on their leader; globalization affects nearly every organization and makes competition even harder and on top of all this, the leader of today is not only supposed to lead but also to enable each employee to lead himself or herself (Manz & Sims, 1980).

### **Research questions**

In addition to reviewing literature, an effort has been made to use the matrix organization as the thread through both of these chapters by linking most of the relevant themes to this organization structure.

Several authors have pointed out the need to look more closely into matrix structuring in general. In 1992 Ford & Randolph noted that the literature on matrix structure and organizations is dominated by anecdotal and opinion-based books and articles. These authors claim that the last decade's academic interest (in matrix structuring) has waned completely and with the absence of empirical research within the field, old anecdotal stories and principles have become commonly accepted and taken for granted as definitive facts. In a more recent article by Engwall & Källkvist (2000) the problem of the lack of empirical studies of the matrix structure was raised once again, which might indicate that the academic interest in matrix structuring in fact has waned since the 70s and 80s.

As long as matrix structuring is a widely used organization form, also in Norway, there is a need to examine matrix organizations more closely to achieve more knowledge about this structure based on empirical data. As for Norway, there is also a need to examine the phenomenon of organizational communication set in a Norwegian context.

Thus this study aims to contribute to two areas of organization literature and studies through extending empirical research:

- 1) Organizational communication and leadership communication in a Norwegian context and
- 2) More insight into the matrix organization in terms of leadership and communication

This will be done by answering the following main research question:

*What constitutes an effective Norwegian matrix organization in terms of communication and leadership as perceived by its members/employees?*

Providing an answer to this question is the main objective for this (thesis) study. After careful consideration of the literature reviewed, seven guiding research questions were formulated:

1. Are there special leadership skills and styles that are particularly important in the matrix organization?
2. What are the main challenges of running a matrix structured organization?
3. What are the effects on communication between functional and project management in the matrix organization (especially in relation to roles and responsibility)?
4. How and in what ways can management influence the employee's feeling of commitment in the matrix organization?
5. How and in what ways do managers attempt to persuade the different audiences in the matrix organization towards reaching organizational goals?
6. What role does management feedback and upward (employee) communication play in relation to employee satisfaction in the matrix organization?
7. How does the management of teams affect the effectiveness of the matrix structure?

As the research questions and objective for this study have been defined, the next step is to turn to the methodology used to help find the answers to these questions.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

### **3.1 Introduction**

The objective of this study is to answer the main research question:

*What constitutes an effective Norwegian matrix organization in terms of communication and leadership as perceived by its members/ employees?*

This question will be sought answered through seven related guiding research questions, listed in chapter 2a, and in the following chapter the methodology used to approach these questions is described.

To meet the objective of this study it was necessary to have the possibility of entering one or several organizations. In this study I chose to focus on one particular organization. The main reason for this was that my master thesis was conducted in the same organization two years earlier, and therefore I was to some extent familiar with the research field before this present study started.

The objective of my master thesis was to audit the internal communication flow in the entire organization (see chapter 1 – Introduction, for a further description). Thus this was a study within the same research area as the present one, but with a much broader angle. That study was conducted as a survey, using questionnaires as the main data gathering technique. The method was based on earlier studies that have shown that internal communication flow in an organization can be investigated by using a quantitative approach. Many experts on organizational communication have used questionnaires and other quantitative methods when approaching this area (Downs, 1988, Downs et al., 2004; Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979; Hargie & Tourish, 1996, 2000). When the population is large it is easier to conduct an analysis of internal communication using for instance questionnaires.

However, in the present study a qualitative approach was chosen. The main reason for this was that the organization this time wanted a qualitative approach. Both I and especially the organization wished to investigate further

some of those questions that were raised after the previous study, and a qualitative approach might provide the opportunity of getting a more thorough insight into the area of internal communication and leadership. The organization wanted the study to take place in one particular part of the organization, Project I. This was the second reason for choosing a qualitative approach. The population was relatively small (about eighty persons), and thus it felt natural and also justifiable to make an in-depth analysis of the current topic. The master thesis is in this context to a certain degree used as a pilot study, and I entered the research field with the knowledge gained through that former study.

### **3.2 Qualitative research**

There are many definitions of what qualitative research is, some definitions more extended than others, but they all contain a few important similarities. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research like this:

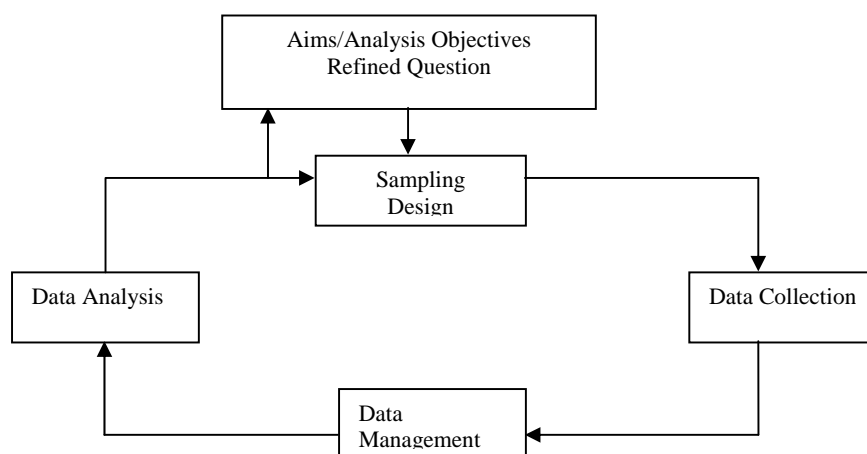
*Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the researcher in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practises that make the world visible. These practises transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (p. 3)*

Denzin and Lincoln stress the fact that qualitative research takes place in the real world. There is nothing experimental about it – the researcher does not manipulate the surroundings. It is the researcher who, through different methods and his or her own interpretations of the world will have to make sense of what is happening. And there seems to be agreement that this is the essence of qualitative research. Creswell (1998) offers a somewhat simpler definition, but the content is more or less the same:

*Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).*

In relation to the research objective for this thesis, a research approach which allowed the researcher to get to know the research field in the most natural way possible was desirable. How these issues were met during this study, will be discussed under the heading *Getting started*.

Creswell (1998) stresses the importance of distinct methodological traditions in qualitative research. It has not been usual to differentiate between different research designs within qualitative research. This might be the reason that qualitative research often is so difficult to pin down. It has been claimed that qualitative research is most often designed as it is being done. It is anything but standardized or impersonal (Van Maanen, 1998), it is flexible and has an emergent character. How to conduct qualitative research depends on the aims, objectives and research questions (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Like Van Maanen (1998), Crabtree & Miller (1992) also stress the fact that qualitative research is an ongoing process where data collection and analysis often occur concurrently, and that initial analysis often changes sampling strategies and collection methods.



**Figure 9 The Iterative Qualitative Research Process (from Crabtree & Miller, 1992).**

Figure 9 illustrates how the development of a qualitative research process often will proceed. The importance of the issues shown in the figure will also be discussed in relation to the implementation of the present study later in this chapter.

In spite of these important aspects of qualitative research, Creswell (1998) states that it would be more practical to distinguish between different research designs like it is normal to do in the quantitative traditions. This issue is of great relevance in the present study, as I have chosen to use the case study as a methodological approach. Yin (1994) describes the case study as a distinct research design.

Multiple, theoretical paradigms claim use of qualitative research methods and strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The different researchers will approach the research aims, objectives and questions with different assumptions depending on theoretical background but also on empirical data which in this case study is most relevant. This study is based on a constructivist view, which among others stresses the assumption that different persons experience the same event in different ways depending on how each individual perceives the surroundings. Another assumption is that the researcher and informant will mutually influence each other. There is no way to avoid this, and therefore it is important to be aware of this fact.

Qualitative research is used in many different disciplines, and qualitative research does not have a distinct set of methods or strategies that is entirely its own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). But it is possible as for instance Yin (1994) does to define a research design using one or several qualitative methods. In the study conducted here it was natural to use the case study as a research design.



### 3.2.1 The case study

The main reason for using the case study as a frame in this context is, as Yin (1994) puts it: the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as (among others) organizational and managerial processes (p.3). According to Yin (1994) a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The objective of this study is to find *what constitutes effective internal communication in a matrix organization as experienced by the employees*, and internal communication is very much a real-life event. It is an ongoing organizational and managerial process, which can not be separated from its context – the organization.

Yin (1994) views the case study as a research strategy in line with other research strategies with pre-specified procedures. Stake (1994/2000) promotes a different definition of the case study as *not* a methodological choice but a choice of *what* to be studied. In his opinion we choose to study the case using whatever methods we find necessary or suitable. A case study is both the process of inquiry of a case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 1994/ 2000). This is a much broader definition than the one Yin (1994) uses, and more in line with the normal qualitative research traditions. Nevertheless, both definitions have been of significance when deciding to use the case study as a frame for this present study.

In accordance with Yin's definition the present study is defined as a case study because:

- The case is a “bounded system” – bounded by the part of the organization where this study takes place, namely the Segment X, and even more narrowly: Project I. This case study was also bounded by time: Project I is a large project, running over several years. Different teams, doing different jobs start up and shut down when the job is done, while the project as such is still running. It was not possible for me to follow the project from start to end, so I decided to follow the start-up period of this project. The start-up

period for this project lasted about two years. After this time, the two work packages/teams that I had followed started to shut down.

- Multiple sources of data-gathering techniques have been used to provide an in-depth picture of internal communication in this organization.
- The context plays an important part in trying to meet the research objective.

It is desirable to be able to generalize the results from this study to other organizations with the same organizational structure. Stake (2000) would call this an *instrumental* case study, which is a case study where a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. In this case that would mean a greater insight into the area of internal communication in a matrix structured organization.

### **3.2.2 The qualitative research interview**

This heading is from Kvale's book from 1997, and it is no coincidence that I have chosen to use this as a heading in this context. It is fair to characterize the interviews that were conducted in this case study as qualitative research interviews. In the introduction to his book, Kvale proposes the following definition of a qualitative research interview:

*The qualitative research interview aims at understanding the world through the eyes of the interviewee, emphasising the importance of the experiences of different people and revealing their perception of the world, prior to scientific explanations (Kvale, 1997, p. 18).*

The meaning of this definition will, although not explicitly, be discussed throughout this section.

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings. The whole purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meanings they

make of that experience (Seidman, 1998). Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first, because the spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity. It does not matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers – the ambiguity will still be present. Still it seems like everyone, not just social researchers relies on the interview as a source of information, with the assumptions that interviewing results in the true and accurate pictures of informants' life (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

In search for the true and accurate picture of an informant's life many qualitative researchers choose an ethnographic approach (i.e. Gilchrist, 1994). An ethnography is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 1998). Ethnographers do not start with a hypothesis to test, but rather they attempt to discover a group's culture, or shared sense of reality (Gilchrist, 1994). The researchers study the *meanings* of behaviour, language and interactions of the culture-sharing group (Creswell, 1998). To be able to study these meanings in the most accurate way possible, the following theorem from Spradley (1979) becomes important to every ethnographer: "Rather than *studying* people, ethnography means *learning from* people" (p. 3, my italicising). Spradley (1979) stresses that the main idea behind the ethnographic interview is that it is the informant who is supposed to teach the interviewer – not the other way around. The important thing is to let the informant talk about how she or he experiences life in his or her own voice. Especially when doing research in cultures one already is familiar with this seems like an easy task. The truth is that it is not. As Fontana & Frey (2000) also point out – there will always be some sort of linguistic ambiguity. It is a fact that one expression might have different meaning from one subculture to another. If the researcher is not aware of this he or she is in danger of imposing his own meaning on what the informant says – and that might not be the correct interpretation. Depending somewhat on the informant there is also a risk that the informant (if he or she suspects the researcher to be ignorant in the particular area) automatically will translate whatever he or she believes to be difficult for an outsider to understand. All this is

a threat to the main idea behind doing ethnography. If the researcher takes some precautions this could to some extent be avoided. The questions have to be carefully designed, and Spradley (1979) divides the ethnographic questions into three different kinds: descriptive questions, structural questions and contrast questions. In relation to making one's own interpretations of what is being said, it seems like this will always be a part of doing qualitative research. Spradley (1979) claims that every ethnographic description is a translation. But at the same time one can not escape the fact that the quality of the interview to a large degree depends on the skills of the interviewer. Creswell (1998) points out that a skilled interviewer is a listener rather than a speaker during the interview, and a good listener is more concerned about what the informant actually says, than imposing his or her own interpretations of what is being said. In an organizational context the nondirective interview is widely recognized as a "bread-and-butter" research tool for ethnographic organizational researchers (Mason, 2001). In a context like the one this case study has been conducted in, the culture will to a large degree be familiar to the researcher and because of this familiarity it might be easy to jump to conclusions about what is being said. The importance of being a good listener will then be even more important.

The main focus for this research project was on how the employees experienced the internal communication (in relation to leadership and organizational structure) in their organization. In order to meet such an objective it seemed natural to choose an ethnographic approach (Bantz, 2001). Case studies have often been used to investigate organizational communication (Arneson & Query, 2001), and the present context is defined as a case study – bounded by time and space, but it is a case study with an *ethnographic approach* in that it seeks *the view of the informants* on the internal communication flow (in terms of leadership and communication) in their organization.

The use of the term 'informant' also needs some clarification. In qualitative research there will always be a question about what to call the participants in the study. To many researchers it is important to call them something that will reflect the participants' relationship to the study and the researcher in the most correct

way. In ethnography it has been usual to call them “teachers” (Spradley, 1979), but there are many choices available. Other terms that have been used are *consultant*, *friend*, *respondent*, *actor*, *participant*, *interviewee* and *source* (Gilchrist, 1994). Gilchrist herself uses the term *informant*, which is to mean “the individual who provides information”, simply because it still seems to be the most commonly used term in the literature (p. 71). In the context of this present case study it felt natural to use the same term and the same definition of the term as selected by Gilchrist.

According to Kvale (1997) the qualitative research interview is based on an everyday conversation, but with a professional approach. In line with this, Spradley (1979) also talks about how the ethnographic interview in many ways resembles the friendly conversation, as many of the characteristics of a conversation can be identified in the interview. In an organizational setting Lee (1999) calls the interview approach the *conversational interview technique*. The conversational interview is usually implemented in a *semistructured* format. This is to say that the interviewer pursues predetermined themes and is free to pursue and probe for additional meaning. But to prevent the conversational interview from developing into a pure conversation, it is of great importance that the researcher enters the interview situation with a high degree of a conceptual clarity as to the interrelationships among the study’s purpose, the research questions and the analytic method (Lee, 1999). According to the same author the conversational interview is useful for both generating new theory and for testing theory.

It seems like there is an overall agreement among writers on qualitative methodology that the qualitative interview is characterized by a form which in many ways is familiar with that of a conversation (Spradley, 1979; Lee, 1999; Kvale, 1997). The interviewer and the informant play more or less equal parts in the interview setting. The questions asked are always open ended, but with differing structures (Flick, 2002), encouraging the informant to talk about whatever is the focus of the interview. And probably most important; it is the informant who tells the researcher how it is, not the other way around.

### 3.2.3 Focus group interview

The group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique (Madriz, 2000) that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting. Thus this technique straddles the line between formal and informal interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 651).

The term *focus group interview* which I have chosen to use in this context has normally been associated with marketing research. Here the purpose has mainly been to gather consumer opinion about different aspects in relation to a product. This format has also been used to a considerable extent by political parties and candidates, and it has also been used in sociological research (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The popularity of focus groups has increased tremendously, particularly during the 1990s (Dickson, 2000).

The main advantages of group interviews include that they are low cost and rich in data, that they stimulate the answerers and support them in remembering events, and that they can lead beyond the answers of the single interview (Flick, 2002). One of the main problems related to this technique is how to document the data in a way which allows the identification of individual speakers and the differentiation between statements of several parallel speakers (Flick, 2002). In this particular case study this problem was met by both videotaping and tape-recording the interview.

There are several ways to conduct a focus group interview. The researcher has to make the decisions well in advance on how structured it should be, who the participants will be, what (if any) questions should be asked and to what degree the researcher should be involved in the discussion (Lee, 1999). How involved the researcher should be depends to a large degree on the interview's purpose (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The purpose might for instance be exploratory. Then the interview will be conducted in order to test a methodological technique or for the pretesting of other information gathering techniques. The exploratory interview is designed to establish familiarity with a topic or setting; the interviewer can be both directive or not, but the questions are usually unstructured or open-ended (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The same format is

used in interviews with a phenomenological purpose. Here the intent is to tap intersubjective meaning with depth and diversity. Through the focus group interview conducted in this case study I wanted to tap the intersubjective meanings of the participants about the internal communication (in terms of leadership and organizational structure) in their organization. More exactly I wanted their meanings about the quality of the internal communication in their own organization.

In relation to an organizational context it is important to stress that a focus group interview might provide other data than just the content of the talk. For instance; when doing research on organizational communication it will be, as a result of more than two people gathered in a room, possible to also discover the *process* of communication, which might be of interest to the researcher (Dickson, 2000). Despite this opportunity of gathering information at two different levels at one go, Dickson (2000) is uncertain about the focus group interview's contribution to improving corporate communication.

Focus groups are used on their own or in combination with other methods (Flick, 2002). In this case study the focus group interview was used in combination with single interviews and observation.

### **3.2.4 Observation**

When reading about qualitative research, one might get the impression that qualitative research *is* observation. When qualitative research was associated only with studying foreign cultures, this was to a large degree true. In qualitative research conducted today, observation is usually one form of data gathering technique used in combination with other techniques, and observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied (Yin, 1994).

In a case study, observations serve as yet another source of evidence and they will often range from formal to more casual data collection activities. Observations of meetings in a work place will for instance represent formal data collection activities, while observations of conversations during lunchtime in a

work place might represent the casual collection activities. In this case study, both formal and more casual collection activities were conducted.

In the literature it is normal to distinguish between direct observation and participant-observation. This differentiation reflects to what degree the researcher takes part in what is being observed. Is the researcher a participant *and* observer or a complete observer? When direct observation is being conducted, the researcher operates as a complete observer. He or she does not take any part in what is under observation, and as much as possible he or she tries to remain unobtrusive by keeping in the background (Creswell, 1998). During this particular case study the *formal* data gathering through observation was conducted as *direct observation*.

Some authors claim that observation as a data gathering technique is underutilized in organizational research and that the potential of these techniques to produce substantial insight through the generation and testing of theory is overlooked (Lee, 1999, p. 100). It is not only in organizational research that use of observation as a data gathering technique has been an issue of discussion. The role of observation as a sociological research method has been central to methodological discussions throughout the history of qualitative research (Flick, 2002). But according to the same author it is possible to say that in general most approaches stress that practices, like for instance organizational communication, are only accessible through observation and that interview and narratives merely make the accounts of practises accessible instead of the practices themselves. The claim is often made for observation that it enables the researcher to find out how something factually works out (Flick, 2002).

In a positivistic world the researcher would be absolutely sure that what he sees is how it factually works out. But in the post modernistic world this is another issue of discussion: is it possible or not for the researcher to maintain objectivity during observation and is it possible that the setting in which the research is being done will not be affected by the researcher (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)? This particular issue is of great importance for qualitative



research in general. It has been commented on earlier in this chapter, but to find any solutions to these questions will by far extend the objective of this chapter.

### **3.3 Reliability and validity in qualitative research**

How to assess qualitative research is a problem which still is unsolved, and this unsolved problem is particularly difficult regarding the legitimacy of this type of research (Flick, 2002). Nevertheless, there is an agreement among qualitative researchers that there are ways to take care of the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Some of these precautions offered by relevant authors will be commented upon in relation to the case study conducted here.

*Essentially a person – more or less fallibly – is observing, interviewing and recording, while modifying the observation, interviewing and recording devices from one field trip to the next. Thus, you need to ask, about yourself and your colleagues, how valid and reliable is this person likely to be as an information-gathering instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 38)?*

As Miles & Huberman point out, the quality of qualitative research is to a large degree dependent on the researcher. According to the same authors there are some markers of good qualitative researcher-as-instrument. These are as follows:

- Some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study.
- Strong conceptual interests.
- A multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline.
- Good “investigative” skills, including doggedness, the ability to draw people out, and the ability to ward off premature closure (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 38).

When conducting a study in relation to a PhD-thesis it is fair to say that the researcher is still quite inexperienced. But it is also fair to say that in this context the researcher was both familiar with the phenomenon of interest (organizational

communication), and with the setting as a result of conducting my master thesis within the same area of interest and in the same organization. A strong conceptual interest has also been present in that quite extensive investigation of some of the most important concepts in this context had to be done both in relation to the prior master thesis and prior to the actual start-up of this project. These concepts have, among others, been: communication, organizations, organizational communication, leadership and organizational structure. It has also been a study with a multidisciplinary approach, in that interviews, focus interview and observation have been used as information gathering techniques. It is hard for me to judge my own investigative skills, but I suspect that this is where my inexperience is at its most visible.

According to Kvale (1997) the three concepts of generalization, reliability and validity have reached a status as some form of holy trinity within modern social science. Generalization means in short that it is possible to generalize the results from one population and situation in one study to another population or situation. This case study has been defined as an *instrumental* case study (Stake, 2000), which means that the intention of this case study has been to gain greater insight into the area of organizational communication, and then to be able to generalize the results to other, similar organizations. Reliability points to the chances of getting the same results if someone else were to replicate the study. It is therefore of vital importance that the researcher does in a very careful way explain every step in the entire data gathering process. Validity refers to in what degree the study actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Kvale (1997) believes the holy trinity to be positivistic in its origin, and he claims that the three concepts often are used by researchers to disqualify qualitative research. That is the reason that some researchers within the qualitative tradition reject those concepts as suppressive, positivistic concepts which interfere with a creative and liberating qualitative research. Many researchers within the qualitative tradition have made use of everyday linguistic expressions, such as trustworthiness, dependable, security and confirmatory (Crabtree & Miller, 1992) instead of the three English-Latin expressions generalization, reliability and

validity. Nevertheless, in this case study I have chosen to keep the three English-Latin expressions, because it seems like these are the expressions that most people are familiar with.

A standard intention of interpretive approaches in research is to give voice to the participants (Creswell, 1998). In this case study this was attempted at mainly through *interviewing* the participants. In making use of qualitative interviews one should pay just as much attention to generalization, reliability and validity as one would do in every other kind of study (Lee, 1999). Kvale (1997) stresses the importance of integrating the three concepts into the whole process of qualitative research. In line with other authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lederman et al, 2001) Kvale is especially concerned with the concept of validity. According to Lee (1999) validity refers to the shared true variance between the researcher's phenomenon of interest and its scored measurement. Both the generalization and the reliability of a study are dependent on the validity of the study.

