Authority: Authoring, Struggle, Evolution

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Abstract

Authority has long been a considered a taken-for-granted mainstay of organizational life; which has resulted in its practice being uncontested and under-explored. This study brings the empirics of authority into light and argues that authority is wrought in struggle. Through an ethnographic study of a Danish municipal department, we examine how authority is enacted in situ over time in meeting interaction. Our findings suggest three contributions to existing literature: 1) Authority is part of a continuous struggle over meaning. 2) Hierarchical position plays a key role in shaping the authoritative text of organizations. 3) Acts of authoring can illuminate leadership process.

Keywords

Authority, authoring, leadership, process, struggle
Introduction

Authority is a central idea in organization studies. As the writings of Weber (1978/1924), Simon (1951) and others attest, it has been a conceptual workhorse historically associated with bureaucratic structure and rights accorded to hierarchical position. Authority has also been a touchstone for theorizing about organizational design (Burns & Stalker, 1961), and it continues to be an important issue as organizations move away from the bureaucratic form to more widely dispersed authority constellations to address complex environments (Casey, 2004).

Whatever more or less transitional state “authority” is in, it is the central thesis of this paper that authority remains relatively understudied as a phenomenon in its own right (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). While it has been theorized and modeled by several contemporary scholars (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Casey, 2004; Simon, 1951; Taylor & Van Every, 2014; Weber, 1978), and fleeting glimpses into its operations surface when other phenomena like leadership, resistance, power, or organizational design take the spotlight, its day-to-day empirics largely remains uncharted (cf. Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2014).

Authority’s relative lack of empirics may be a response to a bygone era—an era in which organizational life was more stable, technological change was less rapid, and globalization was a distant future. But these conditions no longer describe contemporary organizational life; rapid change and high levels of complexity in uncertain environments are now the norm (Safian, 2012). It is no wonder then that the empirics of authority currently hide in plain sight if we are stuck looking through a rear-view mirror by assuming its constancy and stability. While process views of such phenomena as organizational structure (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Giddens, 1979), organizational change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), leadership (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008a; Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012), and even organizations themselves (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Boden, 1994; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) have taken hold, why not authority?

This study showcases the performativity (Taylor & Cooren, 1997) of authority in reciprocated acts of “authoring” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014) in everyday interaction. However, we view such authoring as a function of the dialectical
relationship between power and resistance whereby authority is, not only continually negotiated among
organizational members, but also marked by struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Mumby, 2005). Such a view is
particularly responsive to the power-laced dynamism of social interaction, but also to the protean nature of authority
in contemporary organizations. Through an ethnographic study of a Danish municipality in the midst of an
organizational restructure, we demonstrate how authority resides in the tension between power and
resistance—how it is claimed, granted and resisted in an effort to stabilize and destabilize operations of power. We
also undertake a close discursive analysis to reveal the myriad ways in which daily struggles for authority amidst
resistance take place. We then draw out the implications of these struggles for leading organizational change over
time. We begin with a review of the different ways in which authority has been captured in the literature and follow
up with our research questions.

**Shifting Views on Authority and Resistance**

The grounding of authority in diverse literature bodies, including political science (Arendt, 1961), sociology (Parsons,
Kram, 1994; Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2014), economics (Simon, 1951), and psychology (Milgram & Van den
Haag, 1978), is testimony to its multifaceted nature and its presumed centrality to human existence (Benoit-Barné &
Cooren, 2009). Yet, despite such centrality, it remains a notoriously elusive concept—a concept often used but
seldom explained (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). To navigate this conceptual maze, we use Hardy’s (In press) literature
review of power and authority in which she describes different treatments of these closely related terms according to
managerialist theorizing, critical studies, and discursive (poststructuralist) approaches. We use this framework with
the goal of moving authority out of the shadows and into view.

**Managerialist Theorizing**

A key starting point for insight into the managerialist literature on authority must begin with the work of Max Weber
(1924/1978) for whom one aspect of authority was a claim to legitimate domination. Based on formal rules or laws, Weber made rational-legal authority the *sine qua non* of bureaucracy, wherein “the rational-legal rules structure the hierarchy of the organization and impersonally separate the rules from the person administering them” (Casey, 2004, p. 62). Managerialist theorizing of bureaucracy has, in turn, taken as its starting point the relationship between rational-legal authority and hierarchical position, as people with higher positions and resource control can have or be granted authority over people on the lower rungs (Grossman & Hart, 1986; Hart & Moore, 1990; Kahn & Kram, 1994; Simon, 1951). Rational-legal authority is thus fundamental to bureaucratic structure, albeit reified by equating it with hierarchical rank (e.g., in organizational charts or labor contracts) (Putnam, 1983).

