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**More passion than the job requires?
Monstrously transgressive leadership
in the promotion of health at work**

Paper forthcoming in *Leadership* special issue on
'The Materiality of Leadership: Corporeality and Subjectivity'

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Abstract

Despite Weber's early emphasis on passionate emotions in charismatic leadership and a recent but broader interest in the embodied and emotional aspects of leadership, we still know relatively little about how passions are embodied in leadership. We also know little about how such passions may transgress formally and socially defined limits of leadership in organizations. Through a case of workplace health promotion this paper therefore investigates how people in organizational leadership roles passionately – and corporeally – transgress the limits of these roles whilst pursuing organizational change. Going beyond extant research, the paper argues that the leaders' pursuit of health was driven by their own embodied passions as well as by organizational rationales, but that their passions were expressed in largely non-charismatic ways that de-motivated rather than motivated employees.

Keywords: body; emotion; leadership; monstrous transgression; passion; workplace health promotion.

Introduction

Passionate emotions have concerned leadership commentators at least since Weber, who highlighted how charismatic leaders summon their subjects through ‘an emotional form of communal relationship’ by expressing passionate emotions to attract passionate followers and stimulate social and organizational change (Weber 1947: 360). While this has led certain commentators to emphasize passion as a success factor (e.g. Day 2004; Davies and Brighouse 2008), others have taken a more critical view, associating charismatic leadership with irrationality (Beyer 1999), crisis (Tourish and Vatcha 2005), collapse (Bligh et al. 2005) and resistance to change (Levay 2010). The dark and aggressive emotions that charismatic leaders may express and spur in others have also been widely acknowledged (e.g. McClelland 1975; Bryman 1992).

At the same time, studies of emotion in leadership more broadly have addressed the significance of narcissistic identity-work (Pullen and Rhodes 2008), emotional labour (Iszatt-White 2009), emotional intelligence and sensitivity (Fineman 2003a) as well as emotion management and impression management (Fineman 2003a; Blackmore 2004). Similarly, more recent studies concerned with embodiment in leadership have highlighted issues of bodily presence, body-language, body-work and embodied knowledge (Ropo and Parviainen 2001; Sinclair 2005; Ropo and Sauer 2008).

However, studies of charismatic and passionate leadership typically ignore how the passions involved in such leadership are embodied,

and recent studies of embodiment and emotion provide limited insights into the embodied emotions of leadership in general and to embodied passions in particular. Meanwhile, this has attracted attention in the broader organization studies literature (e.g. Burrell 1984; Linstead and Brewis 2007). Drawing on this latter literature as well as on previous studies of emotion and embodiment in leadership, this paper therefore seeks to investigate how people in organizational leadership roles passionately and corporeally transgress the limits of these roles whilst pursuing organizational change. Towards this end, I utilize qualitative data from a study of workplace health promotion. I focus on why and how people in leadership roles sought to promote and pursue healthy living amongst the organization's employees as part of an official health initiative. Hence, I am interested in how passion was expressed verbally and corporeally – through what leaders said and did in order to promote healthy living. But I am also interested in what drove them to pursue health – their underlying rationales and passions. In other words, I am both interested in the *sources* that informed their leadership and the *forms* it took.

I argue that the leadership exercised in this case is neither captured by Weber's three categories of traditional, rational-legal and charismatic leadership nor by extant discussions of embodied and emotional leadership. Rather, I argue that leaders expressed a passionate and profoundly embodied kind of leadership. Indeed, their involvement in health promotion was not merely driven by rational goals but by an embodied passion for health. And whilst this made

them transgress the limits of what most employees considered to be their leadership role, they did so in ways that were not considered charismatic.

Towards the end of the paper I will therefore propose a fourth category of *monstrously transgressive leadership*. Unwittingly, the term “monstrous” has a number of pejorative connotations, relating to the evil, the ugly, the weird and the otherwise deviant (Thanem 2006, 2011). Although I am not seeking to positively reverse the connotations of the monstrous here, I am also not seeking to demonize the leaders in this study. Rather, while the monstrous relates to the disruption of moral, magnitudinal, morphological and social boundaries, I am speaking of the monstrous to highlight how leaders may passionately and corporeally – with their bodies but without charisma – disrupt and exceed the formally and socially defined limits of their leadership role. In other words, that they disrupt and exceed the pursuit of official tasks and organizational rationales which formally define their leadership role and that they disrupt and exceed followers’ dominant expectations which socially define their leadership role. More specifically, I will argue that monstrously transgressive leadership is rooted in embodied passions rather than organizational rationales, and that it involves behaviours that potential followers do not find charismatic but instead too passionate, indeed, so passionate that they provoke distancing and resistance rather than commitment and followership.

By emphasizing embodied passion in workplace health promotion I also seek to take the embodied and emotional aspects of leadership in a more corporeal and material direction. Embodied passions and un/healthy living are not merely matters of bodily surface and bodily presence but materially incorporated in tastes and distastes, pains and pleasures, abilities and inabilities which are expressed in bodily practices such as eating habits and physical in/activity. Though one might object that studying embodiment in this context risks committing tautology on the ground that healthy living is obviously and inherently embodied, I would argue that this should only warrant objection had I merely used this case to establish *that* leadership is embodied. As pointed out above, my concern is with *how* leadership is embodied and how embodied practices and expressions of leadership are related to *verbal* practices. These are not issues that can be simply confirmed but questions that require careful investigation.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section I reiterate and critically review Weber's trichotomous understanding of leadership as traditional, rational-legal or charismatic in relation to the more recent literature on passion, emotion and embodiment in leadership and organizations. In the second section I outline the case and methods employed to investigate passionately embodied leadership in a setting of workplace health promotion. In the third section I discuss my main findings in relation to Weber's trichotomy and current discussions of the embodied and emotional aspects of leadership and organization. In the conclusion, I summarize my

findings and propose a fourth category of monstrosly transgressive leadership, which contradicts and complements Weber's trichotomy.