The main rule is to control or validate every action conducted throughout the study, and then to validate one's own interpretations of what is being said or what is being done (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the case study conducted here these demands were met through extensive discussions with my two supervisors before something was to happen in my case study. It was also important to have the opportunity to discuss my impressions and thoughts with these two experienced researchers after something had taken place. I also had valuable discussions with some of the leaders of the organization, both before the data gathering started, and also during the time the data gathering lasted. Both my research objectives and preliminary results were (to some extent) the topics of conversations with the management. I also presented (in a formal way) preliminary results for most of the leaders involved in the study, and they gave me feedback on those. As a result of that presentation the organization initiated a program (focusing on communication and attitudes) in the organization and I regard that as an indicator of validity in my study.

Kvale (1997) summarizes the main elements for ensuring the quality of qualitative research as follows: a) a substantial amount of time spent by the researcher on site; b) intensive researcher contact with the site's participants, operations and activities; and c) an active, dynamic effort on the part of the researcher to understand these participants, operations and activities in their natural context. All these main elements were aimed at in an honest and serious way, as will be described in more detail in the data collection section of this chapter.

This study being a case study it is also natural to look at Yin's (1994) view on how to establish a case study's quality. He argues that four "tests" are commonly applied in the establishment of quality in any social scientific study. These are:

- *Construct validity*, which is to establish correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. To do this Yin recommends three specific tactics. First, multiple sources of evidence can be accessed in order to capitalize on a source's unique strengths and to compensate for its weaknesses. In this case study this was attempted at through the use of interviewing, observation and focus group interview as data collection strategies. Second, the researcher might establish a chain of evidence. That is, the obtained data should result from a sequential process that follows or shows a clear and compelling logic. During this study it seemed natural to start with the observations. Then came the interviews, which were conducted while I was still observing and I continued with the observation after finishing the interviews. I ended the data gathering with a focus group interview. Third, key informants should review the case study report to ensure its veracity, honesty and clarity. Here the intention is to present the report for all of the participants, before it leaves the hand of this researcher. As mentioned earlier there were discussions and presentations of preliminary results throughout the period of data gathering.

- *Internal validity* is to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions. Yin claims that internal validity is not relevant for case studies like the one conducted here. Internal validity is only

relevant for explanatory or causal studies, and not for descriptive or exploratory studies like this one.

- *External validity*, which is to establish a domain to which a study's findings can be generalized. Yin claims that the external validity can only be tested through replicating the study in another situation. This has not been possible to do with this case study. One other way to test external validity in this context might be to compare the results of this case study to other similar case studies, conducted by other researchers.

- *Reliability*, which is to what extent the data collection procedures can be repeated with the same results. In order to be able to do this a detailed specification and data documentation should be kept throughout the study. Just about everything that has been said and done during this case study has been written down.

There seem to be agreement among qualitative researchers that what is regarded as true depends to a large degree on the subjective opinion of both the researcher and the informants. This particular case study report is an honest attempt at telling the story in the most correct way possible, trying to meet as many demands as possible in order to ensure the quality of the study. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that my reproduction of what is being said, or what I have seen is my own interpretation of these events.

### **3.4 The Case Study in question**

#### **3.4.1 Getting started**

This project has been, as discussed earlier, part of a larger project (P2005, see chapter 1 for further description), and the organizations attached to this project were obliged to be part of one or several research projects. On account of this and also on account of my prior knowledge of the organization (see chapter 1 - Introduction) it was not difficult to gain entry to the organization in question as such. The organization wanted me to do a qualitative study in order to investigate further questions raised in my master thesis. The present management agreed on the research objectives for this study, and they also helped the research process by getting me in touch with potential informants.

As I already knew the organization from my earlier project I did not have to use a lot of time to learn and understand the organizational structure, I already knew the different leaders, and I knew quite a few of the employees from before. But I needed a more thorough understanding of the organization in general and the Project I in particular to be able to conduct this case study in a justifiable way. One of my supervisors, one of the coordinators at P2005 and me had two meetings with the managers who were to be involved in my project. Together we discussed my research objectives and they commented on my present description of the study. To me it was important that one of my supervisors had the opportunity to attend these meetings; this gave her a chance to get a more accurate understanding of the organization. Thus it would be easier for her to understand and give me feedback on the things I was doing in the organization. In relation to this it is important to mention that my other supervisor did visit the organization at a later date.

But it was not only the managers who were going to be part of the study. Though it was quite easy to gain access to the organization as such, I was also dependent on getting access to the employees. I therefore attended the kick-off meeting for Project I, presenting myself and my project, opening up for questions and trying to talk with at least some of the employees present. By presenting myself in such a context I felt more secure that those involved knew who I was

and what I was going to do in their organization. I would though not claim a great interest for my project among the different employees.

The issue of gaining access to the actual context of for instance a case study is not a topic extensively discussed in handbooks on qualitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994). This might be because this is not seen as a methodological issue, but rather a practical issue. Nevertheless the gaining-access-issue is discussed by Vallance (2001) as a potential problem, especially for inexperienced researchers. Inexperienced researchers will often take it for granted that every potential informant will find the research objectives or questions just as interesting as the researcher. Most often this is not the case. This has also been my experience. It is not easy to “sell” the importance of good internal communication to a 23 year old fresh-in-the-job engineer, who is most concerned with combining late nights with his friends with getting up for work the next day. Neither was it easy to make an older, more experienced employee believe in the importance of my research objective, when he was perfectly happy with the situation as it was.

### **3.4.2 The data collection process**

#### **The interviews**

If you want to know how people look at their own lives – talk to them! This is the invitation from Kvale (1997). In this case study the interview was the main source of information.

At the time approximately 80 persons were attached to Project I in different ways, and these 80 persons constituted the population for this case study. 22 persons from the population were interviewed, which corresponds to just above 25 percent of the population. The number of interviewees was decided upon in cooperation with the management of Segment X.

Five of these 22 persons were not randomly drawn. These five persons all had some sort of leadership responsibility – some in the hierarchical organization and some in the project organization. In agreement with my supervisors I decided to ask these five persons to participate on account of the assumption that the

information they were in possession of was of great importance in terms of meeting the research objective. All five agreed to participate. The rest of the sample (17 persons) was randomly drawn, and the sample was supposed to give a representative picture of the people working in Project I at that time.

Ten (including the five persons mentioned above) of the 22 persons in the sample had a differing extent of leadership responsibility. Four of these persons were women. The differences in leadership responsibility related mainly to amount of personnel responsibility included in the different leader roles. The remaining 12 persons did not have any form of formal leadership responsibility. There were no women among those *without* leadership responsibility, but as there are quite few female employees in this organization, this was a representative picture of the situation. Each interview lasted at least an hour (but no longer than 1 ½), and each interview was taped to be transcribed later. Normally the interview was conducted outside the employee's office in some other available room. Every informant was assured of absolutely confidentiality.

All the interviews were carried out within a period of approximately four months. It is possible that the interviewing should have taken place later in the research process, as my knowledge of the field increased considerable during the next two years to come. An increased understanding of both my own research and the organization might have helped in overcoming some of the difficulties I met when it came to convincing the employees of the importance of my study. It is also possible that an increased knowledge and maturity would have helped when it came to managing to do what I at first set out to do – which was to use the Critical Incident technique (CI).

The Critical Incident technique (Hargie & Tourish, 2000) seemed a purposeful way to approach the research objective of this thesis. This is a specific methodology which is used to elude concrete instances of effective and ineffective behaviour in any context. It is based upon the view that internal feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a person, profession or organization are the result of actual experience. The rules for conducting interviews using the Critical Incident technique were followed as closely as possible. The informants



were notified well in advance about the interview (approximately one week). The notification (which they received by e-mail) contained a very short description of the study and research objectives, together with those questions I wanted to ask the informant during the interview (see Appendix 1). This was done in order to give the informant some time to think about specific incidents that he or she wanted to discuss during the interview.

As a result of experiences described by both Downs (1988) and Hargie & Tourish (2000) when using CI in organizations, the term 'critical' was left out. The experience they had was that the term 'critical' most often was associated with something negative, thus the informants tended to focus on negative communication experiences only. In this present context the informants were therefore asked to think about *communication experiences* and not *critical communication experiences*. In spite of these precautions the interviews did not proceed as expected.

Van Maanen (1998) and Crabtree & Miller (1992) claim that a qualitative research process is an ongoing process. As a result of this indefinable character the researcher will often experience that both sampling strategies and collection methods will change during the progress of the study. To some extent this was what happened with this case study. The data collection methods changed, not dramatically but they changed. The changes were not initiated by the researcher; they were initiated by the behaviour of the informants.

I did not understand that my initial data collection strategy was unsuccessful before I had conducted a few interviews. But as I knew some of the informants from before I did expect a certain difficulty in getting them to talk about an issue like internal communication, so I brought with me to each interview an informal interview guide to help me get the informant to start talking (see Appendix 2). As the interviews developed like they did, this interview guide was a great help, although I did not follow it in any absolute way.

Yin (1994) considers interviews of open-ended-nature to be the most usual type of interview in a case study. It is fair to say that the interviews in this case study which initially were supposed to be critical incident interviews,

developed into semi-structured interviews with mainly open-ended questions. Creswell (1998) stresses the importance of being a good listener more than a speaker during the interview. Qualitative interviewing is about getting the informant to talk about his or her experiences in their own way – with their own words (Kvale, 1997). As the CI technique did not work it became important to get each informant to talk about how he or she experienced the internal communication flow in Project I in general. It was interesting to note how their everyday organizational life is influenced by organizational communication all the way, and it was even more interesting to note that only a few had a conscious attitude towards this. This will of course be discussed further in relation to the results, but it is mentioned here because I suppose that this unconsciousness regarding the importance of communication can explain some of the difficulties already mentioned.

As discussed to some extent before in this chapter it looks as if the population the sample of this case study was drawn from, can explain some of the difficulties. Most of the employees are men and engineers. If all my prejudices are correct this could explain some of the indifference I experienced towards the topic of internal communication. But also the researcher has to take some of the responsibility. Earlier in this chapter the consequences of an inexperienced researcher were discussed. Nevertheless it is important to mention as a possible explanation that all the informants were quite happy with their overall working situation. They expected me to be looking for only negative aspects with their organization (it did not matter that I specifically pointed out that I was looking for *both* negative and positive experiences), and when there were no negative aspects to talk about it became difficult to talk at all about communication in particular. But then we talked about many other important aspects of their everyday working situation, and this is information that probably would not have reached the ear of the researcher had I used the CI only.

### **Observation**

In the first year of this case study I spent in average one day each week in the organization. During these days in the organization I first and foremost attended and observed meetings at every level in Project I (in addition to conducting the interviews). All in all 31 meetings were observed. The information was collected through direct-observation; notes were taken and then written out shortly after.

The meetings that were observed were mainly meetings in the two different work teams and meetings which the team leaders had with the project management. I also attended three arrangements for some of the management only. These arrangements were usually located outside the organization. The management group left town and spent one and a half day together at a hotel in another town. At these arrangements professional issues were discussed during the day, and then there would be a social gathering in the evening.

I always made an appointment with the person in charge when I wanted to observe a meeting and I never experienced any difficulties regarding this. My visits were carried out on an irregular basis – there was no particular day in the week at which I used to visit the organization. The irregularity was to ensure that I gained as wide a picture as possible of the whole of the organization.

At this point in the research process I was trying to observe indicators of good or bad internal communication practices in Project I and the meetings that were observed were meetings that I hoped would provide examples of communication flow in the matrix structured organization. It would probably have been easier to observe if I at this point in my research had developed those categories that were developed later (see this chapter), but at the same time it is possible that I would have missed important information if I had entered the field with presumptions of what to look for. The information gathered through the observations of the meetings was supposed to work as a supplement to and hopefully support the findings from the interviewing.

It is important to mention that I also visited the organization without observing any meetings, to have the chance to talk to people and experience their everyday work situation on a more informal basis. I had lunch with the

employees, I talked with people in the corridor and as long as I was in the field I tried to notice those small things to which the insider never gives any thought. Stake (2000) claims that the qualitative case study is characterized by researchers spending extended time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on. It was important for me to spend time in the organization in addition to the time spent in relation to the formal data gathering I was doing. By being present in the organization on a more informal basis I got a more realistic and thorough understanding of how an organization with this structure worked. Through my presence I also hoped to convince the employees that I was willing to make an effort getting to know their organization.

As my activities in the field declined, as a result of the end of the start-up period, my visits to the organization became fewer, but it was still important for me to be present from time to time in the organization. I made these irregular visits because I wanted to keep in touch with the employees and the organization. It was important for me to show them that I had not lost interest in what they were doing even though I had finished most of my data gathering. Just as important for continuing of visit the organization was the opportunity to follow the proceedings of Project I in the light of the information I had gained through my interviews. I learned even more about the organization, the structure and the people, and this helped a lot in the later analysis of the data.

The knowledge that came from observing was crucial for my understanding of the organization. In my experience it is necessary to spend extensive time in the field in order to be able to make a thorough investigation of whatever it is you want to investigate.

**The focus group interview**

The focus group interview took place after both the single interviews and the formal observations were finished. Those who were present in addition to myself were the functional management, the project manager and the leaders of the two work teams. All in all 5 persons participated - two women and three men. A suggestion (see Appendix 3) of what to talk about and possible problems for discussion was sent out to these five persons about one week in advance. This suggestion was based on the present analysis of the information gathered through the individual interviews. I also suggested that the interview would last approximately one hour. The interview was tape recorded and videotaped.

It would be correct to say that the interview developed into a discussion, and that my role was to keep the discussion going by putting forward possible new challenges or problems that I had noticed as a result of analyzing the data from the interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (2000) this group interview could be characterized by the following: it was preset, but it took place in the field. The role of the interviewer was somewhat directive, the question format was semistructured and the purpose of the interview was of a phenomenological nature. It was of a phenomenological nature in the meaning of not being a pretest or having an exploratory purpose, but in the meaning of trying to explore further the intersubjective meanings of the participants in relation to effective or ineffective internal communication in their organization. The overall purpose of the group interview was to gather information which could support or oppose my findings from the individual interviews.

**3.4.3 Problems related to the conduct of this study**

As has been discussed throughout this section of "The case study in question", the main problems as I experienced them, were related to the issue of gaining entrance to the informants. Not in the meaning of being allowed to talk to them – which was never a problem, but in the meaning of making each informant understand and approve of the usefulness of my study. As this probably had some impact on the proceedings of my study this issue will be discussed further.

Creswell (1998) talks about gaining access to the field through a *gatekeeper*. A gatekeeper would be a person who is a member of or has insider status with a cultural group. In my case study I did not have a particular gatekeeper besides my formal contact into the organization. It might be an idea to have a gatekeeper, not only one, but maybe two or three, who would help the researcher gain access to the different cultures of the organization where the informants in a case study like this come from. In that way it might be easier for the researcher to understand the informant and also to formulate questions which are easy to understand for the informant.

On the other hand; it is possible that my expectations were too high regarding how interesting the employees would find a research project about internal communication and how useful for themselves and their work they would consider it to be. It is also possible that I was too naïve regarding my own efforts when it came to explaining the usefulness of this study. Flick (2002) mentions (among others) one important aspect which has to be taken into consideration when aiming at doing research in an institution. He says that a research project is always an intrusion into the life of the institution to be studied. It is often regarded as disturbance and it affects routines, often without either immediate or long-term pay off for the institution and its members. Although I'm not certain about to what degree my research project was experienced as an intrusion, I do believe that the participants in this case study never actually understood the point of participating. It was not obvious to them what they could actually gain from it.

It is obvious that in every step of the qualitative research process the skills of the researcher play the decisive part. This has been mentioned several times in this chapter. Flick (2002) puts it like this: In qualitative research the person who is the researcher has a special importance. Researchers and their communicative competencies is the main 'instrument' of collecting data and of cognition (p.54). He continues:

*Negotiating entry to an institution is less a problem of providing information (about the research project) than one of establishing a relationship. In this relationship enough trust must be developed in the researchers as persons, and in their request, that the institution – despite all reservations – gets involved in the research (p.56).*

I believe that the problems I faced during the data gathering were a result of neither the organization as such or the employees being involved or engaged enough in my research project. Most of the blame for this I have to put on my self. I did not manage to establish that important relationship which Flick talks about. In retrospect it is easy to see that I should have put a lot more work into establishing the relationship needed to get the organization and its employees involved in this project.

### **3.5 Analyzing the data**

In qualitative research the researcher is usually viewed as the main research instrument. The two definitions of what qualitative research is (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) also stressed this assumption. Everything that happens, that is told and that is observed will be understood through the researcher's view of the world. It is hard for me to escape the fact that although I wanted every informant to tell how he or she experienced internal communication flow, it would nevertheless be my interpretations of what is said which will reach the public.

Yin (1994) claims that the experienced case study investigator is likely to have great advantage over the novice at the analytic stage, because the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies. An experienced investigator will know the importance of developing the analytical approaches as part of the case study protocol.

It is correct to say that I did not have the analytical approach fully developed at the start of this study. But it is also fair to say that I had an *idea* about how to analyze the evidence. The main problem in relation to this is that when I planned this study, I meant to use another data gathering technique than

those that were actually used. If I had managed to make the Critical Incident technique work as planned, the analyzing of the data/evidence would have been different from how it actually was conducted.

Analyzing the evidence gathered through the interviews was the main task. The intention behind this case study was to collect information about what constituted an effective matrix structured organization in terms of communication and leadership, and this was what I was looking for among all the information gathered. The initial idea was that I was to look for incidents which according to the informants were examples of effective or ineffective communication. But as the critical incident interviews developed into ordinary semistructured interviews it soon became apparent that in order to meet the intention of the study I had to look for *categories*. To look for straightforward evidence of effective or ineffective communication seemed impossible. I had to somehow structure the data material. There are many ways to do this. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggested analytic techniques such as rearranging the material, placing the evidence in a matrix of categories, creating flowcharts or data displays, among other such techniques to facilitate analysis. However, there must first be an analytic strategy. Yin (1994) presents two strategies for general use: one is to rely on theoretical propositions of the study, and then to analyze the evidence based on those propositions, and the other strategy is to develop a case description, which would be a framework for organizing the case study. It is this second strategy which has been used in this case study, because there has not been any particular theoretical proposition working as a basis for this case study, and the case *description* has thus been more important (see chapter 1 for a description of the organization).

The structuring started by grouping the data material by who the informants were. In this way I ended up with six groups:

- 1) Employees belonging to team 1 and no leadership responsibility,
- 2) Employees belonging to team 2 and no leadership responsibility,
- 3) Team leaders,
- 4) Leaders in department 1 (hierarchical organization),



- 5) Leaders in department 2 (hierarchical organization), and
- 6) Leaders in the project organization.

This structuring was in a way a description of the case in that it describes to some extent how the employees are organized in this organization. Although these six groups were not used in any formal way later in the analysis, they were of great help in organizing the data material.

Before I go any further I need to mention one important aspect in relation to the data material. At first it was difficult to see how the information gathered through interviews and observation could be related to the main theme - internal communication. The main reason for this was that the informants seldom used the term "internal communication" in an explicit way. I had to dig in under what he or she actually had said to discover that in the end almost everything could be related to internal communication. In spite of everything I had read about the topic of internal and organizational communication it took some time to realize how this also worked in "my" organization. This was also the reason that I chose not to use any form of computer programs in the analysis of this data material, because I believed that the data material was so complex that it would be difficult for a computer program to give a correct picture of the content.

Within the six groups I looked for utterances which in one way or another could be related to internal communication. This was not a very straightforward task as the utterances below might show:

*1) During the weekdays there are some regular things that take place. On Tuesdays there are many meetings before lunch; it is the meeting with the work team, and there is the meeting with my group... and so on.*

Or:

*2) I was really tired of working in that project. I told my leaders that I wanted to do something else.*

Or:

*3) I do believe that we have control over the job each and everyone is doing on an everyday basis to such an extent that we know enough about what people can and can not, what special skills each individual have...*

These utterances are random examples of how complex this data material was. At first sight it is hard to discover anything here which easily can be related to internal communication. But then I discovered that the links were very much present. For instance: In utterance number one there is talk about *meetings*. Meetings are an important aspect of internal communication flow. In utterance number two the informant mentions one of the things which he *talks to his leaders about*. What possibilities the employees have to talk to their leaders and what responses they get from their leaders are of tremendous importance for the quality of the internal communication flow. In utterance number three one of the leaders talks to me about how the leaders are *familiar* with the skills and knowledge of each employee. Such a familiarity is dependent on communication between leaders and employees and between leaders and leaders.

When I understood how this was all connected I started to form categories, first within each of the groups, and then I tried to look for categories which were mutual across the groups. Utterance number one was for instance placed in a category called *meetings*. I felt that utterance number two belonged to a category which I named *leadership*. Utterance number three would also be placed in the leadership category.

This was an ongoing process. I had to work my way through all of the transcribed data material from both the interviews and the observations every time I was to take the next step in the analysis process. The categories changed names and some of them disappeared. As I was still visiting the organization my knowledge of the organization also increased, and that also influenced the way I looked at the evidence. After some time I was operating with ten categories which I found to be mutual across the six groups: *leadership, communication between hierarchical organization and project organization, communication in the project, communication in the hierarchical organization, organizational structure and communication, meetings, cooperation within the two work teams, communication within the two work teams, information flow in general, and commitment/belonging*.

I realized that the leadership category was a large and important category. As a result of more reading I discovered other issues in relation to this category in the data material, and eventually it was also necessary to divide this category in two. These two categories were then named: *leadership in the matrix organization* and *leadership communication in the matrix organization*.

Leadership in the matrix organization	<i>Leadership traits</i> (age, looks etc.)
	<i>Leadership skills</i> (technical, emotional)
	<i>Leadership style</i> (i.e. task-oriented, relations oriented)

Leadership communication in the matrix organization	<i>Persuasion</i> (i.e. the use of emotional, logical and personal proofs)
	<i>Influencing</i> (i.e. use of power)
	<i>Feedback</i> (i.e. are the employees satisfied or not with the amount of feedback they receive?)
	<i>Belonging/ commitment</i> (what strategies do leaders use to ensure commitment to the organization of their employees?)