Such reification has paved the way for the empirics of rational-legal authority largely hiding in plain sight in managerialist research throughout the 20th century. While authority was theorized and modeled by scholars (e.g., Simon, 1951; Weber, 1978), we have gotten only fleeting glimpses into its empirics in cases where other phenomena have taken the spotlight. These include: 1) leadership (e.g., see early survey studies of leaders’ “areas of freedom” (Bass, 1981); see also Blake and Mouton’s (1964) Managerial Grid for “authority-compliance” as a high task orientation and “delegating” (authority) in Hersey and Blanchard’s (1979) Situational Leadership Theory; and psychoanalytic discussions of “authoritarianism” (Gabriel, 2011) as rigid adherence to authority); 2) power (e.g., authoritative forms of power such as “legitimate” power in French and Raven’s (1958) five bases of social power); and 3) organizational design (e.g., Burns and Stalker’s (1961) mechanistic versus organic organizations).

Hardy (In press, p. 3) explains the managerialist lack of empirics on authority in this way: “Since authority is considered as a ‘normal’ or ‘inevitable’ phenomenon that results from the formal design of the organization, it is largely excluded from analysis as research concentrates on power that is exercised outside formal hierarchical structures.” Authority is thus considered to be the acknowledged, legitimate right to make a decision, while power takes on a negative cast as resisting management, resisting change, the pursuit of self-interest, or informal,

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1 Weber argued that there were three bases of authority: *Rational-legal authority*, which stemmed from formal rules and laws, *traditional authority*, which stemmed from cultural rites and practices, and *charismatic authority*, which stemmed from the special qualities of gifted individuals.
illegitimate sources of power (e.g., Crozier, 1964; Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971). Thus, authority “was increasingly taken for granted; with researchers rarely stopping to consider how it got there or whose interests it serves. Power was what counted—and what fascinated—researchers” (Hardy, In press, p. 3). In the managerialist tradition then, authority largely faded into the background of empirical research.

Critical Approaches

Critical approaches to power and authority, otherwise known as critical management studies (CMS), view managerialist approaches to power as narrowly scratching its surface. Power exists in what appears natural and neutral in the everyday of organizational life, including the very composition of organizational structures and decision-making processes, thus masking managerial interests (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006; Deetz, 1992). According to Hardy (In press, p. 3), in CMS: “Power is domination; authority is one form of domination; and resistance is a repudiation of that domination.” Resistance to authority is thus celebrated for its emancipatory potential, while power and resistance uniquely contribute to the state of power relations in organizations. CMS researchers thus interrogate how the elite mask their interests through the opaqueness of language, ideological control, and the suppression of conflict (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 2001, 2004). In parallel fashion, they also document those at the margins and their attempts to free themselves of the effects of power (Brenton, 1993; Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1992).

To be sure, authority as a form of domination is an important target for critique within CMS; however, empirically, it is often merged with other forms of domination (e.g., capitalist relations). When authority is referenced or implied, its empirics are often cast in broadly macro terms (e.g., institutional or economic structures). This is consistent with Mumby’s (2004, p. 251) observation that CMS studies are not known for their close examination of power-resistance discursive processes, exceptions notwithstanding (e.g., Clegg, 1975; Collinson, 1992; Rosen, 1988; Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011). Thus, while critical approaches provide insight into the nature of authority, its performative nature (or mechanics) has still not been a particular focus.
Discursive (Poststructuralist) Approaches

The poststructuralist work of Foucault (Foucault, 1979; Foucault, 1980, 1982b) challenges the notion of an ultimate authority in control of organizational outcomes in favor of a network of power relations, i.e., discourses that makes everyone subject to its operations. A discourse is a system of thought describing ways of seeing, speaking, and behaving anchored in time socio-historically; it provides resources to social actors, enabling them to communicate while simultaneously disciplining them to its ways. Power thus circulates through discourse, influencing how particular kinds of objects and subjects become “known.” Power is also relational and intertwined with resistance; each follows closely on the heels of the other. In terms of authority, Hardy (In press, p. 4) observes, “this work implicitly or explicitly, resurrects the notion of authority by acknowledging that certain actors and institutions are constructed as authorities and authoritative.” The work of Foucault and others with a social constructionist mindset have become a part of the linguistic turn in social philosophy (Rorty, 1967) and the organizational sciences (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) whereby organizations are framed as constituted within the communicative realm. To wit, organizational reality is not given in hierarchies and structures, but is enacted in communication and through discourse (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2001; Deetz, 1992; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Such work demands that authority, resistance, and most other organizational phenomena be treated as performative (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Cooren, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2014).