Understanding passionate and embodied transgression in leadership

Weber on charismatic leadership

While it has been told over and again how Weber (1947, 1978) viewed leadership as either taking a traditional form, a rational-legal form or a charismatic form, this trichotomy provides an important backdrop to understanding the role of passion and emotion in leadership. In traditional systems, leadership roles are passed on through relations of kin, typically from the patriarch to the next male kin, less often from a matriarch to the next female kin. Subjects obey the leader's will because it is their duty to do so and because obedience is key to sustaining the traditions on which the system is based. In rational-legal systems, people are appointed to leadership roles on the basis of merit and aptitude. Subordinates comply with decisions made by leaders because they find themselves in a formal relationship commanding compliance, and because leaders would only make rational decisions within the boundaries of a formally defined leadership role. Indeed, bureaucratic organizations and other rational-legal systems are not primarily defined by their hierarchical structure but by their separation of the formal from the informal, of public office from private interest (Kallinikos 2004).

Alternatively, people rise to leadership roles on the basis of extraordinary personality traits rather than kinship or formal

qualifications. This is typical of autocratic systems characterized by irrationality and an absence of hierarchy, formal rules and legal principles. In such systems followers submit to leaders upon being excited by the leader's charisma. Charismatic leaders do not curtail their passions and emotions but utilize them rhetorically and demagogically to demonstrate their excessive and ostensibly magical powers to followers. Charismatic leaders, then, tend to gain, maintain and enhance their power by being exceptionally funny, aggressive, committed or benevolent.

Although rational-legal leadership continues to be a dominant form of modern organization, charismatic leadership is of particular interest here because it draws attention to the emotional aspects of leadership – both to the passion with which leadership may be expressed and to the passion which this may arouse in followers. Still, Weber (1947: 363-86; 1978: 246-54) blurred the boundaries between these two categories by speaking of the routinization of charisma. Weber argued that charismatic leaders seek to form an administrative apparatus in pursuit of the long-term ideal and economic interests of their followers. This is typically an administrative apparatus built on charismatic followers. Officials and successors are therefore not appointed or dismissed, but called and chosen in terms of their charismatic qualities, which cannot be taught or learned but only awakened and tested. Transgression seems to have different implications for these two forms of leadership. Whereas rational-legal leadership is lost when leaders overstep the limits of rational-legal

authority, charismatic leadership is not necessarily lost but possibly trivialized and thereby weakened when charisma becomes routinized and turned into a mundane continuation rather than an extraordinary rupture of the everyday.

Two points of contention have attracted particular attention amongst Weber commentators. In spite of Weber's focus being on charisma in religious, martial and feudal systems, he was critiqued by Friedrich (1961) for acknowledging the existence of charismatic leadership 'in all places and in all historical epochs' (Weber 1948: 80) and thereby dis-embedding charisma from its original meaning in Christian religion. And even though Weber recognized that charisma is socially constructed through the particular interaction between leaders and followers, later commentators have insisted that he was more articulate about the extraordinary personality traits associated with charismatic leaders than about the social relationships wherein they were embedded (Bryman 1992; Calás 1993; Conger 1993).

Charismatic leadership after Weber

This last issue in particular has continued to concern students of charismatic and passionate leadership in modern organizations. On the one hand, studies have extended Weber's view of charisma as an extraordinary personality trait, viewing charismatic leaders as passionate and 'extremely active, assertive, and energetic' role models who motivate followers to go beyond the call of duty to accomplish social and organizational change (House 1988: 116). At the same time,

it has been emphasized that charisma presumes an emotional interaction between leaders and followers (e.g. Bryman 1992; Jermier 1993): charismatic leadership involves strong emotions such as love and hatred (Wasielewski 1985); followers feel energized by charismatic leaders (Lindholm 1990); and charismatic leaders manage impressions and emotions by projecting a particular 'body posture, speaking rate, gestures, smiles, eye contact, and touch' (Bass in Gardner and Avolio 1998: 43). Further, the socially constructed nature of charismatic leadership has been more strongly articulated in later work arguing that there are no leaders without followers (e.g. Hollander 1993; Howell and Shamir 2005), that followers' response is the test of charisma (Tucker 1968; Beyer 1999), that a leader's charisma depends on being validated by followers (Bryman 1992), and that charisma is not just a relational phenomenon but even a distributed phenomenon (Calás 1993). Moreover, studies more concerned with routinized forms of charisma have stressed how everyday forms of charisma do not necessarily disrupt and exceed but also maintain and conserve established states of affairs (e.g. Shils 1958; Bryman 1992).

Meanwhile, the bright and dark sides of charismatic and passionate leadership have generated interest. On the one hand, it has been argued that 'charismatic leaders are highly considerate of and sensitive to the needs of their followers' (House and Howell 1992: 89). Similarly, the more recent literature specifically concerned with passion in leadership tends to herald passion as a success factor. For

instance, in the specialist literature on educational management, passionate leadership is seen to '[take] leadership from the realm of a role or a job to one of an abiding drive to enhance children's learning and children's lives' (Davies 2008: 1). Moreover, passion is regarded central in enabling leaders to persevere and stay focused to do what they want to do (Elliott and Stead 2009), and the passion associated with the actual job is seen as a sacred quality not to be interfered with through managerial reform (Blackmore 2004). While passion tends to be broadly defined in this literature, it is further associated with an enthusiasm and passion for achievement, care, collaboration, commitment, trust and inclusivity (Day 2004).