The next category was named *critical factors in relation to the matrix structure*. I discovered that many of the other ten categories could somehow be related to this category:

Critical factors in relation to the matrix structure	Communication between hierarchical organization and project organization
	Communication in the project
	Communication in the hierarchical organization
	Information flow in general

The fourth and last category contained two of the before mentioned eleven categories; *communication within the work teams* and *cooperation within the two work teams*. This category was named *teams in the matrix organization*.

Teams in the matrix organization	Communication within the two work teams (i.e. meetings)
	Cooperation within the two work teams

These four categories form the background for the next chapters. There will be one chapter for each of the categories. These chapters are mainly descriptive, but to some extent also interpretive.

## **CHAPTER 4 ILLUSTRATIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The effectiveness of an organizational structure will depend, to a large degree, on the leaders in the organization in question. It is the leaders who run the organization, and whether the chosen structure will function will therefore mainly be a result of the different leaders and their behaviours. An important issue in the matrix organization is that there will be many different leader *roles* and leadership will have to be practised across departments, professions, skills, culture and generations. In this chapter the leader roles directly attached to the accomplishment of the different tasks of the current project will be looked at more closely.

Because of the demands put on the leader and in order to facilitate the role of the leader, it will be of interest to investigate further whether there are special traits that characterize the leader in the effective matrix organization and whether there is one leadership style more effective than another in such an organizational structure.

It is important to emphasise which management levels this thesis deals with. Because this is a case study of a project running in one part of the organization in question, it was natural to look further into the leader roles directly attached to the project. That is to say that it was leadership at lower level (team leaders and to some extent group leaders), which was of the main interest in this case study, but project management and functional management on higher levels have also been looked at. Top management has not been at issue here. In spite of different management levels, it seems like it is possible to some extent to generalize results from leadership studies to every management level, although with some exceptions.

In the following there will be an analysis of the data collected which has showed to be relevant in this context. The analysis will be conducted in the light of relevant literature.

## **4.2 Effective traits and skills of leaders in the Matrix structure**

### **4.2.1 Traits and skills in general**

Recent research has shown that successful leaders are not like other people (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), and that there are certain traits that can be recognized from one successful leader to another. During the previous century considerably research on leadership traits has been conducted. In addition to trying to define the universal traits associated with effective leadership, one of the main interests has been to categorize the different traits. This categorizing has resulted in several taxonomies regarding leadership traits – like “The Big Five Dimensions of Personality” (i.e. Bass, 1990; Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). However, these authors do not express an extensive belief in that the use of this taxonomy can get you the most efficient leader, and thus this taxonomy will not play any part in the analysis of the current results.

The informants in this case study seemed to be more concerned about the different *skills* of the leader than inherited personality traits. In modern trait theory it is recognized that the effective leader also is characterized by special skills and motives in addition to different traits (Bass, 1990; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982), and in this case the focus will mainly be on what *skills* characterize the effective leader in the matrix organization. There will though be an effort to find if there are personality traits that can be related to the different skills mentioned.

The ability to relate to other people in an effective way and to communicate well are skills that have been recurring in the context of this particular case. Technical skills have also been mentioned as important. Physical *traits* such as height or appearance were not mentioned by any of the informants and traits related to aspects of personality were not mentioned specifically. None of the informants commented on possible differences between male and female leaders.

It has already been mentioned that there are many different leader roles in the matrix organization. The main concern in this case study was the team leader

role, but several other leader roles were commented upon and some of those comments are good illustrations of what skills in general one is looking for in a leader in the matrix organization.

In a project of this size and length, both the employees and the leaders have the opportunity to (and usually they have to) move from one role or task to another during the project's lifetime. In this organization they will usually find their leaders within their own organization. As a result of this they do not have a wide range to choose from, but then they will probably be familiar with the skills and abilities of each of the potential leaders. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the leaders in the matrix organization. This leader belongs to the project management and one of his tasks is to find and place employees with leadership abilities in the current project. When describing one of the leaders he has chosen for the project and why he chose him he says:

*His predecessor was very technically skilled, but "Per" is not that, but he has experience from leading people, and that may be even more important. The ability to be aware of the conditions of your task/role and to follow up (your team members)...you don't have to be number one in the technical area; other people can take control of that (Leader 1).*

From this quotation it is possible to draw the conclusion that both technical and interpersonal skills are regarded as important in a leader, but although this informant did not explicitly put one above the other he is aware that having technical skills are not a necessary qualification to be an effective leader. The quotation emphasises the same as every newer leadership theory emphasises: that a leader's interpersonal skills are just as important as his or her technical skills (Bass, 1990). In particular the ability to lead people and to follow up (in the meaning of taking care of the interests of) those you are supposed to lead are mentioned as important to be an effective leader.

The ability to know what the conditions for your leader role are and take them into consideration is also mentioned as an important skill in a leader. A skill like this can be related to the ability to see things in their right perspective. This is a form of cognitive skill, and cognitive skills are regarded as important for the

effective leader by for instance Yukl (2002). Cognitive or conceptual skills include analytical ability, logical thinking, concept formation, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning (op.cit). These skills will be of greatest importance mainly in high level leader roles (Bass, 1990), but will of course be of relevance in every leadership role.

This informant regards the ability to lead people as a combination of interpersonal skills and cognitive skills. To be technically skilled is not regarded in a negative way, but it is not perceived as necessary to become an effective leader.

### **Traits and skills of a group leader**

The group leaders in this organization are supposed to manage the human resources in his or her group. Thus it is a first line leader role in the functional organization in the matrix structure. During the interviews the main focus was mainly on which skills are needed to handle the members of the group in the best way possible, thus interpersonal skills. Regarding the objective of the group leader role this is not surprising.

The quotation below is from an interview with one of the group leaders. During this interview we talked about her background as a technical skilled person and what part her technical skills play in the role as a group leader in a matrix organization:

*TR: I suppose it is an advantage to be technically skilled as well when you are to lead a group of highly technically skilled persons?*

*Leader 4: Yes! But to lead a group like this is also about having the right attitude: that it is the group members who are the experts, not the leader. The only thing that I can do is to ask critical questions. I can't do the job they are doing, and you (as a leader) have to accept that there will be people that have skills that you don't have. So I can't do anything else often than asking question. And actually they don't expect anything more from me either.*



This group leader clearly sees the advantage of being technically skilled in a job like this, but there are other areas of her job that she regards as just as important. She talks about respect and to accept the fact that the members of the group you are leading might be more technically skilled than you. She also mentions the importance of being able to ask questions.

In order to be able to respect your employees and colleagues the leader will need to have enough self-confidence not to feel threatened of others knowing more than her/him on certain areas. This group leader had to use her technical abilities to a full extent when she had to take over the responsibility (for a shorter period of time) of one of the work teams in the project. Several of the team meetings she was leading were observed. During these meetings she strengthened the impression of a leader which is calm and cool in most situations and which also has the self-confidence of making a joke at her own expense. She urges others, more technically skilled than her to talk about issues she does not know enough about.

To be able to ask critical questions you will first of all need technical competency, but you will also need to be open-minded and to have the ability to learn. In order to ask questions the group leader needs to know what technical issues the (in this case) group is working on, and to gain that knowledge she will need to learn from others, including those she is supposed to lead. To learn you need to be open-minded and curious. Leaders who are able to learn from mistakes, change their assumptions and beliefs and refine their mental models are valuable for the organization which has to adapt in a turbulent environment (Yukl, 2002). This might be of particular importance in the matrix organization. Leaders in the matrix organization do not only have to deal with a changing external environment. They also have to deal with a fast changing internal environment. Although the group leader's role is relatively stable in the matrix structure, the group leader has, in order to be able to follow up the group members, to deal with the changing conditions under which the group members are working. The challenge is that the different group members will be working on

different problems, and to ask those critical questions the group leader will need to have some knowledge about everything.

In order to meet that challenge some specific personality *traits* identified by Yukl (2002) could prove to be valuable: Curious and Inquisitive, Open Minded and Learning Oriented. These traits will be of great importance also in other leader roles in the matrix organization because of the continuing changes a structure like this will cause. The leader in question did, during this case study, come out as curious, open minded and learning oriented. It is important to mention that she was regarded in a highly positive way by her subordinates, as the following quotation shows:

*Team member 1: She is my functional leader, and I'm tremendously pleased with her! That part is really working well!!*

#### **Traits and skills of a team leader**

The main focus regarding leadership in this case study was on the team leader. This focus is due to how important this person is in order to get the projects through and to make the matrix structure work. One of the group leader's tasks is to find, together with the rest of the functional management, the team leaders to the different work teams in the current project. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the group leaders and is a good description of the team leader role:

*Leader 4: Everything is dependent on the team leader [ ]. This particular person takes on the responsibility the project has to reach benchmarks and so on, at the same time as he has no form of budget authority [ ]. By now I understand how this job is a real exposed position with a lot of responsibility and very little authority.*

In spite of this great responsibility the team leader has there is no tradition in this particular organization to in any form educate their team leaders. Argyris (1999) believes that education of leaders in the matrix organization should 1) focus on

the individual in team systems, 2) occur where the problem is located, 3) be learned by the use of actual problems, 4) be tested by the effectiveness of the actual results, and 5) be controlled by those participating in the problem. Since there is no such training in this organization the question of how well the team leader fits into the leader role will be dependent on personality/traits, relevant experience and skills acquired through this experience. There were in particular two kinds of skills which were frequently mentioned by the informants when talking about the team leader. The two quotations below are from two different interviews. The first is from an interview with one of the leaders representing the functional management, the other is one of the team members speaking:

*Leader 2: ...to be a skilled communicator and to be able to involve those people you have working for you, that is very, very important. But really it is a combination of...team management is very technical, and you have to be technically skilled to know what is important (to focus on) inside the work team. But you need to have the wish to lead, but wish will not always be the same as ability...*

*TR: What do you think characterizes a good team leader?*

*Team member 1: He or she has to be technically skilled, but (the team leader job) is a combination between covering the technical area and pure administration. [ ] I think it is really important that the team leader is technically skilled to such an extent that it is possible to discuss technical matters with him or her. [ ] But of course – the team leader will have to take care of informing the team members on a regular basis, typically by running meetings on a weekly basis, and to make sure that the information is on a suitable level for everyone so that nobody will feel that attending the meetings is wasted, and then of course the team leader has to keep an eye on everything that is happening in the team.*

These two informants who have different starting points characterize the team leader in quite a similar way. Two kinds of skills are explicitly mentioned by both, although in different order, namely communication skills and technical skills.

A study by McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) showed that advancement for technical managers was not predicted by either the need for power, or the need

for achievement. This might indicate that it is technical skills and verbal fluency which are most important for managers with a technical responsibility, such as the team leaders in this case study. During observation of the team meetings of the different work teams in this project it became apparent how important the team leader's communication skills are. The team leader has to relate to a variety of different people in the team, he or she has to make important decisions and distribute responsibility among the team members. He or she also has to communicate well both with functional- and project management, but this will be commented on later in this analysis. Communication skills are an important part of what is called *interpersonal skills*. Bass (1990) claims that the trait research shows consistently that interpersonal skills are important for managerial effectiveness and advancement. Studies have also shown that deficiencies in interpersonal skills were a major reason for managers who derailed (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995).

As the quotation above shows leader 2 talks about the ability to lead and the wish to lead. The team member mentions administration as one of the team leader's tasks. From this it is possible to draw the conclusion that management is regarded as a great part of the team leader role. The team leader should be highly technically skilled and at the same time be a leader able to get the team members to work in an effective way against the team's goals. The team leader does not have any form of budget authority, and this of course makes the team leader's role even more difficult. The importance of team management in the matrix organization will be dealt with in the next chapter.

#### **4.2.2 The new generation**

A great challenge both in the current project and in the organization as such is the great amount of very young, and also inexperienced employees in particularly one part of the organization. These young people might have other wishes for their leaders than other employees, and maybe in particular for their functional leader – who is supposed to take care of their interests in the organization. Not long before this case study started the organization did in fact hire a new group

leader for one of their groups. He did not have any technical competency at all, but he had other skills and traits judged to be just as important in this position. The group he was supposed to lead consisted of many of these young and inexperienced employees. Several of the informants who related to this group leader were really happy with him, and there was in particular one trait that was frequently mentioned:

*TR: Do you have any problems talking with your group leader about more personal issues?*

*Team member 2: No! I actually had some problems at home a couple of months ago, and I went straight to my group leader and told him.*

*TR: And he was understanding?*

*Team member 2: Yes! I will of course not talk to everybody about things like this, but I talked to him. And he did say that if you have any problems, please talk to me, so that is what I do. But if he had been thirty years older I would not have done it – of course. He has the right age, and I can identify with him.*

*TR: Is it OK to talk with your group leader?*

*Team member 3: Yes, he is OK to talk with!*

*TR: Does he have some special characteristics that make it easy to talk to him?*

*Team member 3: The fact that he is about my age is pretty good.*

This group leader is quite young, and as a result of his age it is easier for the younger employees to identify with him, than with another, older person. One of the informants even says that he would never talk to a person much older than himself about personal issues. The matrix structure and the 2-boss issue is often talked about in a negative way (Davis & Lawrence, 1977), but the fact that each employee has to relate to two leaders can also give many positive advantages as well. This group leader did not have any technical competency and could therefore not contribute at that area. But the technical responsibility is with the work team leader, and the group leader's responsibility is mainly to take care of the group members personal interests, and in this case this worked out quite well.

### **4.3 Leadership style**

It might be difficult to differ between leadership skills and leadership behaviours (Yukl, 2002). Skills will influence a person's behaviour, as will traits and motives, and having the right traits or skills will probably make it easier for the leader to practise the most effective behaviours (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). In the search for the effective leadership behaviours/styles in the matrix structure an effort will be made to take these issues into consideration. Another issue also needs to be taken into consideration: leadership *style* is not enough to explain effective leadership. It will be just as important that the leader has the ability to alter his or her leadership style in accordance to the *situation* or the *people* or both (i.e. Goleman, 2000). In fact there are many more different situations than there are leadership behaviours (Vroom, 2000), which makes it even more important to be able to alter one's behaviours to go with the situation. This will be looked at more closely in this section.

In a matrix organization the ability to switch among different leadership styles is of great importance because in a structure like this the leader will work with or lead many kinds of people, across divisions and professions and the working situation will therefore change in at rapid pace.

A specific style might be very effective in some situations, but not in others. To use the "right" style in the wrong situation might even be very ineffective. In a previous project some of the functional managers experienced the project management as mainly focused on the negative aspects of the work done in that particular project. A leadership style not altered to the situation or the people can lead to an unfortunate situation like this:

*TR: Could you say something about why the focus is a bit different this time (from another project to this), maybe tell me something about the persons involved (in the two different projects)?*

*Leader 4: Yes, one example might be this: when we are working against a benchmark it will always be a little bit like reading for the exams. People have been working extra*

*time, and really made an effort to reach the benchmark. During the last project...when reaching a benchmark there will always be a cake and some sort of celebration, and at such an occasion the project leader (of the previous project) started by saying "well, yes, we did reach this benchmark, but oh, hell! It got really expensive and next time we have to perform better!" After this episode we had to use a lot of time to make people believe in themselves again. People expect praise in that situation, and the leader should wait a few days to tell them to try to use fewer working hours in the future. [ ] When the employees are celebrating (by eating cake) the best thing is to focus on those things that were positive. [ ] The leader needs to respect the employees in order to keep them working. The leader either has that skill (to be considerate) or not, and I feel that those who run Project I have this skill to a large degree.*

*TR: Do you think that this skill is something you can learn?*

*Leader 4: Yes! I'm totally certain that it is possible to learn this. But we are much too busy, you know! It will take time, and it will take a lot of work. But we have to train our project leaders and we also have to train our team leaders. We have to!*

Research on effective leadership behaviour started mainly with the Ohio- and Michigan studies (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). These two different studies came up with almost the same categories of effective leadership behaviour (see further description of these studies in chapter 2b), and it seems like leadership behaviour studies mostly result in behaviour patterns which can be divided into two, relatively broad categories, namely: Task-Oriented Behaviour and Relations-Oriented Behaviour. The most effective leaders are concerned by both task and relations (i.e. Yukl, 2002). The leader which is described in this quotation seems to be mostly concerned by the current task, and as described by the informant this behaviour was not particularly effective. After the incident described here, the functional managers had to use a lot of time building the self confidence of the employees.

The situation was a happy situation, the employees had just reached a benchmark and should have been praised instead of criticised. Douglas McGregor (1960) developed the concepts of theory X and Y. The central principle of theory X is that the organization is controlled and directed through the

exercise of authority. The manager mainly views the employees as lazy, and the only way to get them to work is to threaten them, control and direct them. A leadership style like this will make both morale and productivity fall, which was exactly what happened here.

The informant also talks about respecting your employees if you want them to work for you, not against you as a leader. A manager who views the employees in accordance with theory Y, will look at the employee as motivated by the ability to exercise self-direction and self-control in the search for goals to which they are committed (McGregor, 1960). And according to McGregor commitment to goals will be *a function of rewards associated with their achievement*. In this particular situation described by the informant there was time for reward in form of praise of the work done.

The importance of integrating the individual goals and the organizational goals has been emphasized by many authors (Argyris, 1964). There will be different ways of doing this, and it will probably be most effective for the leader to be aware of them all, and able to perform the behaviour needed. The quotation illustrates a leader who in this situation practises a form of leadership in accordance with theory X. If the overall understanding of human behaviour in organizations is that human behaviour is motivated by the possibility of reaching individual goals, self-development and –fulfilment, it is possible to agree that a leadership behaviour influenced by theory X will not be effective. But, and there is a but, there might be situations where a leadership style similar to that influenced by theory X will be needed, but the leader does not need to be influenced by the philosophy of theory X, the leader will just be practising a style in accordance to the situation or people, and he will switch to another style when needed.

Every contingency theory stresses the importance of exercising the correct leadership behaviour in the current situation. Some theorists believed that a leader was only able to practise one form of leadership behaviour (i.e. Fiedler, 1967). If that leadership behaviour did not fit the situation, you had to either alter the situation or exchange the leader. But in a matrix organization the situations



are changing all the time, and the access to leaders is not extensive. So what can a leader do in order to be effective? The leader has to be able to alter his or her leadership style in accordance with the situation or the people or both. Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) stresses the employee and the employee's readiness to follow a direction or complete a task. Readiness is defined as the capacity to set high but attainable goals, willingness and ability to take responsibility, and the education and /or experience of group members (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). It should have been possible for the leader to take both the situation (which was a positive one) and the people (many of them were very young (in line with observation of meetings) into consideration when deciding upon what behaviour to use on that occasion. But if the leader does not have any knowledge of how his or her style will influence the employees, the question of how to become an effective leader in the matrix organization should perhaps be directed elsewhere.

Leader 4 believes that it is possible to learn new behaviours. As mentioned before in this analysis, an important leadership skill is the ability to learn. Interpersonal skills are among the skills which theorists believe are possible to learn (Hargie, 1997). Kouzes & Posner (2002) suggests that effective leaders provide extensive recognition to subordinates for their achievements and contributions (something this leader failed to do). To know how and when to praise your employees and to know how to show them that you as a leader respect them and the work they are doing are among several interpersonal skills. When being skilled in all of these activities it is natural to talk about social competency (Hargie, 1997). The effective leader today is a socially competent person (Goleman, 2000). Effective leaders contribute to an effective organization, and it is possible that organizations could focus even more on training leaders (present and future) in interpersonal skills.

Skilled communicators are by definition high on interpersonal skills (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Emotional intelligence (EQ) helps you use your interpersonal skills in the correct manner and according to Goleman (2000) EQ is decisive for practising effective leadership behaviour and being able to alter style depending

on the situation. As mentioned before Hargie (1997) supposes that interpersonal skills can be learnt, and in like vain Goleman points to the belief that EQ can be learnt (1997). Because of the constantly changing situations the leaders who work within the matrix structure are dependent on good interpersonal skills in order to be effective leaders.

The quotation below is from an interview with one of the leaders in the current project. It is a good illustration of how he experiences part of his leader role and what he feels is essential in practising leadership:

*Leader 1: Policy is trying to find the correct level... delegate responsibility, and that might be a great challenge. It really depends on the people I'm working with. Some do this very nice and easy, while others need a lot of support and back up.*

*TR: Yes, I suppose that when you work as a leader the ability to decide on what kind of people one is dealing with will be quite decisive?*

*Leader 1: Yes, of course! And in this case I had to get to know the people as we went along because I had never worked with any of these persons before. They were 15 persons, imagine that, who had worked together and then they get a new leader. I was not familiar with how they worked, in what way they usually acted....but you will initially lean more heavily on some persons. Anyway it is obvious that everyone has their own agenda; there is always something.... and it will take some time before you as the leader will discover their agendas...and then you just have to bear with it, although by now I feel that the team is working quite well. But still there is someone [...] who is in search of their role, and that is something we are working on. During time the picture changes, and some have experienced a heavier work load than others, and that was not how it was supposed to be so this is something that will have to be adjusted.*

This leader is quite young, but in spite of his age he has extended experience from leading people. He knows what this is about, and he shows a very conscious attitude towards what to expect from those he is supposed to lead, which is in line with having a high EQ (Yukl, 2002). He is aware that people are different and that situations change during time. And more important: *he is also aware that he has to behave in accordance to the different people or the different situations.*

To be aware of what kinds of people you are working with or leading is in line with among others, situational leadership. Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) definition of subordinates' maturity or readiness is described earlier in this chapter. The informant is aware of the fact that people are different, and that is something that has to be taken into consideration when deciding on what leadership style to use. Although situational leadership theory has been criticized by several authors (Blank, Weitzel & Green, 1990; Vecchio, 1987) the importance of being aware of the people you as a leader are dealing with, can not be overlooked.

This leader is also aware that he probably will lean more heavily on some of his subordinates than on others. He is also concerned with delegating responsibility, and that different people needs different kinds of and different amounts of responsibility. The Vroom-Yetton-Jago Normative Model (Vroom & Jetton, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 1988) discusses what methods leaders use to make decisions. These methods usually involve at least consulting some of the members of the group when decisions are to be made. The Vroom-Yetton-Jago model does not mention any "best" way to make decisions, but in line with other context fitting theories the model urges the leader to take several issues into consideration before making a decision about *how* to make a decision. This informant has obviously found his way of doing this; he has a conscious attitude towards the fact that he relates more to some of his subordinates than others in different situations.