Taylor and Van Every (2014) adopt a performative view when they argue that authority originates in the communication process through discursive acts of “authoring” (see also Shotter, 1993). Such authoring happens when organizational members seek authority by acting on behalf of the organization, as the organization has no voice of its own and thus requires representation. Taylor and Van Every’s work is inspired by Pierce’s (1903/1955) notion of “thirdness”, in which any purposeful activity includes three components: “an actor (a first), and acted-on (a second) and a third, or that which interprets and justifies what is happening, gives it meaning and supplies a script that actors can follow” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014, p. 18). Taylor and Van Every bring an organizational perspective to thirdness, whereby “everyone takes on authority through their relationship with the organization” (p 25). This means that

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organizational members and managers, in particular, “will have to justify their actions as authentically translating the purposes of their organization” (p. 27). Representation, with all its demands and obligations, is thus what makes a claim to authority legitimate in the eyes of the audience (Cooren, 2010; Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008), as the organization will become “a source of authority for those who represent it” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014, p. 14).

Consistent with a post-bureaucratic perspective, in which bureaucratic structure is no longer the sole, or even major, source of authority in organizations (Barley, 1996; Casey, 2004; Kahn & Kram, 1994), Taylor and Van Every (2014) also argue that the structural dynamics of authority are problematic in all large contemporary organizations. Contra Weber, for whom hierarchical position and expertise coincided, a mark of the contemporary condition is the “decoupling” of these two sources of authority (Barley, 1996). As increased complexity and perpetual change have become the new standard, it is “increasingly difficult to specify and reify in advance exactly who should be doing what, when and in what order, and with whom” (Kahn & Kram, 1994, p. 18). This means that in (many) contemporary organizations, “hierarchical position alone is an insufficient justification for authority” (Barley, 1996, p 437; see also Hardy and Clegg [1996]). As such, the organization can also be legitimately “authored” by those outside the top tiers of the hierarchy, for instance, by organizational members who possess a high level of expertise but low positional rank.

Fleishman and Marwell (Fleishman & Marwell, 1977, p. 1) would describe this high-low combination of position and expertise as status inconsistency whereby an individual is “high on one major dimension of society’s stratification system and low on another.” Hence, when claims of either expertise or position by reference to a “third” are made, status inconsistencies appear when a person (or persons) is seen as being high on positional authority but low on expertise authority, or vice versa. Such status inconsistencies are more likely to make the negotiation of authority more conflictual, even volatile, as organizational members seek to level out the authority playing field. To Taylor and Van Every (2014), conflict is an important lens; conflict over authority makes it visible. Normally, authority “remains invisible, even to the dedicated observer, precisely because it is so fundamental” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014, p. 10).
In several ways, Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) perspective complements that of dialectical power-resistance struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Mumby, 2005), which embraces Foucault’s relational view of power. A dialectical perspective allows us to see the conflicts of authority, not just as the lens through which to observe authority, but also as integral to the performance of authority itself. A dialectical perspective sees organizations as sites of ongoing power-resistance struggle and conflict (e.g., Collinson, 2005; Kondo, 1990; Mumby, 2005; Scott, 1990; Zoller, 2013; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007), which includes resistance to authoritative power. It eschews the notion of power and resistance as two opposite poles of a spectrum, but instead argues that “relations of power and resistance operate in more complex ways than can be described in simple all or nothing polarities” (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994, p. 3-4). Instead, power and resistance are co-constitutive, always present (Thomas & Hardy, 2011), and may be “closely knit together in complex and often contradictory ways” (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, p. 304). In short, power-resistance conflict is “intrinsic to complex systems” (Deetz, 2008, p. 389).

Hence, we propose authority-resistance struggle as the lens through which to see the performance of authority through authored acts and the responses they entail, especially over time. Following Taylor and Van Every (2014), in the contemporary condition where hierarchical position is putatively no longer enough to claim authority, status inconsistencies will likely surface as organizational members high in hierarchical position are low on expertise or vice versa. Organizational members should thus seek to legitimize their right to speak on the organization’s behalf by referencing their expertise and/or position. Following a dialectical “struggle” perspective, few claims to authority are benign or undisputed because power and resistance are intimately intertwined. Claims to authority will, at some level, be met with resistance, while acts of resistance may simultaneously claim authority (Holm & Fairhurst, 2014).