In contrast, more critical research has highlighted the ambiguous and darker sides of charismatic leadership. Rather than facilitating organizational change, charismatic leadership may be utilized to halt change (Levay 2010). Moreover, charismatic leadership coupled to "corporate cultism" may undermine dissent and promote conformity to such an extent that it eventually leads to organizational collapse (Tourish and Vatcha 2005). Furthermore, charismatic leadership taking a "personalized" rather than a "socialized" form has been seen to involve self-interested, dominant, authoritarian, self-aggrandizing and exploitative behaviour (McClelland 1975; House and Howell 1992). Charisma has also been associated with narcissism, making charismatic leaders not only creative and result-oriented visionaries but also egotistic, hostile and arrogant yet deeply insecure and anxious (Conger and Kanungo 1998; Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006).

As narcissistic leaders direct their desires and love towards themselves rather than towards others, they may become self-aggrandizing bullies who intimidate others into compliance or workaholic star performers who regard themselves superior to and deserving the admiration of others (Pullen and Rhodes 2009).

Emotion and embodiment in leadership

Beyond this concern with charisma, previous research on emotion in leadership more broadly has problematized the relationship between emotion and rationality by investigating how emotion is expressed, experienced, utilized and managed by leaders. For example, “toxic leaders” express, utilize and manage emotions of fear, anger, envy and aggression, which in turn have to be dealt with and processed by unfortunate “toxic handlers” who both find themselves at the receiving end of toxic leadership and work to mediate between toxic leaders and their followers (Frost 2003). Leaders also exploit emotions to influence followers, sometimes by combining emotional expression with rationalistic rhetoric (Samra-Fredericks 2004). Further, leaders seek to manage emotions through impression management (Fineman 2003a), with emotional intelligence and sensitivity (Fineman 2003b), and through emotional labour (Iszatt-White 2009) and “emotional scaffolding” (Fairhurst 2007): through emotional labour, leaders carefully manage and utilize their displayed emotions as a leadership tool (Iszatt-White 2009); through emotional scaffolding, leaders take [...] emotional cues from followers while simultaneously [...] helping to

“scaffold” or channel such emotion [...]’ in particular directions (ibid in Zoller and Fairhurst 2007: 1350).

In summary, the literatures on charisma, passion and emotion in leadership have drawn attention to how leaders express and utilize emotions, how passions and emotions enable leadership, how leaders engender passions and emotions in others, and how leaders and followers manage emotions. However, these literatures do not say much about *what* passion is, and they pay little attention to how such leadership is *embodied* beyond asserting the significance of various impression management techniques. For Weber, this neglect may be seen in light of his conflation of embodiment with essentialist and racist naturalism, and his consequent disdain for materialist explanations of the cultural (see Weber 1949). Although Weber acknowledged that material factors might play a preliminary role in cultural life, scepticism towards their cultural significance and fear of materialist reductionism squeezed embodiment out of his sociology. Unlike his friend Ernst Tröeltsch, Weber dismissed, in a Kantian manner, the possibility of knowing ‘the “most basic dispositions and volitional tendencies” ultimately underlying the social institutions, and ideological structures of history’ (Gerth and Mills 1948: 43) – these were beyond *Verstehen* as well as *Erklären*.

While contemporary mainstream research on charismatic leadership leaves few clues about why it downplays its embodied aspects, issues of embodiment have attracted some attention in leadership studies more broadly – from the significance of bodily

presence and body-language to the role of body-work and embodied knowledge. Ropo and Parviainen (2001) argue that leadership skills and knowledge are gained and developed through the bodily experiences and social interaction of individual leaders. This is a tacit form of knowledge, which requires bodily presence and enables leaders to read situations and choose behaviours appropriate to particular situations.

Further, Sinclair (2005) has drawn attention to the role of leaders' bodily presence, body-work and body-image in achieving radical change. Leaders may achieve radical change by modelling their bodies in ways that transgress and subvert norms. In one case, this was achieved through the power of a big imposing physique, a commanding presence and physical contact, where a tall male school manager took a literally hands-on approach to school management in a disadvantaged community. In another case, this was pursued as a female police commissioner marched in the local LGBT parade.

Unfortunately, these latter accounts remain somewhat superficial. Ropo and Parviainen (2001) assert the importance of embodied leadership skills and knowledge, but they provide no insight into how such skills and knowledge are embodied and expressed by leaders. Sinclair (2005) highlights the role of leaders' bodily presence, body-work and body-image, but gives no attention to the embodied passions that might inform their leadership.

Passionate embodiment and transgression in organization

At the same time, organizational scholars have theorized the embodied aspects of passion in organizational life more broadly. Partly concerned with how embodied passions are disciplined and tamed in a quest for order and organization, this still small literature picks up on a theme earlier addressed by Weber. In his study of religion in China, Weber (1951) highlighted the role of eunuch officials in the administrative apparatuses of pre-modern imperial rulers, and Coser (1964) expanded on this with a functionalist explanation, arguing that imperial rulers surrounded themselves with eunuch officials because their loyalty and rationality remained undistracted by nepotistic concerns and family commitments.

Without paying much attention to Weber or Coser (perhaps because Coser emphasizes nepotism rather than temptation), this literature more clearly brings out the contested nature of the relationship between passion and organization. Through Foucauldian genealogy, Burrell (1984) has argued that erotic passions and desires have been so intensely subjected to discipline, control and suppression in organizational life that one can speak of a “desexualization of organization”. Indeed, the turn from pre-modern domestic production to modern factory production during the industrial revolution involved efforts by capital and its managerial representatives to eradicate the possibility for workers to ‘spend time in long periods of leisure activity or in sexual play or in a bingelike consumption of manufactured goods and foodstuffs’ (ibid: 107).