Empowerment is very much in line with newer leadership theories, but leader 1 realizes that not everyone can and will deal with the same amount of responsibility. He is taking the consequences of that realization and is only delegating responsibility in accordance with whom. To feel empowered is not to have a lot of responsibility, but to have a feeling that your opinions count when decisions are to be made (Schermerhorn, 1996).

Hargie et.al. (1999) point to four considerations they have found to be central in which leadership style to use: 1) the task faced by the group, 2) nature, abilities and characteristics of the members, 3) past history of the group and its

members and 4) pressure and demand of the external environment. Consideration 4) was not mentioned in this quotation, but the other three considerations are mentioned by leader 1 and he is trying to take them into account when practising leadership.

This leader in the current project, together with the rest of the project management is regarded in a very positive way by the functional management in this organization. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional managers:

*TR: Why is it that this area of KDA is doing so well with the organizational structure you have chosen?*

*Leader 3: I do believe that it all has to do with how well the functional management and the project management are able to cooperate. If anyone was trying to ride only one's own hobbyhorses there would have been trouble. [ ]You have to be flexible, understand each other's situations and be able to both give and take, not only take and take.... This I think works pretty well, at least towards Project I....*

#### **4.4 Discussion**

In this part of the analysis some of the different leader roles in the matrix organization have been given a closer look. An examination of different traits and skills has been conducted in the light of relevant literature. Leadership behaviour or style has also been of great interest in trying to find what makes an effective leader in the matrix organization.

Although the different leader roles involve different tasks it seems like there are some skills or traits that are of equal importance independent of the leader role. This case study showed that interpersonal skills in particular were viewed as very important both by employees and the leaders themselves. Davis & Lawrence (1977) point in particular to the importance of interpersonal skills in everyone involved in the matrix organization. As a consequence of shared responsibility and mutual authority, the matrix structure can result in more problems and conflicts than a functional organizational structure. Problem-solving

skills and skills in how to handle conflicts will therefore be essential especially to the different leaders in the matrix organization. Skills like this will involve other skills, like for instance communication skills which were frequently mentioned during the interviews. Communication skills in particular were seen as very important for the effective team leader. Technical skills are seen as equal important for the team leader, but if the team leader is not able to in an effective way communicate his or her technical skills, those skills are of little or no use. The observations of several team meetings also revealed how crucial the team leader's communication skills actually are. Studies have suggested that communication skills and technical skills are of vital importance for the technical manager (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Because of the important role the team leader plays in making the matrix structure work in an effective way, a greater focus on communication skills can contribute to an even more effective matrix organization.

A person with several interpersonal skills is defined as a socially competent person (Hargie, 1997), and a socially competent person will usually be an emotionally intelligent person (Yukl, 2002). Emotional intelligence includes several skills/traits which are also mentioned as important leadership skills in this case study. Both the ability to respect your subordinates and to have the self confidence necessary to respect the fact that your subordinates may be more skilled than you can be related to the concept of emotional intelligence (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). To respect your fellow humans and to be self confident were among those skills and traits viewed as very important for the effective leader in the matrix structure, independent on the leader role. It is believed that it is possible to learn emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2003), but not as a result of training in a classroom setting. Increase in emotional intelligence will probably require intensive individual coaching, relevant feedback, and a strong desire for personal development (Yukl, 2002). As long as studies reveal that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective than those less emotional intelligent (Goleman, 2000) organizations will probably benefit from developing for instance internal coaching programs or mentoring programs.

Newer leadership theories do to a great extent focus on the importance of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, as mentioned in the paragraph above. And although these are of major importance for the effective leader, there are other skills as well that will influence the leader's ability to act in an effective manner. During this case study there were some skills in particular that came out as significant: learning skills, conceptual skills and technical skills.

Argyris (1991) claims that one of the most important competencies for successful leadership in changing situations is the ability to learn and to adapt to new situations. The leader in the matrix organization does to a great extent need these learning skills. No matter the leader task, she or he will have to be able to adapt to the constantly changing internal environment which is one of the consequences of a matrix structure. When organizations choose their leaders the potential leader's ability to learn and to adapt to new situations should be taken into consideration. In situations where it is natural to choose a leader among one's own, the opportunity to evaluate such abilities should be used to its full extent.

Trait research finds strong evidence for the importance of conceptual skills in the effective leader, mainly in higher level managerial positions (Bass, 1990). Conceptual skills will in general terms mean good judgement, foresight, intuition, creativity, and the ability to find meaning and order in ambiguous, uncertain events. In a matrix organization abilities like that will be crucial, especially to find meaning in an internal environment, which from time to time might seem a bit confusing. To be an effective leader, he or she is dependent on not only being able to understand and interpret the world for oneself, but the leader also has to be able to make the organizational world comprehensible to the other members of the group.

Conceptual skills are also about being able to solve problems and make the correct decisions. Effective managers use a mix of conscious reasoning and intuition to do this (Agor, 1986). Intuition comes with extensive experience (Simon, 1987), and depending on the leader task, the potential leader's experience must be taken into consideration.

Technical skills were mentioned as important by the informants, especially for the team leader. This is in line with trait research (Bass, 1990; Mc Clelland & Boyatzis, 1982), where it has been argued that technical skills are most important for technical managers along with good communications skills (Mc Clelland & Boyatzis, 1982). It seems obvious that the potential team leader should be technically skilled. It is important to bear in mind that the effective team leader also is a skilled communicator.

To be an effective leader at every level is much about having the right skills or traits. Interpersonal skills and communication skills in particular play a very important part in deciding upon the most effective leaders. Lack in interpersonal skills is one of the most important reasons that seemingly successful leaders fail (McCall & Lombardo, 1990).

Effective leadership style is also dependent on interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000). Emotional intelligence enables the person to take both the situation and the people into consideration when deciding upon which leadership style to use.

It seems today that a leader who has the ability to be flexible in how to behave, taking both people and situation into consideration is the most effective leader and the leader who most probably will succeed with his or her daily work.

## **CHAPTER 5 CRITICAL FACTORS IN RELATION TO THE MATRIX STRUCTURE**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The theory regarding organizational structure reviewed in chapter 2a, stressed that the main objective of organizational structure is to enable the organization to meet its goals. The organizational structure decides who works together, where decisions are made and it will also have an impact on how formal or informal the particular organization is perceived to be. According to Goldhaber (1993), organizational structure can be defined like this:

*Structure refers to the network of relationships and roles found throughout the organization. Structure enables the organization to meet its objectives effectively and in an orderly manner. Thus, structure provides the stability, predictability, and regularity necessary for an organization to function without anarchy (p. 53).*

A tall organization structure would often imply a quite formal organization, like for instance the Army. In terms of communicating this would mean to communicate only along the chain of command established by the organization's hierarchy of authority (Shermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2003). The organization in this particular study uses a flat organization structure. Such a structure would imply an organization where the use of informal channels not adhered to the organization's hierarchy of authority, is much more frequent.

An organizational structure is also said to be a function of the task of the organization (Rosengren, 2000), thus the products the organization is supposed to produce will (or at least should) decide on what organizational structure the organization would be best off with. The organization that is the focus for this study has chosen to use a matrix structure. A matrix structure is especially used for large, specialized projects that temporarily require large numbers of technical people with different skills (Newstrom & Davis, 1993), and this is a typical characteristic of the projects of this organization.



## **5.2 Challenges of the matrix structure**

### **5.2.1 Understanding the matrix structure**

There are, as both the review of the theory has shown and as the following quotations will show, many challenges to an organization structure like the matrix. Galbraith & Kazanjian (1986) concluded that it takes a lot of work to establish a well-functioning matrix organization. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the managers in this organization, and might illustrate that this organization structure is in no way straight forward and easy to understand:

*Leader 2: There is absolutely a chance that we (the functional managers) do not communicate clearly enough to our team leaders the role the team leader should have and the role that others connected to the project office have. C for instance was very uncertain about the role of A. He didn't understand the connections. And he didn't know what obligations he had when it came to keep us (the functional management) informed. [ ] Actually he did not know that it is the functional organization that owns the team and has the follow-up responsibility for it. He thought he only had to report to the project office.*

Introduction of a matrix structure has been found to increase role ambiguity (Joyce, 1986), and to any newcomer in a matrix organization his or her role is not necessarily clear only by definition. Especially when hiring someone who is supposed to have some management responsibility, an explanation of the matrix structure and the dual reporting relationship is needed. According to Davis & Lawrence 1977 all individuals new to the matrix management lack some of the knowledge and the skills needed to navigate through the ambiguities and conflicts of a matrix. Especially in relation to the team leader role there will be new demands for communication and uncertainty about the kinds of commitments that can be made, among others.

This particular organization is in many ways what Davis & Lawrence (1977) call a mature matrix. To have reached the state of a mature matrix, will have implications for every different role in the organization, as will be illustrated during this chapter. A mature matrix provides a very flexible form of organization.

The organization in this study has been shown to be capable of handling both power shifts related to changes in management and location shifts. Many of the quotations below will show that this is an organization which has overcome some of the difficulties associated with the use of this structure. The difficulties are mainly related to the two chains of command, one along the functional lines, and one along project lines.

### **5.2.2 The role of the functional manager and challenges in a balanced matrix**

The organization in question uses what has been called a balanced matrix, as opposed to a functional or project matrix (Larson & Gobeli, 1987). In a balanced matrix the project manager establishes the overall plan for completing the project, integrates the contributions of the different disciplines, sets schedules, and monitors progress. The functional managers on the other hand are responsible for assigning personnel and executing their segment of the project according to the standards and schedules set by the project manager. The merger of “how and what” requires both parties to share responsibility and authority over work flow operations. Because of this equal share of power, this form of matrix is probably the one form that needs the most work (Larson & Gobeli, 1987).

The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional managers in the organization. This quotation is a good illustration of some of the most usual challenges related to a balanced matrix.

*Leader 3: I don't like to look at the functional organization and the project organization as two very distinct organizations, because we are working towards the same goals, we have different roles in the matrix organization, but we have the same goals....but it is us (the functional managers) who work with developing our employees, and how we can use people across projects. And of course we will receive some frustration from project management every time we (functional management) pull a highly competent person out of one project because there is a greater need for his competency in another project. When the project management has to let go of some of their people because new projects are starting up, they will often - to put it meanly, give us their worst people. But*

*to get a project started you need people that are really skilful and able to get the new project running properly. However, I do understand that the project management wants to keep their best people, to get the best results.*

*Anyway, as long as the matrix structure is working well, and the power in the organization is distributed evenly, I believe this structure to be the most effective - as opposed to a pure project structure. We are actually making a great effort developing our employees; we believe this to be a good way to hold on to them. We want to give them a feeling of self-development, and interesting tasks. And to use one person's competency in project after project is absolutely the most efficient way compared to the recycling of some written words or a data program. To transfer knowledge by moving a person around is the most optimal – and that is one of the possibilities that the matrix structure gives us.*

Here the informant mentions many of the most important aspects in relation to making an organization structure like this work. The quotation shows a leader aware of the different challenges of a matrix structure.

This informant is what Davis & Lawrence (1977) would call a matrix boss. A matrix boss could be either a functional manager or a project manager. As already stated, this informant is a functional manager. When implementing a matrix structure in an organization, the functional manager is usually the one who will experience the greatest difference in relation to role description. For the functional manager the matrix organization is often experienced as a loss in status, authority and control. In a functional organization, managers have authority over the objectives of their function, the selection of individuals, the priorities assigned to different tasks, the assignment of their subordinates to different tasks and projects, the evaluation of progress on projects, the evaluation of subordinates' performance, and the decisions about subordinate pay and promotions. In a matrix organization none of these responsibilities remains solely the purview of the functional manager, and this loss of responsibility can create hostility and resistance to a matrix form of management. However, as the matrix structure matures, the functional manager might find the role highly challenging. They must balance the needs of the different projects – starting or ending, they

must anticipate training needs, and they must balance work loads to avoid excessive peaks and valleys in resource demands (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). During the interviews with some of the functional managers of the organization in question, never once was the role of the functional manager commented upon in any negative way. And in line with Davis & Lawrence (1977) this might be due to this organization having developed into a mature matrix.

Independent of their role, a matrix boss should ideally minimize the formal elements in order to move from fixture to actor, from bureaucracy to process. According to Davis & Lawrence the main skill of a matrix boss is the ability to be flexible. Flexibility requires high interpersonal relation skills, and Galbraith (2002) stresses the importance of skills such as conflict solving, networking and persuasion skills. Some research has reported that functional managers are less satisfied with their situation than project managers (Turner, Utley & Westbrook, 1998). One source of dissatisfaction among functional managers might be interpersonal relations. The functional managers are traditionally selected for their positions based on technical excellence and not for their interpersonal skills. Lack of interpersonal skills might cause frustration among functional managers (and also project managers) because of the numerous interfaces inherent in the matrix structure which make skills like that an absolutely necessity (Turner, Utley & Westbrook, 1998). According to the same researchers failure to recognize the necessity of these skills when appointing a functional manager could result in a lose-lose situation. The individual loses through decreased job satisfaction in the role as functional manager, and the employees that he or she manages experiences possible reduced productivity from that person due to this frustration. However, the quotation above shows a functional manager who seems to be at ease with the situation of working in a matrix. First, this leader has the ability to understand the other party's (the project organization) situation. Being able to see different challenges from different angles might facilitate the cooperation between the functional organization and the project organization. Second, the understanding of how the project organization and the functional organization have to cooperate in order to reach their – after all, mutual goal,

show a flexible matrix boss in accordance with Davis & Lawrence's (1977) definition.

#### ***5.2.4 The individual and the challenges of a balanced matrix***

A typical challenge in the balanced matrix would be one of those issues that this leader describes, namely the distribution of resources. Since this is the responsibility of the functional management, and since this is a potential conflict area in the balanced matrix (as also is pointed out by the informant and which will be discussed later in this chapter), all the interpersonal relational skills mentioned by Galbraith (2002) would be of great importance - maybe especially for the functional manager. Both conflict solving skills and persuasion skills are necessary for the functional manager in addition to networking skills, when trying to distribute resources without getting into serious conflict with the project management. However, this leader points also to one of the greatest advantages of the matrix structure – the possibility of reusing resources, and thus reuse competency and experience.

One of the most important tasks of the functional organization is to take care of the employees' interests. The informant is concerned about what the organization has to offer in order to keep hold of their employees. Inherent in the matrix structure as such is a high degree of involvement in decision making, which should enhance personal commitment and motivation (Larson & Gobeli, 1987). Also, a review of the literature on matrix structure (Ford & Randolph, 1992) does indeed reveal a number of perceived benefits of the matrix structure for the individual employee. These benefits include increased motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and personal development. Most of the employees in a matrix organization are working in cross-functional teams. In relation to the individual, it is uncertain whether working in cross-functional teams actually does have a positive impact in motivation and commitment or not. Many specialists find interacting with different types of people and performing a wide range of activities frustrating. Also, the very nature of such project teams tends to make working in one a potential stressful experience for the participants. Multiple reporting relationships and divided commitment across projects heighten role

conflict and ambiguity, and this problem is most apparent where the ambiguity is the greatest: the balanced matrix (Larson & Gobeli, 1987).

The next quotation is from an interview with one of the employees in one of the teams (work packages) in Project I. He confirms some of the advantages and also some of the disadvantages of working in a matrix structure for the individual employee, reviewed in the literature.

*TR: How do you feel about working in a team like you are doing now?*

*Team member 3: Actually I only see advantages of working like this – in a team. You'll get close to the people you are supposed to work together with. On the negative side...I don't really see anything negative by working like this. I experience another form of attachment to the project when working in a team than the kind of attachment you'll feel when working by your self. When you are working by your self, it is hard to get an overall picture of the situation.*

*TR: Have you ever experienced working in several projects at a time?*

*Team member 3: Oh yes! That is something I experience quite often. But that can be a bit difficult at times, because suddenly you have to jump from one task to a completely different task in another project. I need some time to rearrange inside my head, so I would say that it is not particularly efficient to work like that. But as I said, I believe that when you are working in a team, you feel a greater personal responsibility for the whole project. You don't feel like standing on the sideline. What sometimes can be problematic is that you don't know who your leaders are, especially in relation to which task to prioritize. If there is one request from one project and then another request from another project, where should I turn, who will decide what is to be done first?*

*TR: Is this a recent experience?*

*Team member 3: Yes, it is! But I talked to my team leader, and then both of us talked with my functional leader, and we sorted it out. We decided on what to do together, so it is not that difficult to handle, but there are times when I'm not sure about which leader I should turn to.*

*TR: I understand that you have quite a few leaders that you have to relate to in day-to-day work?*

*Team member 3: Yes, far too many!!*

In this quotation the informant discusses two important issues in relation to working in a matrix structured organization: 1) working in teams, and 2) multiple reporting relationships. Both these issues are associated with some of the most difficult challenges of the matrix structure.

In a matrix organization individuals find themselves working across various projects under different managers. This situation creates as already mentioned, multiple reporting relationships, conflicting and confusing expectations, and excessive demands (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Critics of the matrix structure like Peters & Waterman (1982) conclude that the matrix structure is too complex to be effective. One of the results of this complexity is the large numbers of project assignments, which will overly fragment the time for the engineer, and which is not seen as particularly effective. In spite of this, one study conducted by McCollum & Sherman (1991) found that the number of project assignments for each employee did not have any significant negative effect on performance. These findings would imply that several project assignments for each individual will not necessarily have an impact on the perceived effectiveness of the matrix structure.

Nevertheless, running a matrix organization is not easy, and it would seem like it is the individual employee that most often is at risk. Joyce et al. (1997) identified several important costs of the individual by implementing a lateral (matrix structure, among others) organization including stress, role overload and loss of work commitment. In the quotation above the informant tells how he actually feels a greater personal responsibility for the whole project by working in a team, and thus it doesn't seem like he has lost his work commitment. The informant also points out how he appreciates working in a team. He sees it as a benefit getting close to those people he is supposed to work with. According to Burns (1989) one of the advantages of the matrix structure is actually the use of cross-functional teams. Teams like this are supposed to reduce functional barriers and overcome the problem of subunit orientation. With differentiation between functions kept to a minimum, integration becomes easier to achieve. A

cross-functional team structure will also – ideally, facilitate adaptation and learning for the whole organization.

The overall impression from the interviews is that the engineers of this matrix organization have *not* lost their work commitment, and one reason for this might be due to a functioning system of rewards. As rewards in lateral organizations seldom come as promotions, Joyce et al. (1997) point to the importance of a clear system of alternative rewards in order to avoid several of the individual costs perceived to arise from the matrix structure. Such a system would ideally reward people for expanding their skills and competencies, thus enabling them to make even more contributions in the future. This seems to be in line with what leader 3 said about the importance of taking care of the interests of their employees, in the quotation further above.

Joyce et al. (1997) also assumed the manager's ability or inability to cope with uncertainty and diversity in reporting relationships to be a critical factor in relation to costs of the individual employee. Loosening horizontal boundaries places greater emphasis on processes, and requires improved communication, leadership and resolution on turf issues.

The individual stressors referred to in the study by Joyce et al. (1997) are also present in the present organization, but to a lesser extent. One reason for this might be that this organization has implemented a rewarding system adjusted to the demands of the matrix structure. Another reason might be that managers are able to handle the uncertainty and diversity associated with the dual reporting relationship in a matrix organization. And the overall reason might be that this organization has reached the state of a mature matrix.

#### **5.2.5 The role of the project manager and challenges of a balanced matrix**

The role of the project manager in the matrix organization is not straight forward. It would seem like they have the same responsibility as a general executive – the profitability of a business, but the project manager does not have the same undivided authority as a general executive. In a matrix the sources of authority are shared with the functional managers (Davis & Lawrence, 1977).

The next quotation is from an interview with the manager of Project I:



*Leader 1: ...and then there is of course priorities as well. You have to put the tasks up against each other, which task is the most important? And that is not easy, but on this issue it is the project organization which has to make the decisions together with the work teams. [ ] As far as possible we are trying to prioritize between tasks, and if there are things we can't do now, we will just have to do it later (that of course depends on what kind of task it is, tasks that are directly related to the customer and thus mean money in the bank will just have to be finished in time, in those cases there is no tolerance), that is what we (the project organization) can do, really. And we can redistribute resources [ ], but that is actually the line organizations job, but I think it is OK to look at things like that from two angles, and I believe that is working just fine: the line organization handles the resources issue at their meetings and we take care of the technical stuff, and then there is a small overlap.*

*TR: You don't feel that there has been any trespassing?*

*Leader 1: This is important! I talked to M and T about this and the fact that they take care of the use of resources, and that they don't know anything about technical solutions in Project I, so that is ok, and then we (the project organization) will, together with the team leaders who know what this is all about, take care of the final result.*

The most common authority conflicts are those between functional and project managers over project priorities, administrative procedures, technical perfection versus performance trade-offs, personnel resources, cost estimates, scheduling, and personalities (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Barker et al. (1988) found that the three most intense areas of conflict (schedules, priorities and personnel resources) result from the split authority problem between project managers and functional departments. The way to minimize conflict would be to clarify authority and responsibility for the project. Based on research into the area of inter organizational conflicts, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that project managers who handle conflict through cooperative and confirming strategies are more likely to be effective than those who use confrontation or avoidance strategies (Barker et al., 1988; Thamain & Wilemon, 1975). According to Davis & Lawrence (1977) project managers must use their knowledge, competence, relationships, force of personality, and skills in group management to get people

to do what is necessary for project success. Communication and relationships are seen as particularly important in getting things to move along.

The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional managers in this organization. Here we are talking about the project manager.

*Leader 2: He is very good at providing us (the functional organization) with the information that we need, usually things that are related to needs of resources. He respects the rules we have about use of resources, which is to say that he does not just point to one person and claim him or her, which is something I'm used to from other projects. [ ] But there have been a few issues not specifically related to the teams, things they have not informed us about, where they have asked already heavily loaded persons to do a job for the project office. But when we get to know about this, we confront them and we sort it out. [ ] It is easy to relate to this project.*

*TR: It seems like one is dependent on the right kind of persons to get this cooperation (between the two organizations) to work?*

*Leader 2: Yes, it is dependent on the right person. I actually think LI as a person has a very good qualification to make this a good project to work in. It is very important that you have the ability to communicate with the persons you have with you, and develop a true "project spirit". If you can manage this, people will be more willing to put in an extra effort to help you reach your goals. It means that they care about you and what you stand for.*

The informant's perception of the project manager seems to be very much in line with the definition of an effective project manager offered by among others Barker et al. (1988). Both the project manager and also the functional managers seem to be willing to face issues of potential conflict as soon as they arise. As a result the project management and the functional management of this organization are able to work together without any devastating conflicts. The informant points to some of the individual skills of the project manager, and stresses in particular the importance of his communication skills in relation to effective project management.