What then are the ideal conditions for viewing authority-resistance struggle vis-à-vis authored acts and their resistances, which themselves may be a claim to authority? We would argue that a focus on actual talk-in-interaction is uniquely suited for providing the close textual analyses that Mumby (2004) recommends. Even in the most mundane interactions, talk-in-interaction is inherently social, constituting and constituted by “action upon action” (Foucault, 1982a, p 789). Following Boden (1994, p. 7), “People’s everyday actions in concrete social situations are the
stuff of social order and, as such, the constitution of society involves the mutual and simultaneous elaboration of structure and action across time and across space”.

However, only a handful of studies have examined authority-resistance struggles in actual talk-in-interaction over time with a focus equally on authority and resistance. In the resistance literature, authority is often the proverbial straight man—the one made to look foolish by one’s partner (in this case, resistance). A few studies that do examine both authority and resistance talk-in-interaction focus only on single episodes (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Brenton, 1993) or narrow topics such as humor or agenda setting (Boden, 1994; Holm & Fairhurst, 2014). Finally, Taylor and Van Every (2014) examine authority conflicts over time in two case studies; however, these are largely anecdotal accounts, not a close discourse analysis. Hence, there is little research that we’ve been able to find that undertakes a close discourse analysis with an equal eye to both the performance of authority and its resistances over a prolonged period of time. In order to close this empirical gap, we examined the case that we describe below by asking the following questions:

RQ1: How are authority-resistance struggles brought off in a contemporary, knowledge-intensive organization undergoing major change? More specifically:

a) What forms do claims and grants to “authoring” take?

b) What forms do resistance to authoring take?

c) How do they interrelate in struggle mode?

As the ensuing discussion reveals, the focus of this study is on the formal meetings of two merging departments of a Danish municipality. Because the merger caused organizational roles and power relationships in the leader group to change, we also ask:

RQ2: How do leaders (re)produce their authority in formal meeting interaction over the course of such struggles?
The Case

This study focused on a group of seven leaders in a Danish municipality during the establishment of a new department. The new department, “Organizational Advancement” (hereafter, OA), was formed as a response to a new organizational strategy of creating more cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing between skill-sets and specialties in the municipality. OA came into existence by merging two existing departments and a project team, namely “the Human Resources and Communication department” (hereafter, HRC), “the Information Technology department” (hereafter, IT), and the “Project Team”, into one department. This restructure was quite extensive and resource-consuming, and the practicalities of it (e.g. relocating to new offices) spanned several months.

The establishment of the new department also entailed a new leader structure. Michael, formerly the head of HRC, was promoted to lead OA; and under his command, he re-organized the department’s 80+ members into teams, each with a team leader; Thomas, John, Martin, Monika, Louise and Charlotte. All team leaders had previously been employed in IT, HRC or the Project Team, and all (except Thomas) had previously been managers. The team leaders were considered hierarchically equal and were all members of a leader group led by Michael. For only one of the team leaders, John, did the restructure entail a demotion, as his new title ‘team leader’ ranked lower on the organizational chart than his previous rank of ‘department leader.’

This study follows all the seven leaders as they interact with each other and employees in leader group, department and team meetings.

Methods

This study used ethnographic methods to examine how leaders establish their authority in new organizational positions as the result of a departmental merger. It was conducted in a Danish municipality over a period of five and a
half months, where the primary focus was meetings wherein one or more of the leaders were present. Such meetings were deemed to be important sites for the establishment of authority, because the working day of the leaders typically consisted of numerous meetings, and these meetings constituted venues wherein updates, discussions, decisions, propositions, etc. about the organizational change would often occur.

The data generation process consisted of observing and audio-recording 48 meetings (of which 14 were also recorded on video); conducting and audio recording 14 in-depth interviews; and monitoring and selectively gathering several written communications over the municipal intranet during the research period. This resulted in a total of 76 hours of audio recorded data, 23 hours of video recordings, 61 pages of field notes, and 70 pages of intranet website data. The recorded meetings cover leaders-only group meetings, team meetings, and whole department meetings. Some 13 of the 14 interviews were with members of the leader group; the remaining interview was with a leadership consultant who was involved in the restructure process. At all recordings, except three, the first author was present in the room, but did not partake in the meeting interaction. The resulting data were selectively transcribed in Danish by the first author, then chronologically arranged, and entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo10. A version of grounded theory methods, termed an iterative approach (Tracy, 2013), was used to analyze the data. An iterative analysis “encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data. Iteration is...a reflexive process in which the researcher visits and revisits the data, connects them to emerging insights, and progressively defines his/her focus and understandings” (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p 77). Hence, in contrast to some forms of grounded theory, where it is not recommended that one consult the literature until the data has been collected and analyzed, an iterative analysis approach actively encourages it. As such, there were four major data analysis phases.