But this also indicates a recalcitrant organizational underworld of passion and desire. To pick a more concrete example from Burrell, the eighteenth and nineteenth century British Navy's prohibition and punishment of sex between men at sea was an attempt to discourage and reduce something that was already quite widespread. More recently, Boje and Rosile (2006: 77) have argued, with Bataille, that whilst regimes of work and consumption are 'part of the wider human project of denying and forestalling death, controlling the animal, the passionate, [and] the erotic, [...] sex, gluttony, drunkenness, hysteria [...] will always break through into the productive, rational, profane world despite our best efforts [...].' In a similar vein, Linstead and Brewis (2007: 365) argue that despite utilitarian norms and social taboos, 'we give in to the urge to get drunk, to sob or laugh hysterically, to gorge ourselves with food, to dance wildly or to have uninhibited sex.' Hence, sexual and culinary desires – and addictions – may be seen to motivate and disrupt organization.

Underpinning Linstead and Brewis' argument is a distinction between passion and desire. Whereas desire is 'a flowing and shapeless creative/destructive urge', passion is 'a focused, powerful emotion' (ibid: 353). Without going into a detailed discussion of opposing ontologies of desire as excess (which is implied by Linstead and Brewis) contra desire as lack, I would not argue that this puts passion in opposition to desire, as if the former was a contained or containable force to be repelled or desired. Rather, passion becomes an effect of embodied desire, making passions at least as wild,

indeterminate, uncontrollable and transgressive as implied in the leadership research on the dark side of charisma, but without reducing this wildness to toxic emotions. Before examining how this multiplicity of passions was played out in a case where leaders promoted healthy living amongst employees, let me outline and discuss the methods I used to investigate this.

Case and method

In order to investigate how people embody leadership and transgress the limits of their leadership roles whilst pursuing organizational change, I decided to focus on a site where leadership was focused on changing people's bodies. I therefore chose an organization that had worked systematically to promote healthy living amongst their employees. Following standard guidelines for purposeful sampling (Strauss and Corbin 1990), one of the organizations I ended up studying was a Swedish public organization. The organization employs around 50 staff consisting of office workers, researchers and managers.

The organization's health initiative involved a range of activities geared to help employees exercise more and adopt a healthy diet, from expert lectures and seminars about nutrition to lunch walks and gym sessions. Participation in lectures and seminars was compulsory, and participation in physical activities was voluntary. Each unit was also required to include healthy living on their weekly meeting agendas – this typically involved going around the table asking people about

what they had done during the past week to lead a more healthy life. While this may suggest that the leaders had the best of intentions in helping others become healthier, this turned out to be a sore issue.

I negotiated access through the personnel manager, who played a key role in the health initiative, and who set up interviews for me with other employees. This did not limit my sample to supporters and keen followers, but enabled me to conduct semi-structured interviews with twelve members of staff who related to the health initiative in a variety of ways. This included interviews with the personnel manager, two of the organization's four health inspirers, and nine other members of staff.

In addition to their ordinary job tasks, the personnel manager and health inspirers were formally appointed to lead the organization's health initiative. Whereas the personnel manager was responsible for promoting healthy living within the management unit and the organization as a whole, the health inspirers were responsible for promoting healthy living within their units. This involved organizing health activities, raising health issues at meetings, and motivating colleagues to participate in health activities.

Interviews with other employees helped me understand how followers – whether committed, compliant, reluctant or resistant – responded to the leadership exercised by the health inspirers. This was important in order to recognize that leadership is not exercised in a vacuum but always involves a social relationship between leaders and followers. All interviews were conducted face-to-face during 2007

and 2008, tape-recorded and transcribed. They lasted 30 minutes on average. I generated additional data through unstructured observations of employees during work, coffee breaks and lunch breaks, and through internal documents about the health initiative. I also participated in one indoor hockey game together with one of the health inspirers and four other employees.

My non-participant and participant observations, though limited, enabled me to develop a more embodied understanding of the research context. In particular, this provided me with real-time data into how leaders and employees engaged in physical exercise, their eating habits, and how they related to one-another through face-to-face interaction. It has been argued that real-time observations are preferable to post-hoc interviews because they do not enable respondents to censor their emotional display (Samra-Fredericks 2004). Unfortunately, the deep field immersion which is implied by such arguments was not available to me. However, this was not necessarily a problem. Indeed, post-hoc interviews can serve as an important source of emotional and embodied data (Engelsrud 2005; Ezzy 2010; Thanem and Knights 2012). Rather than censoring their emotions, my respondents seemed to talk freely about their active or lacking engagement in the health initiative, and they expressed a wide range of emotions (from passion and enthusiasm to frustration and anger) when commenting on their own and others' active or lacking involvement. For instance, leaders did not censor their frustration about reluctant employees but readily shared this with me. Moreover,

interview statements were confirmed not only through my observations but also through interviews with others (e.g. Glaser and Strauss 1967). Indeed, leaders and followers tended to provide fairly similar accounts of what happened, of who said what and who did what, even if they expressed conflicting attitudes towards the health initiative as such. Hence, the interviews provided insights into key events that I was not able to observe.

While this study relates to broader concerns about how people in leadership roles pursue organizational change, my somewhat unusual emphasis on how passion is embodied in leadership meant that I could not rely on established concepts in the leadership literature but drew on sensitizing concepts when starting to analyze this material (Blumer 1969). These revolved around broad conceptions of embodied passions and disembodied rationales that informed leadership as well as embodied and verbal practices that were mobilized to exercise leadership. I then combined an inductive form of thematic template analysis (Cassell 2008) with the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Silverman 2006) to identify and specify analytical themes in the empirical material. This involved first going through the data and isolating and naming an instant of *how* the leaders exercised leadership, that is, a particular *form* of leadership. The first instance identified the personnel manager describing the importance of motivating employees by being a good example through her own bodily practices of healthy eating and physical exercise. The first *form* of leadership was therefore named “Embodied motivation practices”. I

then went through the rest of the data to identify and code other instances that were similar to this response, naming and coding these instances according to the same category. At the same time, I used deviant case analysis (Silverman 2006) to identify and code other forms of leadership. All in all, this enabled me to identify two forms of “Motivation practices” (“Embodied motivation practices” and “Verbal motivation practices”) and two forms of “De-motivation practices” (“Excess passion” and “Finger-pointing”).