The project leader is of course vital for the success of the project, and the project leader will have to face potential conflicts caused by: a) the dual authority

problem, b) the need to balance the desire of professionals to achieve perfection with the organization's need for cost efficiencies, and c) the need to handle political conflicts caused by the need to secure scarce organizational resources from functional managers who are reluctant to give them up (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Project managers are responsible for meeting project goals within a specified time-span and budget, while it is the functional manager's concern that their departmental resources, human as well as material, are used efficiently and kept in good condition (deLaat, 1994).

### **5.2.6 The 2-boss manager and the challenges of a balanced matrix**

Apart from the multiple reporting relationship and the dual authority issues, there is another characteristic of the matrix structure: the 2-boss manager. Usually, the 2-boss manager will be the one leading the cross-functional teams. This is also how it works in the organization in this study. Earlier in this chapter it has been stated that the role of the team leader can be difficult in a matrix structure, and perhaps especially for a team leader new to the matrix management. New to matrix management or not, because of the conflicting demands from both functional management and project management which the team leader has to handle, Davis & Lawrence (1977) assume that the most obvious challenge within the matrix structure lies with the role of the 2-boss manager. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the team managers in Project I:

*TR: What kind of information does the functional management need from you?*

*Leader 5: [] the functional management wants a current update on resources, progress and things that concern the functional management. They also need to know if the results of our team are coordinated with the results of the other teams attached to Project I. The meetings that I have with the functional management function like a channel by which you can discuss different issues with your "employer" in a very open way. This channel will provide the team manager with some kind of assurance in that there always is somewhere where you can (if this channel is working) get instant solutions and decisions on issues at stake. I believe that the communication between functional management and the teams is very important.*

*TR: What kind of information is it that the project management needs from you, then?*

*Leader 5: It is pretty much the same as the functional management gets, it has to do with the present status. [ ] And this is of course necessary. The negative thing is that this kind of organizational structure often results in a form of double communication. And to me it also seems to result in some artificial lines [between the functional management, the project management and the teams], instead of seeing all parts as parts of the same organization.*

The two-boss manager has in general quite an exposed role, and will often experience stress as a result of conflicting demands put on him or her by the functional and project managers (Hodge, Anthony & Gales, 2003). Nevertheless none of those team managers that were interviewed in relation to this study commented in particular on the main difficulty associated with their role in the matrix – conflicting demands from the functional- and project management (it is however important that such conflicting demands were *observed* at one occasion). The informant above is concerned about other issues relevant to the matrix structure. One of the things that are inherent in the matrix structure is the increase in communication. According to Burns (1989) one of the most significant advantages of the matrix structure is that it opens up communication between functional specialists and provides an opportunity for team members from different functions to learn from one another and develop their technical skills. This advantage is in particular related to the cross-functional teams, but other researchers (Davis & Lawrence, 1977) have hypothesized that matrix organization increases capacity for information handling and decision making within organizations in general, by establishing formal, lateral channels of communication. Joyce (1986) found that the implementation of the matrix structure caused the predicted increases in the quantity of communication, but decreased the quality of those communications.

In spite of the fact that the informant questions what he experiences as double communication and lines where there should be no lines, he definitively sees the advantages of having the functional management as a fixed point in dealing with the everyday running of the team. Again, the reason that none of the

team leaders mentioned any conflicting demands from either of the two organizations they have to relate to, might be that this organization has reached the state of a mature matrix. In a mature matrix the functional and project managers have learned to avoid most instances of making irreconcilable demands of their shared subordinates (Davis & Lawrence, 1977).

### **5.3 A well-functioning matrix organization**

According to Joyce (1986) there is little empirical evidence of the perceived benefits of the matrix structure. Evidence or not, those researchers who speak in favour of the matrix are very clear about one thing: to achieve an effective matrix organization takes a lot of hard work. The quotation above gives an illustration of a 2-boss manager aware of the negative sides of the structure chosen by his organization, but who at the same time is able to see some of the benefits as well. And this last point is running like a red thread through all of the interviews. Especially the informants with management responsibility were very aware of both advantages and disadvantages of the matrix structure. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the group leaders in the functional organization:

*Leader 4: It is (the matrix structure) a very demanding organization form. You are exposed to great tensions. In many ways it seems like you are supposed to be exposed to these tensions, because all the time there are the long-term goals of the functional organization, and then there are the short-term goals of the project organization, and this divergence is just laid out in the open. It is a very demanding form. Nevertheless, when all of this is said, this is something I believe in. If you let the project organization have all the power, it would have been too short-term, and there would be no transference of experiences from one project to another. If the functional organization had all the power, then we probably would think much more long-term, and we would definitively waste a lot of time on training people and make sure that everyone was doing alright. Thus, I believe that we have to find the right relationship between short-term and long-term. And then I believe in compromising. I believe that in the long run, this is the best solution.*

The definition of organizational structure includes the intension that structure is supposed to enable the organization to meet its objectives effectively and in an orderly manner (Goldhaber, 1993). The overall impression from the quotations in this chapter is that there is an agreement that the matrix structure is the one structure best suited for this organization in order to reach its goals. Through the interviews it would also seem like this organization has managed to make the matrix structure work in a satisfactory way. Davis & Lawrence (1977) stress that an organization should not use a matrix structure if it does not need to use it. In the literature review (chapter 2a) an account was given of in what kinds of situations it has been most usual to choose a matrix structure. Some of those situations that were mentioned in particular were:

- Special projects, particularly major ones
- Need for diverse occupational skills, particularly higher-level ones
- Conditions of change during project operation
- Complex issues of coordination, problem solving and scheduling
- High needs for authority of knowledge and expertise compared with existing functional authority (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985; Kazanjian & Drazin, 1987)

All of these situations are relevant for the organization in question in this study, especially since this is an organization doing business within the area where the matrix term actually came from – the aerospace industry.

Anyway, most of the quotations above are from employees with management responsibility. By having such a responsibility they are obliged to be familiar with the organizational structure the organization has chosen. The employees on the other hand did in general not have any strong opinions about the effectiveness of the matrix structure, or whether this was the right structure for enabling the organization to meet its objectives. The reasons for this can be many. One of the informants, a young man, said this about the matrix structure:

*Team member 2: The thing with that matrix-stuff is something which I have not made an effort to understand. The functional management will have to take care of that.*

It is obvious that this informant is quite indifferent to management related issues like organizational structure. It is difficult to understand why he is so indifferent, but some suggestions can be made: The quotation could be due to the personality of this employee, or that he is very young and inexperienced. The fact is that the general impression from the interviews was that organizational structure was of no big concern to the employees. This may be due to a failure from the management to communicate this organization structure to their employees, especially new employees, or it could be the result of a well-functioning matrix structure. The management might have been able to keep conflicts related to the choice of organization structure mainly on a management level. Issues related to this structure are thus not particularly relevant to the everyday work of the individual employee, and he or she does not need to make any reflections about it.

#### **5.4 Discussion**

In this part of the analysis, some of the critical factors in relation to the structure this organization has chosen have been examined. The focus of interest in this study is on how the members of this organization perceive their everyday working life with respect to leadership and communication. Therefore there has been an effort to look at the matrix organization through the eyes of its participants as well as in the light of relevant literature. One of the most obvious challenges of this organization is that the matrix is a so called balanced matrix, where the power and authority is supposed to be equally distributed among the two organizations. To be a leader in a balanced matrix is probably even more difficult than in other forms of organization structure. This has been one of the main issues in this chapter – the role of both the functional and project manager in the balanced matrix. The management skills needed in a matrix will be further discussed in another chapter, but in this analysis the ability to handle conflicts, have been pointed out as particularly vital for the matrix boss. The matrix bosses interviewed seemed to accept the fact that conflicts were a part of their everyday

work in the matrix, but they were also prepared to face every conflict in order to solve it in the best way possible, and thus be able to move on.

A study conducted by McCollum and Sherman (1993) concluded that if the environment is appropriate, the integration requirements are high, if the implementation is completely managed and if the size is not extremely large, matrix structures can be effectively utilized in different types of structures. Their study was conducted as, among other things, a response to the somewhat hard critique the matrix structure/management received by Peters & Waterman in their famous book "In Search of Excellence" (1982). The critique was mainly directed toward the complexity of the matrix structure, and their general opinion was that no organization structure that complex could be effective. One of their arguments for this assertion was that none of their excellent companies used the matrix structure, except for one – Boeing. The thing that was special with Boeing was that the employees were assigned for only one project at a time. However, the findings of McCollum and Sherman (1993) did not support the assumption that number of project assignments did have any influence on performance. The individual employee in the balanced matrix has been one of the other themes in this chapter. One of the informants in this present study told about how he experienced being assigned to several projects at the same time as some kind of a stressor. However, when problems emerged he actually took hold of them, confronted his leaders and his leaders would sort it out. And the informant expressed the view that his problems were solved.

Another role that was discussed in this chapter was the role of the 2-boss manager in the balanced matrix. The existence of the 2-boss manager is one of the most important characteristics of the matrix structure, and the holder of this title might often perceive the role as quite difficult. He or she is supposed to report to both the functional leader and the project leader, and might also experience being placed in the middle of ongoing conflicts between the two organizations. The 2-boss managers in this organization did not experience this as a major problem – in fact the two boss manager referred to in this chapter does not mention this issue at all.



Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the matrix structure is complex, and it takes a lot of effort to make it work in a satisfactory way. Even the most persistent spokespersons in favour of this organization structure tell us *not* to use the matrix structure if we don't *need* to use it (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). Also, as already stated, many conditions need to be in place in order to make this work, as well as demands of new behaviour, attitudes, skills and knowledge from both management and employees.

The different approaches to organizational structure have in common an underlying premise that context (the organization's culture, environment, technology, size or task) and structure must somehow fit together if the organization is to perform well (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985). This organization has chosen a matrix structure in order to meet its objectives in the best way possible. Davis & Lawrence (1977) believe that there has to be an organizational *culture* ready for the matrix structure if this structure is to work out well. This study has not focused on the organization's culture or on profit. This study has focused on critical issues in relation to working in an organization structure like this as perceived by the management and the employees. Nevertheless, based on the analysis of the interviews and the known facts about the organization, it would seem like there is a good match between the context of the organization (culture, environment, technology, size and task) and the structure this organization has chosen.

## CHAPTER 6 ILLUSTRATIONS OF LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION IN THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the focus will be on what *strategies* in terms of communication leaders in the matrix organization use (or fail to use) in order to make employees work towards organizational goals. Some authors claim that in order to communicate strategically leaders need a special set of skills:

*Leaders need to think like an analyst to assess the context, visualize like a craftsman to fashion strategy, perform like an elite commando to implement strategy, and agitate like a talk-show host to provoke dialogue (Clampitt, Berk & Williams, 2002:13).*

According to the same authors not many people have all these skills (which maybe is not so surprising) and they point to this as an explanation for the lack of effective leaders. In this particular organization none of those who were interviewed used concepts such as “ineffective leaders” or “strategic communication”. However, the metaphors used by Clampitt et al. illustrate in an illuminating way what enormous demands in relation to communication skills one tends to put on the leader. But there is no way of getting around the fact that the ability to communicate strategically is one of the most important skills of the leader. Through communication, managers establish and maintain the interpersonal relationships needed to do their jobs well on a daily basis. Through communication managers listen to others and share the understandings and information needed to create a motivational workplace. Actually, no manager can do well without being a good communicator (Schermerhorn, 1996). Research also supports this great emphasis that is put on the communication skills of the leader. Mintzberg (1973) found that the majority of the manager’s time was spent in oral communication on different levels, and that only one-quarter was spent on doing “desk-work”.

Most definitions of effective leadership contain elements where the importance of good communication skills become obvious. In the literature review influencing or persuasion skills was found to be crucial. Most definitions of leadership focus on the ability to influence others to work towards mutual goals. In the Introduction to this thesis, the following definition by Yukl (2002) was used:

*Leadership is the process of **influencing** others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the **process of facilitating** individual and collective efforts to accomplish **shared objectives** (p. 7, my emphasis).*

This chapter sets out to investigate how the leaders of this particular organization try to *influence* their employees to understand and agree about what needs to be done through the use of *persuasion* and *feedback*. However, the first issue this chapter will deal with is *commitment*. As will be pointed out in the following, it has been showed that a feeling of commitment to organizations, goals or leaders will *facilitate* the process of accomplish *shared objectives*.

In the following the focus will first of all be on the different communication techniques and strategies the leaders of this organization made use of in order to reach their goals, as reported by the leaders and the employees themselves.

## **6.2 How leaders communicate in order to reach organizational goals**

### **6.2.1 Commitment**

In order to accomplish shared objectives, employees should preferably feel some form of commitment to these objectives. According to Mai & Akerson (2003) the most important communication issue of the leadership role is to create a sense of commitment to organizational goals in each employee.

Research has shown communication to be of great significance for the employees feeling of organizational commitment and belonging (Young, Worchel & Woehr, 1998; Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). When commitment to the organization and its goals is weak, symptoms range from half-hearted work

efforts to an ongoing exodus of the organization's good people (Mai & Akerson, 2003). Research has indicated that employees feel that communication quantity and quality are linked to the desirability to stay with the organization (Scott et al., 1999).

The following quotation is from an interview with one of the team members, and illustrates the importance of management communication in relation to commitment:

*TR: Do you feel that that you get enough information from the project management?*

*Team member 6: In general I feel that there has been very little project information – updating on what is happening in the project as such and things like that. But now we get some kind of summary...update of status by e-mail (from the project manager), and I think this is very good. You feel like you are part of the whole project. It is not like it is important information; I don't need it to do my job, but...*

*TR: Does it have anything to do with feeling more committed?*

*Team member 6: Yes!!*

Although in this case study there never was a focus on whether or not people wanted to leave the organization, there is no doubt that this informant felt more committed to the project as a result of an increase in the communication from the project management. This e-mail newsletter from the project management was greatly appreciated by everyone interviewed, in spite of the fact that this newsletter seldom contained information that was crucial to the completion of different tasks.

As earlier stated, this study did not focus on top management (CEO-level), and as this organization has a quite flat structure, the focus of leadership communication to a great extent is to be found with supervisors and team leaders. Nevertheless top management was mentioned by most of the informants, and research has also found that top management communication behaviour is more strongly associated with organizational commitment than satisfaction with organizational communication in general (Putti, Aryee & Phua, 1990).

Some of the informants were harsher in their opinions of the top management than others. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the employees in one of the teams. He has been working for this organization for several years:

*Team member 4: The only situations when I actually see the people on the top are when we are together on mutual gatherings. Till this day I have never experienced that one of those leaders have entered one of the offices down here and asked about how things are! To us, they are Gods and there is no communication! And I really miss that a leader cares, at least shows himself in the corridors from time to time. Actually they don't mean anything for me!*

In spite of mediated, technology driven, communications employees still prefer face-to-face interaction with managers (Clampitt, 1991). This informant complaint that he never actually sees the top management of the organization, and that is something he misses. As a result he is quite indifferent towards the top managers of his own organization. According to Hargie et al. (2004) senior managers have frequently been encouraged to engage in activities designed to increase their visibility and encourage communication with the work force. "Management By Walking About" could be one approach towards reaching such goals. However, one should be aware of several drawbacks attached to this strategy. When a visit from above is announced in advance there is always a chance that what the senior manager gets to see and hear does not represent the reality, merely an idealized version of reality. Thus it becomes something akin to a "royal visit" where the visitor is walking past rather than about. On the other hand – if an unannounced visit is made, the employees might interpret the visit as a form of "snooping" (Hargie et al., 1999). But there are ways to overcome such difficulties, and according to the same authors one way to do this would be by arranging regular meetings with groups of employees at which there is an opportunity for any issue to be raised.

Commitment to an organization in general will influence a number of work-related issues and is found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Bateman &

Stasser, 1984) and attendance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Organizational commitment is also found to be negatively related to outcomes like absenteeism and turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). It is interesting to note that Mathieu & Zajac (1990) concluded that commitment has relatively little direct influence on performance in most instances (p. 184). However, Becker et al. (1996) found that *commitment to supervisors* (and not organizations as such) was positively related to job performance. This is a finding that every organization should pay attention to. The quotation below is from an interview with a young man and here he is talking about one of his immediate leaders:

*Team member 3: One thing that he might do is to come visit us more frequently. It is not like he has never done that, but he could have done it more often. I want him to look over my shoulder, not in the negative way, but...*

The key to organizational success is, according to Johlke and Dunhan (2001) to have first line supervisors who are good communicators and who maintain high levels of contact with supervisees. Employees routinely report that they prefer to receive information from their immediate supervisor (Clampitt, 2000; Røsdal, 1999).

As mentioned above, organizational commitment has been found to be negatively related to absenteeism and turnover. A poor relationship between supervisor and supervisee has been found to have a very high association with intent to leave the organization (Scott et al., 1999). Knowing this, every organization should be encouraged to put a greater focus on the communication skills of first line leaders, supervisors and team leaders.

The next quotation is from the same interview as the first quotation was taken from. Here the informant is talking about his relationship with his immediate<sup>4</sup> leader:

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<sup>4</sup> Immediate leader would normally mean his or her nearest leader (usually a first line leader in the functional organization).

*Team member 4: She is very good (his immediate leader). I don't talk much about the job with her, usually it is about more personal related areas, whether you have some extra vacation coming up, or maybe that you are going away for a while or something like that. She is interested; she visits you and looks at what you're doing –that's very good. That is what I miss from those on the top. They could have cared a bit more about their employees, not just having a coffee club up there on the top.*

This informant expresses a fondness towards his immediate leader which maybe is quite rare. However, he also explains why he appreciates her so much, and this explanation is totally in accordance with Hargie et al. (2004). In essence, employees want immediate leaders who:

- Take a personal interest in their lives
- Seem to care for them as individuals
- Listen to their concerns and respond to these quickly and appropriately
- Give regular feedback on performance in a sensitive manner
- Hold efficient regular meetings at which information is shared and freely exchanged
- Explain what is happening within the company (Hargie et al., 2004).

### **6.2.2 Persuasion**

How can management channel employee behaviour in the desired direction? Management have many techniques at their disposal, but what techniques do they actually use, and when?

As already mentioned, leadership is basically defined as influencing a group of people to work towards mutual (i.e. organizational) goals. In order to reach organizational goals an organization needs effective and committed employees. And to a large degree the effectiveness and feeling of commitment among employees is dependent on the communication skills of the current leader. The ability to persuade is one of the most important communication skills of the leader. In fact, the essence of effective leadership has been claimed to be

the ability to influence and persuade others to behave in certain ways (Hargie et al., 2004).

There are many different reasons for trying to persuade a subordinate: to complete specific tasks, behave in certain ways, and meet set targets (Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 2004). In Project I at the time of the interviews, several new employees were hired. Most of them were also very young, straight from school. This gave way to some new set of challenges for the managers. For one of the work teams in particular this issue (namely the young and inexperienced team members) also seemed to be one of the reasons that this team had trouble meeting set targets. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional leaders:

*TR: Is it possible that the young, inexperienced employees in the infra team feel that it is difficult to feel any form of commitment to the project, and that they find it hard to understand where they and their job fit into everything?*

*Leader 3: That is the same challenge that we are experiencing in another team as well – how to make each and everyone understand that if you can't manage to do your job, in time and with the right quality, that will result in certain consequences. To make them see that, and wanting to see that is a challenge. I'm aware of that; we have something to work on there. [ ] It is obvious that both functional managers and team leaders have a great challenge in making all the employees see the big picture in a way that makes them understand the consequences of every move they make. If we could define some kind of mechanism that will make them see that, then we will have reached far. But it is not easy. It is about communication and how to form an image of things in a way that easily makes you understand.*

According to Mai and Akerson (2003) too many organizations discover, for instance through internal surveys, that employees are often confused about what is important, what customers want and what they themselves should be attending to. Organizations are complex, and especially to newcomers the organization can appear to be quite confusing. The same authors claim that imposing order over organizational complexity is what effective leadership aims to achieve. As noted



earlier (in chapter 2b) this issue might be especially important within a complex organizational structure like the matrix represents. To be persuasive, especially with more mobile and better educated employees, leaders must provide thorough explanations that connect with the big-picture understandings. They must find ways to make common cause and to build win-win situations (Mai and Akerson, 2003). The following quotation is from the focus group interview:

*Leader 2: Something that I feel has been positive is that we have managed to follow-up the work done by the team by presenting the team members with the economical consequences of the work they have done in relation to how much time they have used. And they are really interested in the progress, and I believe that by sharing this information with the team members the team members feel a greater sense of commitment towards the goals of their team, and thus responsible for reaching them.*

One way to persuade employees is to use reason (Hargie et al., 2004). Reason has been defined as “a strategy of influencing which relies on the presentation of data and information as the basis for a logical argument that supports a request” (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001, p. 818). By introducing the team members to the economical consequences of their work related progress, leader 2 felt that the team members got a better understanding of the so called “big picture”. A persuasion technique like this will typically qualify as an appeal to reason (Hargie et al., 2004). With an appeal to reason the *advantages* of the recommended course of action (in this case: meet set targets, more money in the bank, get a promotion) and in particular the *disadvantages* of the alternatives (in this case: not meeting set targets, running out of money, losing the project, downsizing...) should be firmly stated (Allen & Preiss, 1998). According to Cialdini (2001) most of us are more inclined to prevent lost opportunities than to reap potential gain. Mai and Akerson (2003) claim that leaders add an important dimension to any direction-setting communication by pointing out what the organization and the people stand to lose by not following a given plan.