First, in accordance with the iterative approach, an initial explorative coding of the data was performed to find emerging broad themes in the data. Of the themes that emerged, “change talk” stood out, which dealt with discourse concerning the changes that took place in the organization as an effect of the restructure. This theme came

3 According to Tracy (2013, p. 190), an iterative analysis does not require that “the entire corpus of data be put through a fractured and detailed” coding at this initial stage of the analysis.
to be the foundation of the first-level data coding where five linguistic markers formed the criteria for “change talk.” This included: 1) any and all evidence of changing practices and routines; 2) contrasts made between “the situation here and now” versus some ideal possible future and/or a problematic past; 3) use of new jargon intended to instantiate the change; 4) references to changed materialities (e.g., a change in work spaces); and 5) evidence of iterations of the change (e.g., change announcement phase, implementation phase, and so on). These criteria are in congress with the literature on the discourse of organizational change (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Fairhurst, 1993; Lewis, 2011). The data were then coded in English by the first author, chronologically ordered, and arranged in NVivo10. Second, after the initial coding that created an overview of the discourse of the change process, a second-level coding process was initiated, which was designed to mark instances of claims, grants, and resistances to authority. Claims were defined, in accordance with Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) view of authoring, to be assertions of legitimacy (rights) or responsibility (obligations) or both that were consented to or resisted in social interaction.

In the second-level coding, we used a constant-comparative method (Charmaz, 2006) to perform a more focused coding of authoring, grants, and resistances, continuously comparing the data to emerging codes. This meant we took care to modify code definitions to fit new data; and to consider the literature on authoring and its resistances to help clarify what we were possibly seeing in our data (Tracy, 2013). Both authors independently coded the data, until theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was reached, wherein new instances of authoring and resistance might be found in the data, but these did little more than confirm the existing categorization of the data. This second level coding generated a “codebook,” reflected in Table 1, wherein the instances of authoring, grants and resistances, were divided into a range of categories and sub-categories.

Third, from these categories a third coding process was conducted. This was an axial coding process to determine the relationship between the categories that emerged in the second-level coding. It was performed in order to “link categories with sub-categories and ask how they are related” (Charmaz, 2006). Following this coding approach we determined that the categories involving authoring (and, by implication, their responses) could be broadly divided into: a) hierarchical position, b) expertise, and c) leadership role vis-à-vis advancing the task at hand.
Fourth, following the analysis of the third-level coding data, we discovered that focusing on authoring as it took place in any single meeting interaction was showing only a slice of the action taking place. To tell the whole story of how authority was gained, granted or resisted in the organization, it was imperative that we captured the progress over time vis-à-vis specific decision outcomes (Maitlis, 2005). To do this, we followed topics that developed during the five and a half month the study lasted. A “topic” was determined to be: a) a matter in question or dispute of departmental importance, and b) on which the leader group would seek to agree on a solution. We focused on the leader group because they were not only spearheading the restructure and thus making most of the decisions about it; they were also, arguably, the ones most directly influenced by the merger in terms of reconfigured hierarchical positions and power relationships. Therefore, the leader group meetings constituted an ideal setting in which to study the evolution of authority dynamics. Importantly, to show the sequentiality of authoring, the topics had to appear over several meetings. Through looking at the codes generated in the initial coding, and focusing on leader group meetings, four topics were found that fitted the parameters listed above.

To get an overview of how authoring took place over time, we created analytical memos for each topic. For each memo, we tracked all topic-relevant instances of authoring, grants and resistances, thus providing an overview of the twist and turns that led to a decision outcome. Using Maitlis (2005) as a rough guide, we tracked sub-topics over time as they appeared, noting such things as the connection between the sub-topics and the particular leaders involved. From this it was possible to create a picture of how sub-topics were taken up and/or abandoned, and how some, in the end, turned into decision outcomes. Figure 1 provides a leader group meeting timeline and a visualization of two issues, featuring when specific sub-topics were introduced and abandoned, and the decision outcomes that resulted in a departmental intranet posting, a textualized finalization of the decision.

**Results**

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4 It was officially stated in the municipality’s strategy that managers should be the vanguard of the restructure.
Research question 1a: What forms do claims and grants to “authoring” take?