Using the same procedure I went through the data to isolate and name instances of what *informed* their leadership, that is, particular *sources* of leadership. The first instance identified the personnel manager speaking of a poor psychosocial work environment and organizational culture. The first source of leadership was therefore named “psychosocial rationalism”. However, s/he also mentioned the cost of illness absenteeism and a passion for healthy eating and physical exercise. This led me to identify “Economic rationalism” and “Embodied passion” as two additional sources of leadership.

Rather than generating all-encompassing categories that reduce leadership to a generalizable matter of homogeneous practices, this enabled me to bring out the subtleties and ambiguities that characterized leadership in this case. More specifically, this enabled me to identify, compare and contrast two main *forms* of leadership (“Motivating forms” vs. “De-motivating forms”) and various practices relating to these forms of leadership. This also enabled me to identify three main *sources* of leadership, two of which were disembodied

(“Economic rationalism” and “Psychosocial rationalism”), one of which was embodied (“Embodied passion”). These themes were neither given from the outset nor in the extant literature, but emerged in conversation between my sensitizing concepts and empirical analysis. Finally, I analysed these findings by comparing and contrasting them to themes in the literature on passion and embodiment in leadership and organization studies.

Determining what constitutes transgressive leadership is not straightforward, particularly as the health initiative emerged as a contested issue. Whereas the health inspirers regarded their leadership to be exercised within the remits of their formal role as health inspirers, interviews with a number of employees indicated that health inspirers crossed the formal and socially accepted limits of that role. It is not necessary to be an anti-realist constructionist to acknowledge that certain things in the social world have no existence outside of the meanings that are attributed to them by humans (Hacking 1999; Thanem 2011). Given the significance attributed to followers in prevailing definitions of leadership (e.g. Tucker 1968; Conger 1989; Calás 1993) and the contested nature of leadership in this case, I therefore decided to deem leadership transgressive insofar as it was perceived as such – implicitly or explicitly – by a number of potential followers, even if the leaders in question did not share this view.

Findings and discussion

Whilst broadly interested in how leadership is exercised, let me start off by discussing what drove the organization and the appointed leaders to pursue healthy living in the first place. In other words, what rationales or sources informed their leadership?

Embodied and disembodied sources of leadership

Psychosocial and economic rationalism

Swedish government reports and campaigns to promote a healthy working life tend to express what might be termed a rather conventional type of economic rationalism, where health and health promotion are submerged into economic measures and criteria. Anchored in economic reasoning, such reports typically argue that poor health amongst the working population leads to high levels of illness absenteeism which in turn drive up public spending and impair productivity at organizational, industry and national levels (e.g. SOU 2002: 5). When the personnel manager joined the organization in 2003, illness absenteeism was at 5.8%. Whilst acknowledging that this was high compared to the central government sector average at 2.9%, this did not cause much concern. Rather, problems relating to the organizational culture and psychosocial work environment were regarded more important.

Just before the personnel manager joined the organization, top management worried that the organization suffered from widespread tension between employees, a generally poor work environment and a

weak organizational culture. Shortly thereafter, the personnel manager therefore decided to conduct a survey to identify psychosocial problems. Around 15 questions relating to employee health and healthy living were included. The first survey results, from 2005, reported that 80% of staff expressed contentment with the work environment. Regarding this too low, s/he formulated a short-term vision of improving this to 85%. At the same time, s/he took the lead in developing a “healthy living” strategy. This was regarded central in improving the work environment, reducing tension amongst staff, and creating a more positive and cohesive organizational culture.

Hence, I would argue that the leadership efforts to move the organization in a more health-conscious direction were more strongly driven by psychosocial rationalism than by economic rationalism, as measures of work satisfaction and employee attitudes and relationships were regarded more significant than economic measures of organizational performance and productivity. However, even though the concern with organizational culture and other psychosocial factors embedded the organization’s healthy living strategy within a psychosocial rationalism, issues of productivity and performance were not deemed irrelevant. But rather than viewing productivity and performance in relation to conventional measures such as illness absenteeism, the personnel manager expressed an economic rationalism which related job performance to “personal competence”. Indeed, healthy living was not merely seen as a private matter for

individual employees but as a crucial employee competence with implications for job performance:

We're really focused on people having the competence to perform their work tasks, that you have the right qualifications to do your job. But what's often forgotten [...] is personal competence, how you live, [...] your lifestyle, because that actually affects how you do your job. [...] By giving people knowledge you can hopefully get them to understand the importance of physical exercise, what you eat. [...] And from an employer's perspective, it's also about when you get to work you should have the energy to perform.

While these rationales may illustrate how cultural and corporeal concerns drive leadership efforts to accomplish organizational change, they are not contrary to the formal dimension of leadership. As with Weber's rational-legal form, the concern with the psychosocial work environment, organizational culture and embodied lifestyle competence was not driven by personal interests or passions but by organizational interests – by leaders having a sense of what is allegedly best for the organization. And by pursuing these interests, leaders were not transgressing the boundaries of their formal leadership roles but exercising leadership within the boundaries of these roles. However, the personnel manager and the health inspirers were also driven by a personal and deeply embodied passion for healthy living.

Embodied passion

In particular, the passion for healthy living was expressed through a passion for physical exercise and healthy eating, which coalesced with the focus of the healthy living initiative. Commenting on the health activities s/he was involved in, this passion for exercise was strongly expressed by one of the health inspirers:

I do indoor hockey once a week. [...] I cycle to and from work, so that's around 30km [...]. That gives me exercise every day. [...] When it's not possible to take the bike, I run, and when there's snow I do cross country skiing. [...] During winter I swim as well. I'm a kind of person who doesn't feel well when I don't exercise.

Elaborating on this passion for exercise, s/he emphasized that this was not driven by external factors but deeply embodied:

It's always been in me [...]. A lot of people need a carrot, [...] a race or something [...] but I'm so driven that I don't need no carrot, I do this anyway.