Getting ready to persuade employees or colleagues can take weeks or months of planning – learning about the audience and the position that is to be

argued (Conger, 1998). Conger claims that effective persuasion involves four essential steps: 1. establish credibility, 2. framing the goals in a way that identifies common ground with those one intends to persuade, 3. reinforcement of position using vivid language and compelling evidence and 4. to connect emotionally with the audience. The following quotation is taken from an interview with one of the functional leaders. She is addressing the issue of the new and young employees, and it is interesting to note that she has chosen a quite different persuasion technique than the one mentioned above:

*Leader 4: Those boys in my group...they are genuinely interested in technology and absolutely not interested in other things. You will have to try to motivate them in a different way, preferably in a way that makes them move in the direction of common goals, but this lot will not be motivated by numbers that shows how well we are doing in relation to the project. You just have to mention budgets and plans (and they get really bored)...these guys have to be motivated by other things [ ] The group leader's task is mainly to turn every budget goal and benchmarks and everything they know as old and sad, into hard fun tasks. We are speaking one language in one group and another in another group. When I started (in this organization) – I belong to the generation who were very skilled at what we did, we did what they told us, but we were not as productive as this gang. When they solve a task it is magic. [ ] It is really exciting.*

From interviews with other employees it became apparent that the employees both appreciated and respected this leader (see for instance quotation in chapter 4 on leadership skills). Her credibility has been established a long time ago. One reason for this earned respect and credibility might be that she actively tries to persuade her subordinates to work towards common goals using the formula from Conger mentioned above. She tells that she especially focus on language – making budget plans and benchmarks understandable and interesting for someone not used to think in those terms. And from the quotation there is no doubt that she also connects emotionally both to her audience and to the overall goals.

Hargie et al. (2004) argues that the nature of the persuader is of crucial importance in the influencing process. If we are not convinced by the person, we are unlikely to be persuaded by their arguments. Power, appearance and relationship qualify as so-called personal proofs. If every other persuasion strategy fails, the persuader will usually turn to the use of power. The next quotation is from an interview with one of the functional leaders. She is referring to a situation where the functional management had to intervene with the management of one of the teams:

*Leader 2: the team leader will ask: how much work do you have left? And the employee will answer: two weeks work! And then the team leader will ask the employee two weeks later, and the answer will still be the same. So you see, they don't feel committed to what they have said earlier. There is actually a tendency to put the responsibility on the team leader! So he (the team leader) needs help to get things done, and that is why we have had to use our authority to instruct people to work overtime.*

According to Cialdini (2001) the manager should stress making the different commitments made by an employee (in this case telling how much time is needed to complete a task) active, public and voluntary. He claims that there is a greater chance that whatever the goal of the persuasion attempt is, it will be easier to reach this goal by getting the employee to write down whatever he has committed to. Cialdini (2001) suggests that once the manager believes that he has won an agreement, the manager should ask the employee to summarize the decision in a memo and send it to the manager. This approach was never used in the situation mentioned above, and that could be one explanation for not succeeding in getting the employee to actual reach the goals in two weeks like he said he would.

Another explanation for failing could be lack of legitimate power. According to Hargie et al. (2004) six forms of social power can be used to influence others. These six forms are: 1. Expert power, 2. Information power, 3. Legitimate power, 4. Referent power, 5. Coercive power and 6. Reward power. In relation to the situation referred to above it is clear that management had to

make use of the third form of power; so-called legitimate power. Legitimate power emanates from the position occupied by the persuader. A manager will by definition have power over subordinates, and functional management is ranked higher in terms of power over subordinates than the team leader, thus functional management had to use their legitimate power when the legitimate power of the team leader was not enough. The following quotation is from the interview with the same informant, addressing somewhat the same issue:

*Leader 2: there are quite a few who are willing to work overtime, but they are not nearly enough. Under the present circumstances we (supervisors) actually have to instruct people to work overtime, so that we have a chance of reaching the next goal. So the thing is that we have to, in a more active way, direct our employees to work harder (for a period), because they will not do that unless someone tell them to.*

Several researchers differentiate between soft influence tactics and hard influence tactics (Barry and Shapiro, 1992; Falbe and Yukl, 1992). Legitimizing will typically qualify as a hard influence tactic. The informant tells how the supervisors had to instruct some of their employees to work overtime, because the employees did not themselves initiate anything in order to reach the next goals. It is obvious that the supervisors in this context made use of their legitimate power in influencing the employees to work overtime. According to Falbe and Yukl (1992) legitimizing is one of the least effective influencing techniques, which seldom results in any form of commitment to the goals one is trying to reach. Nevertheless, the results from the study by Falbe and Yukl (1992) did show that hard influencing tactics could be useful for eliciting compliance, and especially when combined with rational persuasion. With rational persuasion the persuader uses logical arguments and factual evidence. In the situation mentioned above the use of rational persuasion in combination with legitimate power could be an alternative to the tactic actually used. Anyway, compliance is sometimes all that is needed to accomplish a task objective.

Another so-called hard influence tactic is pressure. Yukl (2002) describes pressure tactics as use of demands, threats, frequent checking or persistent

reminders to influence the target person. Especially frequent checking and persistent reminders are persuasion techniques that most of us are familiar with, from one context or another. The quotation below is from the focus group interview, and gives an illustration of the use of persistent reminders in a work life context:

*Leader 1: ...and it is just like you say it is (points to one of the other participants in the group), we have to repeat and repeat and repeat time after time the dimensions of this project, how much time we can use, how much money we have to our disposal, quality of work done – all in all: provide the correct setting and communicate the final goals, and this has to be repeated because this will not happen by itself – it has to be hammered in.*

There might be some truth in the maxim “something worth saying is worth repeating”. The importance of repetition was referred to several times during the interviews with the leaders. In addition to legitimating Falbe and Yukl (1992) found that the pressure tactics also was one of the least effective influence tactics. The use of pressure will seldom create any form of commitment to goals in the target person/persons. The use of hard forms of pressure (like threats, warnings and demands) are even likely to cause resentment and undermine working relationships. In most cases the softer forms (like persistent requests, reminders that the person promised to do something) are more likely to gain compliance without undermining your relationship with the person (Yukl, 2002). It is interesting though to note that in a study by Barry and Bateman (1992) pressure tactics were not rated especially effective in relation to influence success by managers themselves.

The reasons why the managers of this particular organization insisted that they had to make use of legitimating and repetition to get things done could of course be many. One reason might be that at the time these interviews were conducted the pressure on both project- and functional management to complete in time the different tasks that the teams were set out to do were so high that the most important thing became *compliance* among the employees, not commitment.

### **6.2.3 Feedback, upward and downward communication**

Most studies on feedback in a work-related setting do find a positive correspondence between feedback and task performance, employee motivation and commitment (Ivancevich & McMahon, 1982; London et al., 1999). In a study investigating the relationships between feedback and self-development, London et al. (1999) found that those employees who perceived receiving positive reinforcement and no threatening feedback and who felt empowered were rated higher in performance. Also they found that positive reinforcement was more important than other forms of feedback (i.e. evaluative feedback, no threatening feedback and empowerment) in predicting performance. Thus, it is important that managers are aware that feedback may affect job performance.

A feeling of uncertainty in a job is often a consequence of lack of feedback on task performance (Clampitt, 1991). Organizational life includes uncertainty about for instance how to do a job and what to expect in performance appraisals (Teboul, 1994). Especially as a newcomer, there will be many sources to uncertainty (Morrison, 2002), and the quotation below is from an interview with one of the newer team members:

*Team member 3: There is one thing that I like to mention: After half a year as an employee here, I had a formal performance appraisal with my functional leader. It was very good to get feedback from him.*

When asked about how employees received feedback on the tasks they had completed, most of them mentioned performance appraisals as the main source for feedback.

A formal performance appraisal might lead to benefits such as: 1) an open and honest two-way communication between management and staff, 2) open and honest communication ensures that when misunderstandings occur an opportunity is provided for their resolution and 3) open communication means that both sides discuss their expectations of the other (Hargie et al., 2004). Communication audits in various organizations have revealed that employees in

general feel they receive too little feedback, be it positive or negative, on the job they are doing (Hargie & Tourish, 1996; Røsdal, 1999).

Giving appraisal or feedback will be a management task, and a lack of feedback from managers or supervisors might give the employees the impression that management does not care about them or how they are doing (Erlien, 1997). However, it is not insignificant who the one giving feedback is. The following quotation is from an interview with one of the team members:

*TR: Did you get any feedback (from the team leader) on this task that you finished?*

*Team member 6: I have not gotten any feedback from him yet. Anyway my team leader can not tell me if what I have done is right or wrong; he can only give me feedback on the amount of working hours I have used on this task.*

According to Neher (1997) the feedback should preferably be given by someone with some form of credibility regarding professional competency. The employee wants feedback on a task done, and he feels that in this case the team leader is not the right person to give him that kind of feedback.

There is no doubt that feedback is essential to effective performance in any endeavour. Most corporations are aware of the importance of monitoring feedback from publics and customers to chart the success or failure of services and products (Hargie et al., 2004). However, the focus on feedback or upward communication from employees to management has not been that great, and according to Tourish and Hargie (2004) research on upward organizational communication has been insufficient. There is no doubt that staff attach considerable significance to upward communication (Hargie et al., 1999). In an interview with one of the functional leaders she gave an illustration of one kind of upward communication, and how they tried to handle it:

*TR: Do the employees in your department communicate new ideas?*

*Leader 3: There are so many good ideas of smart improvements, but you have to put the limit somewhere. Furthermore it has to do with how much it actually is that reaches you, and then, after a while people might give up, they don't bother anymore. But especially*

*the young people with a lot of guts come up with A LOT OF good ideas, which do not necessarily relate to Project I [ ] about how we possibly can do things in a more efficient way. It is really important that we manage to see this in a larger context, and give them proper feedback on their creative ideas and why it is not possible to implement them.*

For organizations to thrive, feedback must always be a two-way street (Hargie et al., 2004). In practice this is to say that employees should be encouraged to “speak up”, while managers should not get into the habit of “talking down” (Hargie et al., 1999). During the interview with this manager she talked about the importance of drawing the line – both in relation to information and in relation to new ideas. An organization of this kind is dependent on their customers and the payment the organization gets for those products they are delivering. A specification of what the product should contain is made in cooperation with the customer in advance. Thus the customer will pay for a product which is in accordance with this specification delivered at a date agreed upon, also in advance. Usually there is not room for any extra costs which the fulfilment of new ideas that are not agreed upon in advance will lead to. Therefore management just have to draw the line somewhere, it is a matter of surviving. But the informant emphasizes the importance of giving adequate feedback on new ideas, independent on whether they are going to be implemented or not. According to Hargie et al. (2004) doing just this is of great importance. If upwards communications disappear into a black hole never to be heard of again, the result will be staff cynicism and withdrawal (p. 14).

Most of the employees interviewed were asked about what responses they got from their functional leader if they expressed any dissatisfaction with their current tasks. None of the informants had ever experienced any troubles in relation to that issue. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the team members:

*TR: Do you feel that those requests you have made (in relation to tasks) have been heard by management?*



*Team member 6: Absolutely! At times when I have not been happy with my work tasks, I have told my functional leader about it, and she has tried to do something about it.*

The Vroom-Yetton-Jago normative model (1973, 1978) is a contingency theory focusing on to what degree a manager should avoid imposing decisions on subordinates and rather seek agreement (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). Managers who involve employees in the decision-making process will necessarily be skilled listeners who ascertain and address the needs and concerns of staff, and discuss social as well as task matters. Such a leadership style has also been called management by expression. Managers parasitizing management by expression, understands that employees want to be kept fully informed about important issues, especially those having a direct impact on their job. Where this does not occur, they feel underinformed and undervalued (Hargie et al., 1999).

The quotation below is from an interview with one of the team members. In spite of his young age he had achieved the responsibility for completing some of the tasks the whole team was set out to do. But insufficient downward communication can sometimes make a young employee a bit frustrated, which he expresses here:

*Team member 6: When I need information I know who to ask, and I get what I need. The thing is that they (the management) do not always allow me to take part when decisions are to be made. They rather tell me afterwards.*

Part of the problem at many companies is that senior managers fail to involve other employees in the decision-making process. This makes employees feel alienated and less willing to accept changes that managers then impose upon them (Argenti, 1998).

In accordance with management by expression the organization is seen as a communicative system whose effectiveness is dependent on good human relationships. All staff are encouraged to become active partners in the working enterprise, and to contribute to the operation. Success is a team game where all the players kick the ball rather than each other (Hargie et al., 1999).

### **6.3 Discussion**

The job of managers is to inspire, to personalize the values and focus of the organization and to seek out fresh opportunities to engage everyone's full commitment (Tourish, 1997). In this chapter illustrations of how this has been carried out by the management of this organization, has been given. The focus has been on commitment, persuasion, feedback and upward and downward communication.

In the chapter on leadership skills, the importance of the leader's interpersonal skills became apparent. Communication skills were defined in terms of interpersonal skills, and in this chapter, illustrations of how these skills were used and also how they affected the everyday work life of both management and employees in this organization, were given.

This case study was conducted in a matrix structured organization. Davis and Lawrence (1977) argued that interpersonal skills were particularly important in this kind of organization, mainly because of the complexity of such an organizational structure. Although the issue of the matrix structure has not been directly addressed in this chapter, the ability to make everyone involved in such an organization work towards mutual goals will be of significant importance. In particular the ability to create a feeling of *commitment* towards organizational goals will be decisive in a matrix organization, because at times it can be difficult to understand and see what the goals actually are. The overall goals have to be communicated by top management. In order to be able to do that, top management has to be visible and also accessible to all of the staff, not only on special occasions, but in more informal settings as well. If conducted in the appropriate way, Management By Walking About, could be a solution to this issue (Hargie et al., 2004).

However, it is not only top management that is important in developing a feeling of commitment in each and every employee. The importance of the supervisor has been put on the agenda to a greater extent. In fact Mathieu & Zajac (1990) concluded that organizational commitment has relatively little direct influence on *performance* in most instances, but as noted before Becker et al.

(1996) found that *commitment to supervisors* (and not organizations as such) was positively related to job performance. Therefore, if effective employees is a key goal (which it supposedly should be in every organization), a focus should be put on the communication skills of the supervisor.

Sometimes merely telling people to do something is not enough; you will have to *persuade* them to do it. In addition to creating feelings of commitment, being able to persuade or influence employees to work towards some set goals or targets, will probably be the most important leadership skill of all (Mai and Akerson, 2003). But persuasion is not easy, which has been noted throughout this chapter. In addition there are many techniques to choose from, and thus there will be a question about *when* to use *what* technique.

In this chapter there has been, to some extent, a focus on how to persuade relatively young and inexperienced employees to work towards set targets. According to Mai and Akerson (2003) leaders must provide thorough explanations that connect with the big-picture understandings. They must find ways to build a common understanding of reality, and to make win-win situations for the members of the organization in order to be persuasive. The big-picture understanding will probably be even more important in a matrix structured organization, than with another kind of organizational structure.

One way to understand the big-picture can be through the use of reason. The use of reason will usually include some presentation of data and information as the basis for a logical argument that supports a request (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). In the case presented in this chapter, the management made use of economical data to illustrate what economical consequences the work of the team had. According to the informant this use of reason imposed a greater feeling of responsibility for reaching set targets among the team members.

Conger (1998) offers a recipe for successful persuasion. This recipe includes among others framing the goals in a way that identifies common ground with those who are to be persuaded, and reinforcing the feeling of common ground using vivid language and compelling evidence. One of the informants gave an excellent example on how to use this recipe (see p.161). In particular

she stressed the importance of turning numbers and figures into something her particular audience would consider interesting.

In their quest to persuade their employees the management of this organization also made use of so-called hard influence techniques (Barry and Shapiro, 1992). In this chapter especially the use of legitimating and repetition was referred to by the managers. As already mentioned Falbe and Yukl (1992) found that hard influence tactics were the least effective influence tactics. By using hard influence tactics, the persuader would only gain compliance, not commitment. But, as also mentioned, sometimes compliance is all that is needed to complete a task, and sometimes getting the task completed is more important than gaining commitment in relation to this task.

In this chapter the importance feedback has been mentioned along with the importance of sufficient downward communication, and the ability to consider upward communication in the appropriate way. What seems to be of importance here is the ability to create an environment in which everyone feels that they play an important part.

The overall impression after having looked at management communication in this organization is that in order to be an effective communicator the manager needs to be able to play on many different strings. He or she has to be familiar with and willing to use different persuasion techniques, depending on audience and context. A leader in a matrix structured organization should preferably focus on big-picture understandings and establishment of common ground among both employees and leaders. In order to gain commitment for the completion of tasks and overall goals, this would be of major importance. To sum up it seems like the effective leader in terms of communication is someone who is visible, who cares, who provides enough information, who offers big-picture explanations in ways that everyone can connect with, and who gives feedback to the individual employee as well as giving appropriate feedback on upward communication. As noted in the introduction to this chapter – the demands put on the leader are great, and the leaders of this matrix organization experience this every day. However, compared to the demands put on the leader referred to at the start of

this chapter (Clampitt et al., 2002), the demands put on the leaders of this particular organization might seem manageable.

## **CHAPTER 7 THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORK TEAMS IN THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The teams in the matrix organization play a vital role. It is the teams that carry out the different tasks of a project and deliver the products or services that the project is supposed to produce. Thus, both the project as such and the organization in general are dependent on well-functioning teams.

The teams in the matrix organization will typically be cross-functional. The basic characteristic of a cross-functional team was given in chapters 2a and 2b (the literature review). In this context the following definition of a cross functional team will serve as background for this chapter:

*A group of people with a clear purpose representing a variety of functions or disciplines in the organization whose combined efforts are necessary for achieving the team's purpose (Parker, 2002, p. 6).*

In this chapter the focus will to a large extent be on the team leader and what efforts he or she is making in order to make this group of people (the team) achieve the team's purpose. As the team is so important in the matrix organization, the team leader becomes equally important. The team leader role will in the following first of all be discussed in the context of conducting meetings. In 1973 Mintzberg claimed that managers spend 59 per cent of their time in scheduled meetings and another 10 per cent in unscheduled meetings. The amount of a manager's time spent in meetings today is probably no smaller. Within this project it was normal for every team to have a meeting once a week. In addition the team leader had to attend one meeting with the project management and the rest of the team leaders and also several meetings with relevant contacts outside the organization (during the same week).

Leaders and employees believe in the importance of meetings. The two quotations below are from the interview with the project manager, and from an interview with one of the team members. Their statements represent a long and a short, but equally illustrative, version of why meetings are regarded as important and necessary:

*TR: What can you as project management do to in the best way possible assure that the work teams will reach their goals in time?*

*Leader 1: We have meetings every two weeks, and every week we have project meetings, where I talk a little bit about things in general, mainly because – not just because it is cosy, but it has to do with motivation as well [ ]. And then we have some form of status meetings every two weeks – those are run by (another person in the project office), and I attend as often as I can. During those meetings we address mainly technical issues. In this meeting place we are able to make some solutions, because the team leaders can talk directly to the one responsible for the team, and all the team leaders can talk to each other as well.*

*Team member 8: I believe that it is in meetings that the real communication takes place. Meetings are perhaps the most important meeting place in an organization.*

Meetings are an important information channel (Clampitt, 1991), and meetings in the matrix structured organization may be of particular importance. According to the project manager the meetings with *project management* and other *team managers* functioned as a means for everyone to keep track of everyone else in the project. The team member simply felt that meetings were the most important meeting place in the organization.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter team meetings of two different teams in Project I were observed. The members of *team one* represented the well established part of the organization. Most of the team members were highly experienced, middle aged men. Their team leader was younger than the average age of the team. *Team one* was quite large, and it was divided into smaller groups. These groups were responsible for carrying out their tasks, which again

would be a part of the overall goal of the team. Every task was dependent on another task being done. At the team meetings it was usually the leaders of each of these smaller groups that would attend, together with the team leader.

*Team two* represented in many ways the newer part of the organization. This was a much smaller team, and many of the team members were both young and inexperienced in work life. Besides the overall goal of the team was a difficult one; the organization had never done anything like this before. The team leader was somewhat older than the average age of the team. All of the team members would attend the team meetings.

However, other aspects of teams in the organization will be addressed as well. Of particular interest in this case study is the *composition* of these two teams as well as the matrix structure issue. Thus in the following illustrations of how different aspects of team life in the matrix organization was observed by the researcher and also perceived by the members of the organization will be given. As there were a few discrepancies between the issues that turned up as important for the two teams under observation, this chapter is divided in two. One section deals with *team one*, the other reports on *team two*.

## **7.2 Managing the work teams in the matrix organization – team one**

### ***7.2.1 The conduct of meetings***

The *internal* team meetings were mainly supposed to keep the team members informed both about how the team and also the project as such were doing. In addition the agenda for the next week had to be decided, and decisions about who would take care of what had to be made. In order to stand out as an effective matrix organization, meetings have to be conducted in the most effective way possible.

From the observations of team meetings in *team one*:

*These meetings are supposed to provide information about what has happened within the different groups of the team during the last week. Nevertheless is it surprising to*



*learn how little team members inform each other (especially from group to group) about highly relevant things that happened during the week. This relates especially to new arrivals of different components and change of plans. Also, people tend to focus on details when they discuss things at these meetings. Details that are only relevant to but a few of the team members. The team leader does not intervene with these discussions, and thus they can go on forever.*

When asked about some of these issues during the interviews both leaders and employees agreed with the observations. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional managers:

*TR: I've been to some of the team meetings and to me they seem to go on forever without any decisions being made?*

*Leader 2: Yes, there has been some talk about that. As I told you we have persons here who are not willing to take responsibility for anything, but then we also have those with very strong opinions of their own, and if two of those don't agree on an important matter there will be no one who dares to cut through and end the discussion and make a decision. And the team leader feels that this has been a difficult issue, because he does not feel that his professional/technical skills in every area are strong enough, and because of that he has not had the courage to decide against a person he knows to be technically skilled. And because of that many possible solutions have been considered over a long time, and we are as a result delayed.*

Unfortunately many meetings are never particularly effective. Either because they are conducted in some sort of a leaderless vacuum or because they are dominated by highly directive leaders who always knows the one right way of doing things (Hargie et al, 2004). From the observations a lack of leadership is perceived, and this is confirmed by leader 2, who also believes that the team is delayed because of this. In addition she (leader 2) tries to give an explanation for how and why this situation has come about. According to her the team leader was insecure about his technical skills, and she believed that to be the reason why he did not interrupt discussions between experienced and technically skilled team members. However, during the interview with the team leader he said this:

*Leader 6: I don't know if one could call it a problem, but those people attending the team meetings are absolutely not a homogeneous group of people. They represent many different approaches (towards the goal of the team). And because of this, and because they are so many I have deliberately tried to make these meetings some sort of meeting place for "letting things out". As many as possible should get to say what they mean as I'm not able to catch up with it otherwise. But apart from this I'm not certain about how to lead these meetings: A standardized program? More information from me? And how should one end the discussions that are always running? And also I'm afraid that if a discussion is interrupted too abruptly, the result will be dissatisfied team members talking in the corridors. And another thing with these discussions that worries me is that it seems like we never reach any conclusions, and thus the initial problem is not followed up. And what consequences will that have for the working environment in the team – I mean, when you raise a question or problem that you perceive to be important, and then nothing happens – that will give grounds for frustration.*

The team leader has chosen a strategy for leading these meetings: in order to prevent rumours and dissatisfaction he believes that it is very important to create an environment in which everyone can "speak out" their opinions and so forth. This belief is in line with for instance Huczynski & Buchanan (2001) who claims that an open communication climate promotes collaborative working, which is discouraged by a closed communication climate. Nevertheless, the team members that were interviewed and asked about the team meetings, almost always mentioned the everlasting discussions that only affected a few of the team members. This was something that to a greater or lesser extent annoyed them. However, the team leader is aware that the meetings do not function in an optimal way. And he is worried about the long discussions. The strategy the team leader has chosen is obviously not working, but why? The choice of the right leadership style is just as important in relation to conducting effective meetings, as the choice of leadership style in general. Leadership styles have been illustrated and discussed both in chapter 2b and in chapter 4, Illustrations of leadership in the matrix organization. Several authors stress the difference

between task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviour in relation to leadership (i.e. Fiedler, 1967). In the context of meetings the distinction can be made between task-oriented behaviour and group maintenance behaviour (Yukl, 2002). Task oriented behaviour would typically be process structuring, stimulating communication, clarifying communication, summarizing and consensus testing. Group maintenance behaviour would be gatekeeping (make people participate), harmonizing (reduce tension), supporting, standard setting (regulate behaviour) and process analyzing.