Authoring Claims. Our iterative analysis resulted in three primary categories of claims to authority and three categories of grants of such authoring, the details of which can be found in Table 1. The three primary categories of claims to authority were: 1) authoring through hierarchical position; 2) authoring through expertise; and 3) authoring through leadership role. As each category is described, only those sub-categories of particular note will be highlighted. Table 1 provides the details for the remaining sub-categories as several are to be expected based on the extant literature.

Authoring through hierarchical position were claims to authority by virtue of being the highest hierarchically ranked person present. The sub-categories for this were: a) opening and closing meetings, b) agenda control, c) responsibility delegation, d) topic closure, e) textual closure, f) handing over mandate, g) delaying conclusions, h) displays of permission or permission granting, and i) prerogative displays. These categories were all directly linked to having a high organizational rank. For example, in the category of handing over mandate, the highest ranking leader would hand over decision rights to a direct report, e.g. by letting this person chair a meeting. In the category of topic closure, the highest-ranking leader would be responsible for the termination of a topic of discussion, e.g., by drawing conclusions or summing up.

Authoring through expertise involved displays of specialized knowledge, skills, or business acumen. As such, we treated this as “content expertise” based on the task, projects, and practices of this municipal department. The sub-categories here were: a) prioritizing, b) updates, c) inside knowledge, d) informed projections, and e) translations. Particularly interesting here were such categories as informed projections, where an organizational member would make predictions of the future, based on proprietary information or ‘executive guesses’, and translations, which involved authoring through framing events or concepts as in, “here’s what it means for us”.

Authoring through leadership role involved situated displays of responsibility taking to advance the task at hand. These were influential acts of organizing not bound by position or a function of expertise. Contra Barley (1996) and
Taylor and Van Every (2014) who argue that authority stems from two bases, namely position and expertise, this third category emerged in our data perhaps because distributed leadership was an expectation for the leader group. It is different from hierarchical position, which fixes authority according to the highest rank. It is also different from expertise because individuals other than content experts can advance the task by moving discussions forward with strong displays of interpersonal, negotiation, or conflict management skills. The sub-categories for this were: a) asserting the right to talk, b) speaking for employees, b) presumptive we, c) association with authoritative documents, d) association with authoritative people, and e) overt responsibility taking. Of particular interest was a category such as the presumptive we, which involved claiming authority through presuming the capacity to speak on behalf of an emerging consensus of people present in the meeting, and asserting the right to speak, which involved claiming authority by interruptions indicative of an assumed right to be heard.

Grants to authoring. Claims to authority alone do not demonstrate that authority exists, it must be granted (Simon, 1951). As reflected in Table 1, our data reflected the granting of authority in three ways: 1) non-responses, which were quiet assents to claims of authority. For all practical purposes, we took uncontested claims to authority to be implicit affirmations of it; 2) affirmations, which were utterances of explicit agreement to claims of authority, for example, a “yes” or “mm hmm”; 3) attributed expertise, which denoted implicit grants of authority by presuming another organizational member had knowledge that only those in an authoritative position would hold.

In the example below and others (see Table 1), claims and grants to authoring, one at a time, time and time again, stitched together a fabric of authority. Crucially, however, these were not straightforward attempts to control and acquiesce, but were often covert struggles over meaning. By this we mean that the claims and grants of authority were the kinds of discursive moves that, according to Deetz (1992), “are rather quiet, repetitive micro-practices, done for innumerable reasons, which function to maintain normalized, conflict-free experience and social relations” (p. 189). Through such struggles, a certain humdrum of authoring still flowed almost seamlessly as the fabric of authority was stitched together, as claims and grants of authority likened “a process of ongoing, multiple, and unpredictable calls (power) and responses (resistances) in which power and resistance are often indistinguishable”
Consider the following episode, where the leader group in OA discusses what kind of information they need to pass on to the employees. For clarity, we added our coding in parentheses.

**Example 1:**

1 Charlotte: We *presumptive we* just need to figure out what we want to send *translations*. Well, I think that what is important for them is to get some information *speaking for employees*. Then we just have to figure out what form we think it should have *setting priorities, translations*.

2 Michael: Yes *affirmation*

3 Monika: But which (kind of) information is important? *Attributed expertise*

4 Charlotte: Well, what is happening (right now) right? Well I think some (employees) think they are good because they get an update on what is happening right now *speaking on behalf of employees*.