This was shared by other health inspirers, who argued that they were more committed to the physical activities because they enjoyed them so much. Furthermore, leaders expressed similar passions for healthy eating. For the personnel manager, this was tightly connected to an aversion against “junk food”:

I'm very conscious about diet [...] I eat absolutely no junk food [...] burgers and pizza. I cook everything myself. I eat a lot of vegetables

– beans and such. I don't use unnecessary fat. I don't like bread with too much sugar. That's probably a habit. If you eat products with very little sugar then you don't like it when there's too much sugar.

For one of the health inspirers, the passion for healthy eating was related to her “unhealthy” upbringing:

I grew up with a mum who didn't like to cook, so [...] I grew up on junk food – macaroni and sausages. When I left home, it became the other way around [...] I'm fixated about *not* eating junk food.

Contradicting rational-legal leadership principles, these quotes draw attention to two embodied aspects of passion: firstly, that the passion for healthy living was exercised through bodily practices of physical exercise and healthy eating; secondly, and differently from previous studies, that this passion was not merely a matter of displayed emotions or incongruence between felt and displayed emotions (e.g. Fineman 2003a; Samra-Fredericks 2004; Iszatt-White 2009) but strongly related to bodily feelings of un-wellness and distaste as well as joy, wellness and taste. Given the nature of their leadership involvement this might not be surprising, but it is significant in showing how leadership may be driven by embodied passions, which are not necessarily subjected to the kind of careful labour, management and control highlighted in previous accounts (e.g. Iszatt-White 2009).

Whereas the rationalistic sources of leadership identified above concurred with the formal leadership role, these embodied passions transgressed the boundaries of this same role because they brought private interest into the formal domain. But in contrast to previous arguments emphasizing the recalcitrant nature of passion (Burrell 1984; Boje and Rosile 2006), the embodied passions in this case initially seemed to support them in exercising leadership, thus becoming a resource as well as a source of leadership. To some extent, their passion for healthy living coalesced with the interests of the organization and other members of staff. In that sense, the passion for healthy living actualizes the distinction between passion and desire highlighted by Linstead and Brewis (2007), harnessing and giving direction to amorphous flows of desire. Still, the directional nature of this passion did not mean that its outcome was containable or predictable or perhaps even as manageable as implied by previous commentators (e.g. Gardner and Avolio 1988; Fineman 2003a). Let me now move on from the sources that drove leadership to discussing the forms it took and how employees responded to it.

Motivating and de-motivating forms of leadership

The personnel manager argued that the health initiative was pursued through “health conscious leadership”:

Top management needs to practice health conscious leadership. They have to agree that everybody needs to contribute to [...] the health initiative. [...] It’s not enough that I’m doing this. [...] We’ve

talked about what we in top management should do to function better as leaders. And that's about feedback, facilitating participation, showing respect [...]. And [creating] opportunities for reflection and reinvigoration. But also that it's fun to go to work. [...] So we've said it's important that top management have those values. If we live up to that, it'll show throughout the organization.

Although these values are fairly common in contemporary leadership discourse (e.g. Conger 1989; Bass and Riggio 2006), leading by example was regarded particularly important in the promotion of healthy living. But unlike previous studies, which have highlighted the importance of leaders motivating followers by acting as role models (e.g. House 1988), the health initiative put a particular emphasis on the leaders' embodied motivation practices.

Embodied motivation practices: leading by example

The personnel manager and health inspirers made a particular point of being role models, by doing a lot of physical exercise, participating in the physical activities organized through the health initiative, and bringing healthy food to work. As expressed by the personnel manager:

I exercise regularly. [...] We've got this "health hour". It says here [...] that we should have the opportunity to go and exercise during the lunch hour, [...] to go swimming for instance. [...] So I try to do that once a week. 'Cos I believe it's important to be a bit of a role

model [...] so that people see that this is something they can prioritize.

S/he further argued that it was important to be a role model of healthy eating:

We've had activities when people can sample different [things], bean salads and such [...] as a complement to our lunch food. [...] I tend to eat in the common room. [...] I bring healthy food to work, bean salads, salads with lentils and such.

Fleshing out the significance of embodiment in leadership, these practices of healthy eating and physical exercise were obviously embodied in the leaders' behaviour and body-image. Similar to previous arguments about the significance of bodily presence in leadership (Ropo and Parviainen 2001), leading by example through healthy eating also involved bodily presence. The leaders did not merely tell others about their healthy eating but demonstrated this by consuming healthy lunches in the common room. Further, whilst passionately enjoying healthy eating and physical exercise, they led by example through body-work. But unlike "hands-on leadership" (Sinclair 2005), which involved leading with one's body whilst literally working on *other* bodies, this case involved leading with one's body by *reflexively* working on and managing one's own body (Crossley 2006).

This further strikes a chord with previous studies of how leaders manage impressions and emotions to influence followers (e.g. Gardner and Avolio 1998; Fineman 2003a). As noted above, the leaders in this

case did not seem to carefully manage their passion for physical exercise and healthy eating. However, as their leadership was largely driven by these passions, they readily exploited them in promoting healthy living. Doing so, they made sure to manage them in such a way that they became visible to other employees. And while they were not particularly concerned with crafting a certain bodily appearance or body-image, this did give them a lean and fit body-image in the eyes of others.