The quotations above provide some illustrations of team meetings that do not function in a satisfactory way. It would seem like for *team one* there is a lack of task-oriented leadership behaviour. However, it is not enough for the leader to simply carry out the behaviour; a sense of proper timing is also essential (Bradford, 1976). For instance can any task-oriented behaviour be useless if premature or overdone. Like with the team meetings of *team one* – a discussion may be excessively prolonged if the leader keeps on stimulating communication instead of testing for consensus (Yukl, 2002). If the task-oriented behaviours are to be used effectively, the leader has to be skilled in every one of the aforementioned behaviours. One of the problems for *team one* could have been that although the team leader had the best intentions, he was not skilled enough in the behaviours he tried to exercise.

Another observed problem for *team one* was the lack of communication internally in the team. Although this is an issue that concerns the overall success of the team, it affected the team meetings as well. People were not informed about new arrivals (products they needed from outside their organization) or change of plans. Thus time had to be used to clear this up, and there was also a lot of frustration among the team members because of not being informed. It has been claimed that the very existence of a group depends on communication, on exchanging information and transmitting meaning (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Through communication members of a group reach some understanding of each other, build trust, coordinate their actions, plan strategies for a goal accomplishment and agree upon a division of labour. It is important to note that

how employees perceive the quality of internal communication correlate with teamwork. Furthermore, the perception of the quality of teamwork is a positive determinant of employee performance (Rodwell, et al., 1998). Thus, in order to have productive employees, teamwork should be positively regarded by the employees, and quality teamwork is dependent on well functioning internal communication.

### **7.2.2 Communication in relation to teams in the matrix organization**

One important characteristic of the team in the matrix organization, which also represents one of the greatest challenges in relation to communication, is that both the team members and also the team manager report to two bosses. These multiple reporting relationships might create role conflict, conflicting and confusing expectations and excessive demands (Barker et al., 1988; Ford & Randolph, 1992). In relation to *team one* it seemed like the team leader experienced both confusing expectations and excessive demands. This was expressed to some extent during some of the meetings that were observed.

From the observation of *team one*:

*At one meeting where the team leader, one representative from the project and two of the functional leaders are present the team leader said that he was a bit frustrated with the project management, because it would seem like they (project management) made changes in the plans for this team without letting the team leader know about it at once. They would not inform him until the first meeting between project management and team leaders after the changes were made. The functional leaders said only that he had to be more persistent and demanding in his relation to the project management. They suggested that he should not let the project management take the full control. He has to say **stop** from time to time.*

It was obvious that the team leader was frustrated, and that he felt under informed. It also seemed like he did not receive much help from the functional management on this particular matter. Teams like this often work within a tight time schedule. The fact that both functional management and project

management can interfere with the decision making of the team, and thus to a great extent affect the progress of the team puts a great pressure on the leader. In order to meet such potential problems in the best way possible the cross-functional team leader needs to be designated, have some position power and be in possession of good interpersonal skills (Yukl, 2002). Interpersonal skills have been discussed in the chapter 4, Illustrations of leadership in the matrix organization, and will not be discussed any further in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that the importance of interpersonal skills shows up in almost every situation related to leadership.

However, it was not only the communication with the project management that seemed to create difficulties for this team. The intra team communication was also, as already noted, a challenge. It is interesting to note, however, that according to the team member quoted below this was basically due to communication with the project management:

*Team member 7: It seems to me like there are a lot of things being done differently in the different groups within the project that could have been done in more or less the same way. I believe that is because the people responsible for the different groups have received their instructions from above (the project), and that these instructions can be interpreted in different ways and thus it becomes different. And I think that if it is possible to do things in the same way one should do it! And it is difficult for us who are going to work with these different instructions (he has a role in the team that is supposed to serve all the different groups). And I have tried to get the team leader to decide on what to do, or at least get someone in the project to decide, but it seems like it is pretty difficult.*

According to Kaplan and Norton (2004) there is no greater waste than a good idea used only once. This is because no asset has greater potential for an organization than the collective knowledge possessed by all its employees. The team member quoted above has a feeling that within this team the Thames has to be set on fire for the first time, every time. The members of the cross-functional team will typically have low to moderate autonomy in determining the mission and objectives of the team. On the other hand their autonomy in

determining work procedures will usually be high (Yukl, 2002). According to the team member, the teams get their instructions from the project management which the team members have to relate to. But as these instructions are open for interpretation, and, in line with what Yukl says, the team members' autonomy in determining work procedures is high, the challenge is to make everyone approach the instructions in the same way. Ideally there should be processes that describe how to communicate and coordinate across and within teams (Galbraith, 2002).

Within *team one* it would seem like a process of *generating knowledge* could contribute to the team's effectiveness. Generating knowledge involves identifying content that could be relevant to others in the organization (Kaplan and Norton, 2004). Such knowledge could for instance be submitted to an electronic database. However, getting people to generate knowledge as a more or less automatic process can appear to be difficult. According to Kaplan and Norton most organizations have to go through a cultural change to shift from hoarding knowledge to sharing ideas.

A related issue was addressed during the focus group interview and several of the leaders present had opinions about this:

From the focus group interview:

*Leader two: (in relation to key persons in the team)...but that is also related to their ability to communicate....to transfer the knowledge they have to the person or persons that actually are supposed to produce the documents and implement the solutions. There are great differences between the individuals in relation to this issue – how skilled they are in transferring their own knowledge.*

*Leader one: It has to do with making them interested in sharing their knowledge and getting them to understand that by sharing knowledge you might get rid of different problems.*

## **7.3 Managing the work teams in the matrix organization – team two**

### **7.3.1 Conducting meetings**

The quotation below is from observations of the other team – *team two*. This team was very different from *team one*, something which was particularly apparent in relation to leadership and how meetings were conducted.

From observations of team two:

*The impression from all of the team meetings of this particular team was that the members of this team were especially passive. At the start of each meeting they all gave a status report from their own work/tasks, and after that the team leader was (almost) the only person who spoke. These meetings seemed more like a school-class than a meeting with grown up people in a high-tech organization.*

The leaders that were interviewed also to a greater or lesser extent confirmed these observations. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the functional leaders. She sees the members of the team as the main reason why the situation has become the way it has:

*TR: At the team meetings of the infra structure work package I never experience any form of involvement or participation from the team members. Do you have any idea why?*

*Leader 3: I believe that many of the youngest ones do not actually dare to show any involvement because they are afraid of being cut of or being ridiculed. Another reason for this lack of involvement is maybe that so many of them are so called “data nerds”, and at these kinds of meetings you are supposed to discuss and so on...and that does not interest them. But that is the problem – they represent another kind of employee than we are used to, and it is a great challenge for the team leader to manage to create some kind of involvement in these employees*

As already mentioned, *team one* and *team two* had a team composition highly different from each other. Thus for the two leaders it would probably be wise to choose different leadership styles. While it seemed like there was a lack of task-

oriented behaviour in *team one*, a lack of group maintenance behaviour is probably a more likely explanation for the problems in relation to the meetings of *team two*. Especially gate keeping behaviour - making people participate would be important in this context, but also the other group maintenance behaviours referred to above would be vital for this team. However, according to Hargie, et al. (2004) deciding on which style to use should involve analysing some aspects of the group:

- The task facing the group;
- The nature and qualities of the group members;
- The past history of the group and those who comprise it;
- The pressure and demands of the external environment (these four aspects have been mentioned before in chapter 2b– the literature review)

In relation to *team two* both the first and the second bullet point could probably have been considered more thoroughly when starting up this team. The task of this team was a very difficult one, and many of the members were young and inexperienced. These are issues that will be addressed later in this chapter. Both the past history of the group and demands of the external environment will also be of importance in relation to this team, but will not be discussed in this context.

Like the team leader of *team one*, the leader of *team two* was also aware that the team meetings did not work in a satisfactory way. The quotation below is from the interview with the team leader of *team two*:

*Leader 5: As you have experienced – this is a very quiet crowd, and I suppose this has to do with the members of this crowd. But I do perceive that those issues that are being presented in these meetings, are at least heard. Because of the fact that I never get any feedback from the team members during the meetings I have tried to have a running dialogue with each individual. And by doing that I get to know much more about what each and everyone is thinking and what problems they are facing right now. I also try to get feedback on whether everyone actually has understood those issues presented in the last meeting. And I feel that I partly get through to them. But on the other hand I feel that I have to repeat things a lot. Probably both these grips are necessary ( having a dialogue with each individual and the repeating of things) in order to assure that both*



*overall directions and technical issues are understood in a way which enables everyone to work with their tasks in the most effective way possible. But during this process of talking and repeating I do register that there are those who do not have the complete understanding of what they are supposed to do.*

Leader 5 tried to approach the problems he felt he had getting through to the crowd in the meeting by getting people to talk outside the meetings. As long as the team members wouldn't talk back to him during the meetings he felt that this was the only way to be certain that everything was understood by everyone. There is of course a question about whether he actually managed to follow each and everyone up as closely as he wanted. Some remarks from the interviews with the team members implied that he did not. Also relevant in this context was that the team leader was not placed in the same building as the rest of the team, which made face to face contact outside the meeting troublesome. It could be that it would have proved more successful taking some actions in relation to how to conduct the meetings (group maintenance behaviour), than using time after the meetings on what should have been accomplished during the meeting. It is important to stress, however, that group maintenance behaviour requires considerable interpersonal skill, maturity and trust in both leader and team members (Bradford, 1976).

### **7.3.2 Team composition**

The fact that many of these team members were so young and also inexperienced has already been mentioned several times. But this is the new generation work force, and during the years to come this generation will enter the labour market to an even greater extent. Leader 3 in one of the quotations above does mention that these new employees represent a new challenge to their organization.

Anyway, it was not only due to the team members that this team became such a challenge. The quotation below is from one of the functional leaders. Here she is trying to explain why the situation for *team two* became so difficult:

*Leader 3: The process with this work package/team has been quite heavy, because the job in itself is very complex and special and we have had too few experienced people to put on this job. We have actually used our best people, but they are too few to do the job. And because of this we had to try to get more people to learn the special skills needed to do this job, and some of them have been very fresh in this game and inexperienced. But then there were too many inexperienced, and too few experienced to get things going, and as a result many of the inexperienced did not get any tasks right away, and then they began waiting and they continued waiting and they got frustrated. But of course, people are different; some of these inexperienced employees just came in, got the hang of it and did a very fine job, while others seemed much more without initiative.*

As already mentioned, the choice of leadership style should be dependent on what tasks are facing the team and also on the nature and qualities of the team members (Hargie et al., 2004). From the quotation above it is easy to understand that *team two* was in a very special situation. The task was a difficult one, and the members were maybe not ideal for solving a difficult job. A review of research studies on teams found that for project teams (which in the review were defined in much the same way as cross-functional teams) key findings in relation to team effectiveness were in the areas of task design, group composition, internal processes, external processes, and group psychosocial traits (Cohen and Baily, 1997). In this review examples of task design variables were autonomy and interdependence. Examples of group composition design included size, tenure, demographics and diversity. Processes would refer to interactions such as communication and conflict that occur among group members and external others, and group psychological traits are shared understandings, beliefs or emotional tone. It is fair to say that especially the variables of task design and group composition became important determinants for the perceived amount of success of *team two*.

After a year some actions were taken in relation to *team two*:

From the observations of *team two*:

*After the first year of observation, this team got a new team leader, although it is not correct to call her team leader, as long as this team has by now joined another team. The former team two is now functioning as a group within a larger team, and she is the leader of this group. This group continues to meet one hour every week. It is obvious that the new group leader is technically skilled. She is also very concerned about giving positive feedback to individuals and the team, as well as she is concerned about the delay. They have a lot to do, and they are way behind schedule. She talks about the responsibility they have in relation to other teams and she also mentions the project management. Anyway – the team members are still very silent, and do not contribute to the discussion a lot.*

In order to get through to, or persuade different kinds of people, there are different techniques. In chapter 2b and chapter 6, Illustration of leadership communication some of these techniques were discussed. The communication skills of this particular leader (referred to above) was commented upon in a very positive way, especially in relation to how she addressed the so called “data nerds” of her group (she also functioned as a leader in the functional organization).

Anyway, in spite of a new leader, the (by now) group was still a very silent crowd, at least during the meetings. Above, in the section about *The conducting of meetings* leader 3 suggests that some of the youngest team members were so silent during the meetings because they were afraid of being ridiculed. One of the reasons for this fright could have been the presence of one of the absolutely most important persons for this particular team. Through observations he was perceived like this:

Form the observations of *team two*:

*There is one person though who speaks more than any of the other, but it appears that he is the “architect”<sup>5</sup> behind the composition of the overall task of this team. He is a very knowledgeable person, but he might seem a bit arrogant and also frightening. One of the returning questions on the team meetings (and from the team members during the interviews) was about how to get hold of the “architect”. To many of the team members it seemed like he was busy all the time and thus they found him very hard to get in touch with. The whole team and the reaching of the final goals were tremendously dependent on this person, as he was the definitively most technical skilled person, with the best overall control in the team.*

As a newcomer in a work place one usually feel uncertainty in relation to both people and tasks. If the newcomer in addition feels uncertain about his or her own skills then much of the well-functioning of this newcomer will be dependent on the people he or she is supposed to relate to. As leader 3 commented on above, people are different and thus handle new situations in different ways. This was obviously the case within this team. Some of the newcomers seemed to be very dependent on one person telling them what to do, while others did not. Everyone in *team two* had, to a greater or lesser extent to relate to the architect, and thus much was dependent on him. During an interview one of the team members described this person in the following way:

*TR: How would you evaluate his interpersonal skills?*

*Team member 6: We have been working together for some years, so thus we know each other and everything is OK. I believe that it is of great importance to get to know those persons you are to work with, at least get to know how they usually will respond when spoken to, their background and so on. I believe that will make everything much easier.*

*TR: How does this work when you don't know this person?*

*Team member 6: In my case the communication with him has in general been problem free. I believe that he and others do adjust their behaviours depending on the person*

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<sup>5</sup> The architect of the team will be the person responsible for designing the optimal way to solve the overall task of the team.

*they are talking to. But of course if you are new, and don't know this person, you might interpret his behaviours in the wrong way (because you don't know him).*

Katzenback and Smith (2003) stress the importance of selecting team members on the basis of skills and skill potential. According to them three categories of skills are relevant: 1) technical and functional skills, 2) problem-solving and 3) interpersonal skills. The key issue for a potential team is striking the right balance between members who already possess the needed skill levels versus developing the skill levels after the team gets started. It is obvious that the architect was of vital importance to *team two*. His technical skills are extensive, and the team was dependent on his skills. Some of the young and inexperienced team members were also dependent on him in order to get going, and it would seem like this issue developed into a problem. Many of these young employees were not familiar with his behaviours, and might, according to the team member quoted above, interpret his behaviours in the wrong way.

The team member stresses the importance of getting to know those you are supposed to work with. But often you are supposed to work with people that you don't know. What then? There are different tools to provide practical and scientifically valid behaviour descriptions of various team members according to the diverse ways that they think, speak and act etc. (Lencioni, 2005). Such tools are supposed to help break down barriers by allowing people to better understand and empathize with one another. In particular Lencioni emphasizes the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is a personality inventory based on Carl Jung's theory of Psychological Types. The Psychological Type theory was developed as a means for accounting for differences in the way people take in information and make decisions, and this is carried on in the MBTI (source:[http://www.personalitypathways.com/MBTI\\_geyer.html](http://www.personalitypathways.com/MBTI_geyer.html)). In relation to team composition, tools like the MBTI might prove helpful.

In relation to striking the right balance in a team between the three categories of skills mentioned by Katzenback and Smith (2003), it is obvious that

this team did not strike the right balance. The next quotation does also support this statement:

From the focus group interview:

*Leader 5: Too much was dependent on the one “guru”, who was supposed to serve all the new ones. That got to be too much and it did not work. [ ] The architect’s role should have been a bit more distant from some of those minor groupings (within the team) in order to take better care of strategy and leave the details to others. But another thing in relation to putting together teams is the chemistry between the people in the group. And that could be an issue to consider, looking at knowledge, interests, background, and skills and through that try to make a good composition of members for a potential team.*

There was a striking lack of adequate technical skills in this team, and as leader 5 comments, the team became too dependent on one person. In addition leader five also refers to the team composition, and from what he says it is possible to interpret that he was not satisfied with the composition of *team two*.

If the functional management responsible for putting together team two, to a greater extent had been aware of the actual challenges that lay ahead of this team, several precautions could have been made, and the composition of this team seem to have been of vital importance.

#### **7.4 Discussion**

According to a review of different studies of teams (1990-1996), it was found that in relation to (project) teams, leadership was strongly correlated with perceptions of team effectiveness (Cohen and Baily, 1997). The illustrations of how the two teams in this case study were observed and perceived, to a large degree support such findings. In relation to the issue of conducting meetings, the focus was on the team leader’s behaviour. Both the leader of team one and the leader of team two had chosen a strategy for conducting their meetings with the rest of the team. Both these strategies did not work in an optimal way, and at least for one of the teams this was perceived to be one of the reasons for this team being

delayed. As the two groups were so different, different leadership styles were discussed in relation to leading the meetings of their respective teams. The researcher suggested that task oriented leadership behaviour would prove most efficient for team one. In relation to team two, group oriented leadership behaviour would maybe be the most suitable for the conduct of team meetings.

Of course, leading meetings in the most optimal way will demand a thorough knowledge both of team members and task (Hargie, et al., 2004). Especially in relation to team two this seemed to be of crucial relevance, and it also seemed that these issues had not been paid enough attention initially. Team two consisted to a great extent of young and inexperienced employees, who needed to be closely followed up by both management and technical expertise. It would appear that the functional management, when putting together team two, was not prepared for the challenge that young employees represented. In addition, team two and especially the most inexperienced got to be very dependent on one person. It is also possible that the interpersonal skills of this person were not in accordance with what the youngest members needed. One of the team members suggested that it was easy to misinterpret the behaviours of people that you do not know. But as many of these team members were newcomers to the organization they had not had the chance to get to know any of those they were supposed to work with. In that context the use of special tools developed to help break down barriers by allowing people to better understand and empathize with each other (Lencioni, 2005), was suggested. One of the functional leaders suggested that so many of the team members were quiet during the meetings because they were afraid of being ridiculed. If the team members, including both team leader and architect, had known each other's behaviours better, then maybe much would have been easier for this team. Although using tools developed in the US might not work in an optimal way in a Norwegian setting, giving the team members a chance to get to know each other before they actually start working together might pay off. Getting to know each other might be of particular importance when the task was perceived to be difficult, as it was in this case.

As the composition and also the size of team one was so different from team two, the important issues in relation to the well-functioning of this team appeared to be somewhat different from team two. In addition to the conducting of meetings it seemed to be communication both in relation to project management and internally in the team that created some of the most obvious challenges. According to Katzenback and Smith (2003) the fundamentals of an effective group are the following:

- Understandable charter
- Good communication
- Defined member roles
- Time-efficient process
- Reasonable accountability

Team one and team two had more or less problems with all of these fundamentals of the effective group. The charter for both teams was understandable, although in the case of team two, it probably proved to be more difficult than initially assumed. Communication within both teams did not work in an optimal way. As perceived by the researcher the member roles were sufficiently defined, but team two got to be too dependent on one of the member roles – the architect. In relation to time-efficient processes, much could probably have been done. The team meetings of team one were not particularly efficient, due to inappropriate leadership behaviours. Also, as already mentioned, interteam communication was not effective. As for team two, being that dependent on one single person, was not effective, especially since many of the team members needed a close follow up. The last point mentioned by Katzenback and Smith (2003) was reasonable accountability. Both the teams had serious trouble meeting scheduled deadlines.

Most organizations are dissatisfied with the leadership skills and spread they possess (Hargie, et al., 2004). It would seem like the areas of greatest dissatisfaction are strategic thinking, leading teams and motivating people (Essery, 2002).



It is important to stress that leadership itself needs support in order to thrive (Hargie, et al., 2004). It is probably wise to ask whether and how team leadership in this organization received support.

## CHAPTER 8 FINAL DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **8.1 Introduction**

The study presented in this thesis was mainly initiated by a previous study in the same organization. This former study was a communication audit, focusing on internal communication in general. The main findings from that study were presented in the Introduction to this thesis. As noted in the Introduction, the results from the communication audit pointed to the chosen organization structure as the main cause of both positive and negative issues in relation to internal communication. Hence, the management of the present organization wanted to conduct a qualitative investigation of the organization in relation to organizational communication and organizational structure. As there is no way of getting round the issue of leadership when investigating internal communication (Hargie et al., 2004), leadership has also been a prominent part of this study.

The aim of this study has been to contribute to two areas of organization literature/study where there has been a perceived need for an extension of empirical research in particular. As noted in the literature review, chapter 2b, these two areas were:

- 1) Organizational communication and leadership communication in a Norwegian context, and
- 2) More insight into the matrix organization.