5 Monika: So we have to make sure that we in some way give them that *setting priorities*.

6 Charlotte: Well I think… *interrupts Monika* asserting the right to talk But we can easily…

7 Louise: (interrupts Charlotte) asserting the right to talk My feedback, the feedback I’ve gotten have been that they lack strategic perspectives *speaking on behalf of employees*.

8 Monika: Yes *affirmation*

In the example above, we see several instances of authoring and granting of such authority. Notably, this claiming and granting of authority does not seem to upset the balance of the power relationship between the interactants, but can rather be seen as a necessary part of the interaction. In the example, we see several people attempting to influence the flow and direction of the discussion, by claiming authority via different means, for example, though expertise (line 1: presumptive we, translations) or their advancing the task through leadership role (line 2: speaking for employees). Hence they seek to be the author of what they perceive to be the definitive meaning of a certain topic. Noticeably, not much overt conflict is observable in the excerpt, but the interruption pattern suggests that an ongoing struggle...
over meaning is clearly present, as each person seek to advance their interpretation of what needs to be done and why (lines 5-12). In a struggle perspective (e.g., Deetz, 2008; Mumby, 2005), in which resistance and power exist in a dialectical relationship, this would be expected as part of the “constant, slippery interplay of control and opposition” (Ashcraft, 2008, p. 382). The struggle over meaning does not necessarily take place in big conspicuous displays of authorship or in overt displays of resistance, but is ongoing and constant in small and inconspicuous ways in organizational interaction. As shown above, this allows authority to recede from view in the continuous humdrum of mundane interaction.

**Research question 1b and 1c:** *What forms do resistance to authoring take, and how do they interrelate with claims to authority in struggle mode?*

**Authority ruptures.** On occasion the humdrum of authority claiming and granting was ruptured in episodes where authoring was directly confronted and put into question and thus no longer automatically granted. Such episodes appeared infrequently in the data, but when they did, they punctuated (Gersick, 1991; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994) the established equilibrium of authority-making. Authority ruptures happened in several forms in the data, such as through the use of humor to spoof authority holders, resistance by calling authority into question, and overt conflict over authoring rights—separately or in combination with one another. Consider the following examples.

**Example 1:** “The turnabout” (Resistance)

The resistance example stems from the first department meeting in OA. The meeting was the first time the entire department of 80+ people was gathered in one place, and it was Michael’s first official act as department leader of the now defunct HRC, IT and Project Team. However, one of the employees in the IT department, Mary, was hesitant to embrace the restructure, voicing her objections at other times. As shown below, she also found a way to do so at the meeting in question. The example begins after Michael has just finished an uninterrupted 34-minute long

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5 More examples can be provided upon request.
“monologue” in which he presented his plan for the future. The bold font designates the particular aspects of the text of interest.

1 Michael: ⋮, and therefore it is also really good that we have some teams which are quite consolidated and
2 which we know (already).
3 ((pause))
4 Mary: Can I ask something or should I wait?
5 Michael: Wait! ((some people laugh)) Because there can be a thousand questions to this and therefore I
6 will suggest that you all use two minutes with a colleague ⋮ [Michael instructs the employees to
7 ⋮ write down questions on notes and put them in a box, as to give everyone a fair chance of having
8 ⋮ their voices heard and questions answered. He then picks three random questions from the box
9 ⋮] and answers them. After this, he turns to Mary]
10 Michael: Mary, what was it you wanted to ask? ((some people laugh))
11 Mary: It is on one of the notes
12 Michael: ((sounding annoyed)) what did you want to ask?
13 Mary: We were just a couple of people who talked about if the leaders were aligned⋯

In the example we see the build-up of a humor-laced tit-for-tat game of authority between Michael and Mary; a game whose benign character is abruptly ended when Mary uses Michael’s own rules to turn the authority tables on him and, in essence, refuse to comply with his command. This cleverness with bending the rules leads to Michael, in a harsher tone of voice, asking his question again, finally eliciting an answer from Mary. Mary’s “turn-the-table” strategy is an explicitly face-threatening act done in such a public forum as the very first meeting of the entire department! This act of resistance ruptures the normal equilibrium of authority claims and granting, as Michael, the highest ranking leader present, is refused his right (albeit, temporarily) to control the agenda and flow of the meeting.
Example 2: “Fuck it!” (Conflict)

The excerpt below comes from one of the weekly leader group meetings. One of the topics addressed dealt with the future meeting structure in the department. After IT and HRC had been merged, it was deemed necessary (by Michael) to take a stance on how meetings should be held in the future. A few minutes before the excerpt shown below, Charlotte mentioned that she thought they should perhaps revive the “hot, spot and applaud” meetings, which was a meeting structure that had previously been used in the now defunct HRC department. Michael affirms Charlotte’s idea and supports implementing such a meeting structure in OA, but, as will be shown below, not wholly uncontested.