Verbal motivation practices: peppering and encouraging others

The leaders also mobilized verbal motivation practices in combination with, and sometimes instead of, embodied motivation practices. Similar to previous research, which has highlighted how emotional rhetoric is utilized to communicate organizational goals (e.g. Samra-Fredericks 2004), the personnel manager and health inspirers used emotional language to motivate other employees. This involved verbal encouragement and positive comments intended to pep employees to eat healthy and join in on physical activities. In particular, they would openly suggest that people come along to physical activities such as lunch walks or indoor hockey. Highlighting the personal and work-related benefits of physical exercise as well as the limited effort that was expected, the personnel manager made the following comment:

We go in on a very low level. What we're talking about is half an hour a day – that [...] is sufficient to [...] make you have the energy to perform better. [...] It's not as if it's a hassle. In my view it's quite

fair. You can't say there's no time. And when you've started [exercising], it's easier to keep going. And those who get started are pepped to keep going.

One of the health inspirers emphasized this as more of a joint effort:

some days you might think you're too busy or you don't feel like exercising. Then it's great to have a colleague who says "Let's go! We'll get [the job] done tomorrow!"

The personnel manager would also encourage people to try certain kinds of food which s/he was passionate about:

I like to bring samples of different salads. [...] and I've asked people if they would like a taste. [...] I'll show people what's in my lunch box you know, and some will say, "that looks yummy."

These verbal motivation practices seemed to be related both to the psychosocial and economic rationalism and the embodied passions that underpinned the health initiative in the first place: the stress on "exercising to perform better" illustrated the economic argument that healthy living was a matter of personal and employee performance; the notion that "We'll get the job done tomorrow" illustrated the psychosocial concern with a friendly and collaborative organizational culture; and encouraging colleagues to taste samples illustrated how the embodied passion for healthy food was used to target and shape employee tastes and eating habits. While these statements suggest that leaders showed care and consideration for their followers, a widely praised leadership trait (see e.g. Bass 1985; House and Howell

1992), some of them also insisted that “some people need encouragement”, indicating that they knew what was best for others.

De-motivation practices: Excess passion and finger-pointing

Relations between leaders and followers were complicated as employees were not unanimously enthused by these efforts to encourage healthy eating and physical exercise. Even though several members of staff were positive about the health initiative, others inversed the leaders' emotions, feeling provoked, discouraged and de-motivated by the passionate leadership effort and by their embodied and verbal motivation practices. Whereas extreme cases of dark side charismatic leadership often involve demonizing out-groups (Haslam and Reichler 2005), this was not an outcome of a conscious leadership decision to create an in-group of healthy enthusiastic followers and an out-group of unhealthy resisters but more about the unintended consequences of well-intended passionate leadership. In particular, some employees argued that the leaders were too passionate about health and that there was too much “encouragement” and finger-pointing, turning the health initiative into an exercise of “healthism” where there was little room for legitimate escape. They expressed frustration and anger about the health initiative, particularly about the finger-pointing, as health inspirers made comments about other people's eating habits:

The health promotion thing can become a bit too much at times.

You get fed up with all that nagging. [...] Certain others would say

outright that “that contains so and so much fat”. But I decide. They don’t. [...] Management puts too much stress on this.

This sentiment was shared by another employee:

People can become too devoted you know. Some people comment what others have for lunch. But they should take responsibility for their own life. [...] There’s too much making comments about others. [...] That puts people off. You can take in information in an open way instead of being force-fed with it. [...] For the dedicated ones this is fun, but it doesn’t attract new people. [...] It becomes an us/them thing – the health group and the rest.

Employees also questioned the rationale behind the health initiative, suggesting that it went beyond the formal boundaries of the employment relationship. As one disgruntled employee said:

Why I am here? To do this health thing or to do my job?!

Whilst the personnel manager and health inspirers acknowledged the difficulty of changing the habits of others, one of them also indicated that s/he became more agitated in response to resistance and apathy by members of staff. Rather than downplaying the passion for health, s/he expressed an increased passion for health:

I’ve become a bit of a health freak. I get mad at people who find it difficult to change their behaviour!

Certain members of staff picked up on this, leading them to become more negative towards the health initiative. In the words of one employee:

It's great for those who want it, but it's a waste of my time. It feels like an obligation. [...] Some people are fanatic. They comment on people's lunch food, but that's my business, what I have for lunch. [...] That I have a burger for lunch. [...] It's in my face all the time. But it's supposed to be voluntary. [...] The health inspirers are extremely haughty, they make me... they shouldn't give a damn about what I have for lunch!

Hence, passionate and emotionally charged behaviour and comments that were intended to inspire, encourage and motivate employees ended up having the opposite effect on several employees. In a broader sense, this reiterates leadership as a matter of emotional interaction (Bryman 1992; Jermier 1993). But in contrast to Weber's notion of charismatic leadership and much of the contemporary research on passionate and charismatic leadership (e.g. House 1988; Davies 2008), the passionately embodied leadership exercised in this case was not regarded charismatic and inspirational by followers. And rather than creating a unified group of excited followers (Lindholm 1990), several employees were discouraged and de-motivated by the passionate leaders. While the leaders sought to manage their body-image by making their passions visible to other employees, they were not able to control how this body-image was perceived by followers.

Further, this problematizes the recent emphasis on embodied skills and knowledge in leadership. In contrast to Ropo and Parviainen's (2001) study, the leaders in this case did not skilfully express ideal behaviour through their bodily practices, read the situation and choose appropriate behaviour to specific situations, or skilfully adjust their behaviour to the organizational atmosphere. Regardless of the situation, they seemed to express the same – or indeed a heightened – kind of embodied passion for healthy living, and they persisted in demonstrating their healthy habits to others and peppering others to follow their example.

This also problematizes Linstead and Brewis' (2007) distinction between passion and desire. Though embodied passion for healthy living was partly directed at the organization, passions were also deeply personal. While this may not have turned leaders' passions quite into an amorphous flow of desire, it did make them less unidirectional and harnessable, and certainly so amorphous that they exceeded what other members of staff regarded appropriate.

This may be related to a certain narcissism amongst the leaders. Though it would be a stretch to associate any attempt to lead by example with narcissism, the salad incidence does suggest that the personnel manager sought to be positioned as a star performer to be admired by other members of staff. But in contrast to Pullen and Rhodes (2008), this did not mean that leaders directed *all* energy and desire at themselves. Rather, health promotion was driven both by a

belief that it would benefit individual employees and the organization as a whole *and* by the leaders' own passion for healthy living.