To approach this aim, a main research question was formulated:

*What constitutes an effective Norwegian matrix organization in terms of communication and leadership as perceived by its members/employees?*

The literature reviewed resulted in seven related research questions. In this chapter, an effort will be made to provide an answer to each of the seven questions. These answers will, in turn, address the main research question.

## **8.2 Discussion**

### ***RQ 1: What are the leadership skills and styles needed in the matrix organization?***

The main concern in relation to leader roles has to some extent been with the team leader role. But all the other leader roles relevant in this organization have nevertheless been considered, to a greater or lesser extent. This is to say that the leader roles included in this study are top management of Segment X, functional management (leader of department, group leader), team manager, and project management (project manager). In interviews, questions were raised with each of these leaders about leadership traits, skills and behaviours and leadership style.

Physical *traits* such as height or appearance in relation to effective leadership were not mentioned by any of the informants. Nor were traits related to aspects of personality mentioned specifically. One of the earliest and most influential researchers on leadership (Stogdill, 1948) concluded that there are no universal traits that are associated with effective leadership. Nevertheless, the age of one of the youngest leaders was commented upon in a positive way by some of the youngest employees, indicating that it was of relevance.

However, traits that in some respect can be associated with the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) have been pointed to as important in relation to effective leadership (Goleman, 1997). In this study the informants seemed to be more concerned about leadership skills and behaviours than traits, but it is natural to assume that emotional intelligence will result in interpersonal skilled behaviour. Davis & Lawrence (1977) points in particular to the importance of interpersonal skills in everyone involved in the matrix organization. This was supported by the employees and managers of the present organization. The

informants stressed to a great extent the ability to relate to other people in an effective way and to communicate well, as pivotal leadership skills. However, the importance of technical skills was not underestimated. Technical skills were evaluated as very important, especially in relation to the team leader role. This is in line with other relevant studies (e.g. McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982) which emphasize the role of both communication skills and technical skills for the technical manager (which a team leader in this case is).

Goleman (2000) suggested that the most effective leaders used different leadership styles like a golf player uses different clubs depending on the conditions. The ability to take both people and situation into consideration and thus adapt the leadership style depending on the conditions was considered to be of great importance in this matrix organization.

***RQ 2 and RQ 3: The main challenges of running a matrix structured organization (communication, roles and responsibility)***

As already has been noted one of the greatest challenges of this organization is that the matrix is a so called balanced matrix. Thus the functional organization and the project organization are supposed to distribute the power equally. The project manager establishes the overall plan for completing the project, integrates the contributions of the different disciplines, sets schedules, and monitors progress. The functional managers are responsible for assigning personnel and executing their segment of the project according to the standards and schedules set by the project manager. The merger of “how and what” requires both parties to share responsibility and authority over work flow operations. Because of this equal share of power, this form of matrix is probably the one form that needs the most work (Larson & Gobeli, 1987). Within Segment X and Project I it seemed like the leaders were handling these issues quite well. They accepted the fact that conflicts would be present, and they were prepared to meet potential conflict with the intention of solving them.

It was noted in chapter 2a that the constant and rapid changes, shifting project personnel, overlapping roles and responsibilities that a matrix structure will result in, create an environment with a high potential for conflict (Kezsbom,

1989). In like vain, Davis & Lawrence (1977) listed nine potential illnesses of the matrix organization (chapter 2a), and it was claimed that avoiding these illnesses was dependent on managerial behaviour. In this study most of the interviewed leaders returned to the issue of distribution of resources (people) within the matrix as the most probable area of conflict. To avoid conflicts respect for the existing rules for distribution of resources in the meaning of who decides, who informs who, and who sets the goals?, was pointed out by the informants as decisive. This is somewhat in line with Galbraith (2002) who stresses the importance of skills such as conflict solving, networking and persuasion skills. Thus it seems like this matrix organization (Segment X, and especially in relation to Project I) managed to get around potential illnesses and conflict as a result of appropriate management behaviour.

In relation to the different roles in the matrix organization there are challenges with every one of them. The implementation of a matrix structure can increase a feeling of role ambiguity (Joyce, 1986). Multiple reporting relationships and divided commitment across projects heighten role conflict and ambiguity, and this problem is most apparent where the ambiguity is the greatest: in the balanced matrix (Larson & Gobeli, 1987). One of the functional leaders in this study suggested that they did not communicate clearly enough how such an organizational structure works, especially in the meaning of who reports to whom. Apart from that it appeared that many of the challenges associated with the different roles had been overcome. Some research has for instance reported that functional managers are less satisfied with their situation than project managers (Turner, Utley & Westbrook, 1998). There were no such findings within this study.

In many ways it seemed like this organization, and in particular in relation to Project I, had reached the state of what Davis & Lawrence (1977) defined as a mature matrix. A mature matrix will in general mean a matrix organization which is flexible enough to handle and survive changes, both internally and changes in the external environment. In order to reach the state of a mature matrix the involved parties, in particular the leaders, must understand and be willing to meet

the challenges that are part of such a structure. The impression was that the functional leaders of Segment X and the leaders of Project I both understood and were willing to meet the challenges.

***RQ4: How and in what ways can leaders influence the employee's feeling of commitment in the matrix organization?***

As noted in chapter 2b the main task of the leader is to have the group or organization's members working towards mutual goals. In fact all definitions of leadership seem to contain three common components: *group*, *influence* and *goal* (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). And as was pointed out both in chapter 2b (Literature review) and in chapter 6 (Illustrations of leadership communication), reaching organizational goals will be easier if the employees feel committed to them (or to management or to the organization as such). According to Mai & Akerson (2003) the most important communication issue of the leadership role is to create a sense of commitment to organizational goals in each employee. One of the research questions (which RQ is this?) that was raised was *how* leaders can influence the employee's feeling of commitment in an organization like this?

Research has shown communication to be of great significance for the employees' feeling of organizational commitment and belonging (Young, Worchel & Woehr, 1998; Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). This seems to be the case in this study as well. And it was also shown, in line with other findings (Putti, Aryee & Phua, 1990), that top management communication behaviour is associated with organizational commitment. Research has shown that organizational commitment does not necessarily lead to increased productivity (Steers, 1977), but it has also been shown that employees who have frequent communication with their nearest leader are generally more satisfied in their jobs and perform better (Becker et al., 1996). It was pointed out in chapter 6 (Illustrations of leadership communication) that the employees in this organization wanted and appreciated immediate leaders that cared about how they as individuals were doing, both in relation to work and on a more personal level. In the light of the findings of Becker et al., this is a finding that Segment X should pay attention to.

Many of the employees interviewed were quite young, and these employees represented a challenge in many ways. Regarding employee commitment it will be important for the organization to be aware that today's employees might never feel fully committed to any organization, at least not on a long term basis, and the organization has to make a real effort to retain their employees for longer periods of time (Cappelli, 2000).

***RQ 5: How and in what ways do managers attempt to persuade the different audiences in the matrix organization towards reaching organizational goals?***

To make every employee understand the importance of one's own role and thus understand why one from time to time had to put in some extra efforts to reach set goals, was definitively a major challenge throughout Project I. According to Mai and Akerson (2003) too many organizations discover that employees are often confused about what is important, what customers want and what they themselves should be attending to. Organizations are complex, and especially to newcomers the organization can appear to be quite confusing. Leaders must find ways to make common cause and to build win-win situations, and the results from the interviews have shown that this is an important task for the leaders in Segment X as well.

Conger (1998) claims that effective persuasion involves four steps (see chapter 6, p. 158). In this study two of these steps have been commented upon in particular. One of these steps was the leader's ability to frame his or her goals in a way that identifies common ground with those they intend to persuade, and the other was the ability to reinforce his or her position using vivid language and compelling evidence. These persuasion techniques were commented upon mainly in relation to the question of how to persuade the youngest employees. One of the illustrations that were used was how the group leader's task was perceived to be to turn every budget goal and benchmarks and everything they know as old and sad, into hard fun tasks.

One of the other returning persuasion techniques that was used by the leaders, and in which the leaders put great faith, was the use of *repetition*. Repetition is a logical proof (Hargie & Dickson 2004), and when using logical proofs one attempts to persuade through an appeal to reason and to logic. Reason and logic will be the cornerstone of many persuasion efforts, but *repetition* needs to be used with care. According to Hargie et al. (2004) too many repetitions of the same request will often lead to annoyance and greater resistance. In this study repetition was mainly used in relation to getting employees to understand the importance of completing their tasks in time. Besides the use of repetition, the leaders often made use of legitimating (using their superiority as leaders) in order to get the employees to work more (for periods of time) (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Legitimizing is not seen as a particularly effective persuasion technique because it seldom results in any form of commitment to the goals the leaders try to persuade the employees to reach. As was pointed out in the analysis of the results, compliance is of course sometimes all that is needed to accomplish a task objective, but as noted above a feeling of commitment will probably make reaching mutual goals easier.

***RQ 6: What role does management feedback and upward (employee) communication play in relation to employee satisfaction in the matrix organization?***

A feeling of uncertainty in a job is often a consequence of lack of feedback on task performance (Clampitt & Williams, 2004). In this study there never was an expressed lack of management feedback. However, when asked about how they got feedback on their performance, the answer was that they mainly received feedback through performance appraisals. Performance appraisals have many potential benefits, but nevertheless it is important that this organization notices that communication audits in various organizations have revealed that employees in general feel they receive too little feedback, be it positive or negative, on the job they are doing (Hargie & Tourish, 1997; Røsdal, 1999). In relation to management feedback the possibility should, however, be taken into account that the employees were mainly satisfied with the amount of feedback



they received, and that is the reason for this issue not being raised in particular during the interviews.

A question about whom to get feedback from was nevertheless raised. According to Neher (1997) feedback on a specific task done, should preferably be given by someone with some form of credibility regarding professional competency. If feedback does not come from the right person, the chance is that the employee will not take the feedback seriously, be it negative or positive feedback. In a matrix organization this will of course be of great importance in that each of the employees has at least two leaders to relate to. For the employee the question will be who to turn to in order to get the relevant feedback, and for the leaders the question will be whether it will be appropriate and effective to provide technical feedback at all.

It seemed like the employees were mainly happy with the responses they got on feedback the employees themselves gave in relation to job-specific tasks. The informants experienced that whatever requests they made were given thorough consideration. This might imply a management behaviour that involves skilled listening as well as being aware of the needs and concerns of staff. Behaviour like that will more or less be compatible with the concept of management by expression. Managers utilizing management by expression, understand that employees want to be kept fully informed about important issues, especially those having a direct impact on their job (Hargie et al., 1999). Management by expression behaviours might also provide an explanation for the employees not complaining about a lack of feedback.

***RQ 7: How does the management of teams affect the effectiveness of the matrix organization?***

The results from this study showed that the management of teams has an impact on the perceived effectiveness of the matrix organization. As it was the team meetings that were formally observed, some special focus was put on the *conduct* of team meetings. This appeared to be a somewhat difficult issue.

It is a known fact that not every meeting we attend is equally effective. According Hargie et al. (2004) this could either be because they are conducted in some sort of a leaderless vacuum or because they are dominated by highly directive leaders who always think they know the one right way of doing things. Especially in relation to team one it seemed like many of the meetings were conducted in, to some extent, a leaderless vacuum. Discussions could go on for ever, without ever reaching a conclusion. The challenges of this team and in particular to the team leader were to find the optimal leadership style. It was suggested by the researcher that there was a lack of task-oriented leadership behaviour in relation to the conduct of meetings (Bradford, 1976), and that the team meetings would benefit from more task oriented behaviour like process structuring, clarifying communication, summarizing and consensus testing (Yukl, 2002).

It seemed though like the team leader had the best intentions and that he in fact tried to carry out some task oriented behaviour. He probably was not skilled enough in the behaviours he tried to exercise. More or less because of this lack of the optimal leadership behaviours, it took a longer time to decide upon different important issues than probably necessary. It was perceived that team one was delayed because of this. The obvious is to put the blame on the team leader, but that would be too easy a way out. It is the leaders of the functional organization that have the responsibility for appointing the team leader. In the matrix organization the functional leaders are responsible for composing the teams, thus they should take every issue in relation to the team into consideration before appointing the team leader. The team leader's leadership skills and styles should be taken into consideration and compared with the composition of the team. As noted before, Hargie et al. (2004) suggest that the task facing the group, the nature and qualities of the group members, the past history of the group and the pressure and demands of the external environment should be taken into consideration when deciding upon what leadership style to use. These are not only considerations that should be made by the leader in question, but also by those responsible for appointing him or her. The functional

management should probably have been aware that the leadership style of the team leader was not a good match in relation to the nature and qualities of the team members. However, the amount of potential leaders within an organization is not extensive. The team leader chosen maybe represented the best match the functional leaders could expect to get. Segment X is not the only organization to meet such a challenge, though, and hence books and programs on how to grown your own leaders (i.e. Byham et al., 2002) appear regularly on the leadership sky. As it has been suggested that it is possible to learn vital leadership skills such as leadership communication (Goleman, 2000; Hargie et al., 2004), spending some time and money on training potential leaders, would probably pay off in the long run.

For the other team – team two, the team composition was of special interest in that the composition could be perceived as one reason why this team struggled. Quite a large number of the team members were both young and inexperienced. The challenges that faced the team leader and the team as such were many. The team leader had to struggle to gain any form of involvement or commitment from the team members. This was in particular visible at the team meetings. The question was then how to get trough to them, and again communication skills, like for instance different persuasion techniques (Conger, 1998) (mentioned earlier in this chapter) are at issue.

Another major challenge in relation to the team composition was that many of the team members' technical skills were not sufficient in relation to the difficult task this team was to solve. Hence, some of them got to be very dependent on the one person in the team with the technical responsibility. As they did not manage to get themselves started, days could go by without them knowing what to do. Also, to the researcher it seemed like some of the least experienced team members to some extent were afraid of this person, because he had quite a brusque way of communicating to others. However, one of the more experienced team members said that if one got to know him one would understand that there was nothing to be afraid of. The problem with this is that many of the team members were hired in order to work on Project I, and they had

not had a chance to get to know this person before they were to work with him. One solution to a situation like this is to make use of tools that have been designed in order to provide practical and scientifically valid behaviour descriptions of various team members according to the diverse ways that they think, speak and act etc. (Lencioni, 2005).

There is no doubt that the performance of these two teams in many ways did affect the effectiveness of Project I, and that the project probably would have benefited from a greater focus on both the selection of team leader, and on the composition of the teams.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

This case study has shown how nearly every success and failure in the matrix structured Segment X was a result of leadership behaviour. If Project I was to be an unreserved success every leader on every level had to succeed in their efforts. After having interviewed employees and leaders, and observed several meetings the overall impression was of a well-functioning, mature matrix organization. However, it is not correct to say that Project I was an unreserved success. There were some areas within the matrix structure that appeared to be more troublesome than others.

After having examined each of the seven related research questions the main research question should be answered: *What constitutes an effective Norwegian matrix organization in terms of communication and leadership as perceived by its members/employees?*

In order for a leader in the matrix organization to succeed on a general level, it was perceived that he or she should be emotionally intelligent and possess social and communication skills. Communication skills that in particular were suggested to be of great importance were the ability to create a sense of commitment to organizational goals in each employee, and to be able to persuade the employees to reach set goals in time. Employees increasingly no longer ask "What should I do?" but "Why should I do it?", and persuasion seemed in fact to be one of the more difficult aspects for the leaders of Segment X.

Extensive interpersonal and communication skills were also perceived to be of great importance to meet the challenges of the matrix structure. The main challenge associated with the matrix structure was the distribution of resources. In order to handle this challenge in an effective way and avoid conflicts, respect for the current rules was pointed to as crucial by both functional and project leaders.

In general the most obvious challenge for Segment X and in particular Project I was the teams and the management of teams. The two teams of special interest in this case study experienced some serious problems. Team management and the composition of the teams were the main reasons that the teams struggled. Both these issues will be the responsibility of the functional management. Thus in a matrix structured organization where the use of work teams is necessary it is of great importance to in a more thorough way evaluate both the skills and style of the potential team leader and also consider the composition of the team. Since teams actually carry out the projects of the matrix organization, the effectiveness of the matrix organization is more or less dependent on well functioning teams.

The truly effective matrix organization is constituted first of all of socially skilled leaders on *all* levels who are effective persuaders, who are willing to respect the formal rules of the matrix structured organization, and who are able to alter their leadership style depending on the context. All this highlights the importance of and need for a stronger focus on leader communication and behaviour.

The results from this case study conducted in a Norwegian organization do not differ to any great extent from the findings of other relevant studies conducted in other countries (the literature reviewed in this thesis is mainly from English speaking countries). However, it does seem like the Norwegian organization (Segment X), and in particular in relation to Project I (as Project I formed the basis for this study) is a well functioning matrix organization, that has stared clear of some of the most obvious challenges mentioned by other research into matrix organizations. For instance the multiple reporting

relationships that exist within a matrix organization were not mentioned to any great extent, neither by the leaders nor by the employees of Segment X.

In relation to further or future research within the area of organizational structure, leadership and leadership communication, several suggestions can be made. For this organization in particular it would be of value to conduct more research into the use of teams. As the teams are so important in a matrix structured organization like Segment X, more knowledge should be gained about the factors that will impact on the effectiveness of the team. One other question that could be raised is whether the necessary leadership skills and leadership communication will differ within a production oriented company compared to an innovation oriented company.

It is also of interest to be able to discuss why or if there are differences between a Norwegian matrix organization in terms of leadership and leadership communication, and matrix organizations in other countries. Future research will also benefit from using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, maybe especially in relation to investigate how communication skills of leaders are related to the feeling of commitment in the employees.

### **Limitations of the study**

The most obvious limitation of the study presented in this thesis is the fact that the research was carried out within only one organization, and within a limited part of this organization. The time limitation imposed by the duration of doctoral studies has not allowed for any comparisons between companies. But as commented above, this is something that should be addressed in the future.

Also, only a qualitative approach has been used within this research, which will put some limitations on the findings and conclusion. In choosing a qualitative approach to meet the aims of this case study, the possibility to involve all the employees in the whole organization disappeared. When reading the conclusion it should be taken into consideration that the findings from this

research are based on the data gathered from the perceptions of only a limited number of employees in Segment X.

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# APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Attachment to e-mail sent to each of the informants**

These interviews will be part of a larger study, which is supposed to focus upon effective and ineffective communication in the matrix organization, as experienced by the employees. This particular study within Segment X, will concentrate upon the Project I, and the two work packages team one and team two.

Further down the page you will find the questions that I'm going to ask you. The purpose of showing you the questions before the interview is to give you a chance to think about what communication experiences you would want to refer to. In this case *communication experiences* are supposed to refer to incidents or occasions, where you have experienced something special in relation to exchange of information. Did you get the information you were supposed to get? Did you manage to send out the correct information to the people who were supposed to get it? Etc. This will be exchange of job related information, by every information channel possible (e-mail, telephone, letter, face to face etc.).

Think of some communication experiences – effective *and* ineffective, that you have made (or that you have witnessed) recently, and that you can relate to *communication with one of your leaders*.

Under each of the following headings, try to remember exactly what happened.

1. Where did the event take place?
2. Who were the people involved?
3. What features of the individuals were important in the interaction?
4. What actually occurred in the interaction?
5. What was the outcome?
6. Why was the interaction considered to be effective/ineffective?
7. What were the implications for this incident for interpersonal communication performance in your organization?

Would you then try to do the same reflections for *each* of the following points:

1. Communication experiences with one (or more) of your colleagues (preferentially with one of your colleagues in the work package).
2. Experiences that can be related to communication with another job package.
3. Experiences that can be related to communication between the hierarchical organization and the project organization,
4. ...or experiences that can be related to communication between the project organization and your work package, or communication between the hierarchical organization and your work package.

Please let me know if there is anything you find difficult to understand or that is not clear.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Enclosure to the Critical Incident Interview guide**

I would like to hear about your communication experiences. Although you might think that a particular incident didn't have anything to do with communication, I would really like you to tell me about it anyway. Almost everything that happens in an organization is in one way or another related to communication. And remember: your positive experiences are just as important as your negative experiences.

#### Background information

Name:

Age:

Seniority:

What is your present position, and for how long have you had this position?

For how long have you worked for this particular project?

Try to describe your day at work

#### The work packages and the matrix organization

1. Could you mention some advantages and disadvantages in general, when it comes to work in a company that is organized like Segment X? Advantages and disadvantages when it comes to internal communication?
2. How do you feel (in general) about working in a work package like this? Advantages and disadvantages?

#### Communication

1. What kind of information is it important that you get in your everyday work (to be able to do a good job)?
  2. From whom do you want this information, and in what way do you want to receive this information?
  3. What information channels are the most effective to keep you informed on an everyday basis (at work)?
- 
1. Let's talk about you as sender of information – for instance, how do you know what information you need to send to others?
  2. What happens when you send information to your:
    - a. Work package leader?
    - b. Project manager?
    - c. Hierarchical leader?
    - d. One of your colleagues?
  3. Do you know of any bottlenecks or any other form of obstructions for internal communication flow? Can you try to describe why this happens?



4. When conflict appears in this organization, what is the major cause? How is conflict typically resolved?
    1. What issues do you think project management should keep you informed of, which they, as for today, do not?
    2. Work package leader?
    3. Hierarchical leader?
    4. How would you evaluate your leaders (one of your leaders or more) communication skills?
    5. How do you know when this organization/ and project has done a good or bad job toward accomplishing its goals? What measures of effectiveness are used in this organization?
      1. How often do you use informal information channels to get important information? How often do you get important information through informal information channels?
      2. What do you think of the formal group meetings in your work package, when it comes to:
        - a. Information?
        - b. Decisions?
        - c. Frequency?
1. What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of internal communication in your organization? What about Project I?
  2. How would you describe the communication climate in your work package?
  3. What would you like to see done to improve information flow in this organization? Why hasn't this been done yet?
  4. Are there any questions that I have not asked?

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Themes for the focus group interview/ group discussion**

Sent in advance to each of the participants by e-mail.

1. First of all: what is organizational communication to you? Is it something that happens while you are busy doing other things?
2. Attitudes: among the youngest employees it seems like they are relatively relaxed in relation to the responsibility they have in the meaning of finishing their own tasks, and thus contributing to the completion of the tasks of the team.
3. To me it seems like this has to do with not understanding to its full how everything in an organization like this is dependent on everything else.
4. How can you manage to persuade your employees to take the responsibility they are supposed to?
5. Communication between the two work teams?