Finally, the ambiguous effects of the health initiative may be seen in relation to its underlying bio-politics. Despite the assumption that participation was voluntary, a number of employees felt that there was little freedom to abstain. Like a Foucauldian technology of self, the health initiative was surrounded by dominant expectations and norms of employee compliance and participation (e.g. Gordon 1991; Thanem 2009). This was reinforced through the confessional dimension of unit meetings. While employees were expected to share their own everyday attempts to lead a healthy life with the rest of the group, this also meant that employees who did little in this respect implicitly confessed their unhealthy bodily sins.

The health initiative further illustrates how leaders, through technologies of self, first sought to lead and manage themselves before leading and managing others. Hence, it is possible to see a movement from the healthy passions of leaders, as expressed through their embodied and verbal practices, to the healthy conduct of employees: as leaders' healthy passions came to inform and literally incorporate organizational discourse on healthy living and working, employee bodies were turned into objects of intervention, re-definition and discipline, first by others and then by the self.

However, as both Foucault (1979) and later commentators would acknowledge (e.g. Gordon 1991; Thanem 2009), this is not a deterministic process, and in this case it seems that the combination

of voluntary and compulsory practices opened up rather than closed down the spectre of possible employee responses. While the leaders gave up power by making participation in the physical activities voluntary, their implicit attempt to compensate for some of that lost power – through excess passion and finger-pointing and by making certain other activities compulsory – provoked a number of employees into frustration, anger and resistance.

Conclusion: For a new category of monstrously transgressive leadership?

The case examined in this paper has a number of implications for the understanding of leadership in organizations. Specifically, it has extended the still small leadership literature on embodiment by showing how leadership is informed by embodied passions and exercised through bodily practices. In this case, leadership was not just exercised through verbal practices of passionate encouragement and pepping, but profoundly embodied through passionate ways of leading by example, through healthy eating and physical exercise. Further, their leadership was not just driven by a rationalistic concern for the organization as a whole, but by their own embodied passions for healthy eating and physical exercise.

The role of private passions and (intentionally) passionate encouragement strikes a chord with charismatic leadership. Like the non-charismatic leaders in this case, charismatic leaders are driven by their own personal values and go beyond the formal call of duty to achieve their goals, thereby transgressing the distinction between

public role and private interest which is presumed in rational-legal organization. However, charismatic leadership is further associated with ecstasy, the extraordinary, and an acute awareness of the social relationship with followers: charismatic leaders exploit their own passions to engender passion, ecstatic dedication and excessive performance in followers. And they do so by appealing to followers' values (Sosik 2005).

In contrast, the leaders in this case simply assumed that their own passions and values coincided with the passions and values of followers. Insofar as they did not coincide, they therefore failed to motivate followers to go beyond the call of duty, reducing rather than enhancing their passion for the health initiative, and leading them to view it as de-coupled and irrelevant rather than central to the jobs they were hired and paid to do.

The transgressive aspects of leadership exercised in this case may be further brought out through the notion of the monstrous. Broadly speaking, the monstrous is that which disrupts and transgresses boundaries – whether financial criminals who transgress legal and moral boundaries, giant multinational corporations that transgress magnitudinal boundaries, heterogeneously embodied people such as myself who transgress morphological boundaries of gender, or people who transgress formal and social boundaries by doing more than what is implied by their job description and by behaving in such a way that they disrupt dominant norms of appropriate and acceptable conduct.

In particular, the leaders investigated here may be seen to have exercised monstrously transgressive leadership by disrupting and exceeding both the formally and socially defined limits of their leadership role. As their leadership was partly informed by their personal and embodied passions, they monstrously transgressed the boundaries of their formal leadership role. Except for their lack of charisma, this is similar to the transgression exercised by charismatic leaders. But in doing so, they exercised further forms of transgression that are not captured by the charismatic.

Firstly, as the role became bigger than normal and differently shaped than normal, it became magnitudinally monstrous and morphologically monstrous. Secondly, and more importantly, they monstrously transgressed the boundaries of socially accepted conduct, thus failing to achieve validation by followers, which is a basic test of charisma (e.g. Tucker 1968; Bryman 1992). Sure, their passions supported them in their effort to promote healthy living amongst employees, and their passionately embodied practices of healthy eating and physical exercise worked to motivate and encourage certain employees. However, others felt that they expressed their passion for health excessively and fanatically, so much so that they were demotivated and discouraged rather than motivated and encouraged to lead a healthier lifestyle. Finally, their leadership actualized the monstrous in a third sense: by seeking to intervene into the bodily habits of employees at work and home, they blurred the life/work boundary and came to exercise leadership in a morally

monstrous way, encroaching on the freedoms and responsibilities of individual employees and violating the boundaries of employee autonomy and integrity.

Since passionately transgressive leadership is not necessarily charismatic, and since leadership can be exercised with too much passion, perhaps it is time, then, to introduce a fourth “category” of “monstrously transgressive leadership”, of the non-charismatic yet deeply passionate, embodied and socially inappropriate ways in which people exercise leadership. Interestingly, and despite primarily being celebrated for his pioneering effort to understand the rationalization of modern society (e.g. Cooper 1998), Weber might be considered monstrously passionate and therefore socially monstrous (Thanem 2011). Indeed, Marianne Weber’s (1975/1950) biography of her husband tells of his martial fighting instinct, excess energy and ecstasy of power, action and potency. Further, Loewenstein (1966; in Bologh 1990: 39n3) described Weber as ‘a daemonic personality’:

His volcanic temperament erupts again and again. [...] Even in routine matters, there was something incalculable, explosive about him. You never knew when the inner volcano would erupt.

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