1 Michael: And then we work with those three understandings and then simply, in some way, get them into play. Whether they are called that (hot, spot and applaud) or something else, because it’s a HRC term, that’s kind of unimportant.

2 Martin: I could have a comment to that

3 Louise: Yes

4 Michael: but..

5 Monika: We shouldn’t

6 Martin: I actually think we should call (them) something completely new

7 Monika: yes

8 Michael: Well fine, fuck it, if they’re called whipped cream meetings, right. I don’t care.

9 Martin: Yes yes

10 Michael: But I actually think the idea is good.

11 Martin: Yes

In this example Michael disagrees with Martin in no uncertain terms. Disagreements were not uncommon in the leader group meetings, but the use of such harsh tones and profanity, as displayed by Michael, was by no means
standard. Martin’s oblique opposition (line 4: “I could have a comment to that.”) to Michael’s statement (line 2-3: “Whether they are called that… that’s kind of unimportant) elicits a rather strong response from Michael (line 15). First, he utters, “Well fine, fuck it”, and then continues by stating that he does not care if the meetings are called “whipped cream meetings”, an expression as trivializing in Danish as it is in English and meant to suggest that Martin is either not listening to him, missing the point, or both. Interestingly, Martin quickly gets with the program as he readily accedes to Michael’s pronounced display of authority (i.e., line 11: “Yes, yes.” and line 13, “Yes.”)

The authority dynamic is particularly interesting here because Michael appears to presumptively communicate that listening to him is vital. As the senior leader present, we regard this as a positional display of authority that, when interrupted by Martin, results in a reminder of just who is in charge. Again we see the normal humdrum of authority being broken, and Michael having to use extraordinary measures to reestablish his authoring rights.

Example 3: “Thomas, Thomas, Thomas” (Humor)

Example 3 stems from one of the weekly IT department meeting (before the OA was officially formed) when John was still the acting leader of the IT department. At this particular meeting, John’s right-hand man, Thomas, took over the task of chairing the meeting, as John was out of town. This was normal procedure whenever John was not present, as Thomas was an integral member of the IT department and a team leader to-be in the OA. In the episode below, Thomas stands in front of the employees of the IT department in his capacity as John’s substitute and tells the employees about the most recent news of the restructure process. However, those plans get interrupted:

1 Thomas: As you can see on the intranet there is actually now, in broad strokes, a new structure of the
2 Mayoral Administration
3 UM*: And what does that look like?
4 Thomas: But there are still some unresolved issues that have not quite fallen into place yet, so it will not be
5 until April 2nd (you will know about the details of the restructure)
6 UM: Come on.
7 Thomas: you will get to know about it
In the excerpt we see the employees humorously heckle Thomas, thereby turning the order of authority upside down; Thomas, suddenly in a position of authority, is now a subject of peer pressure from his fellow employees. This indicates another kind of break in the authority equilibrium, as the other meeting participants expose the duality of Thomas’ status as “not-yet-a-leader” and yet he is acting in a leader role. As a leader, Thomas has the prerogative to give and withhold information as he sees fit, but as a fellow employee, no such prerogative exists. Hence, in this case, we see the somewhat playful struggle over meaning that ensues.

To summarize, the answers to RQ1 give us two views on authority. In the first instance (RQ1a), authority is woven into a seamless fabric stitched by small claims and grants that often reveal a struggle over meaning, yet elides conflict of major proportions. It is the mundane, humdrum of authoritative existence that wallpapers municipal organizations like this one and many others. In the second instance (RQ1b-c), the mundane equilibrium is ruptured—not irrevocably, but in ways that suggest how authority might begin to spiral out of control. Resistance, humor, and conflict are examples of the rupturing agents here signaling how the struggles over meaning can become more pronounced, overt, and consequential. We do not proclaim the point we are making here as particularly newsworthy vis-à-vis the literature; we have known for some time that resistance, humor and conflict are disruptive forces. However, like Deetz (2008), we are interested in the “the nature of co-production” (p. 389), the weaving of the authority fabric based on struggles, mundane or ruptured, over meaning. However, to tell the full story, the evolution of authority over time must first be addressed
**Research question 2: How do leaders (re)produce their authority in formal meeting interaction over time?**

**Evolution of authority.** In RQ1, we displayed the “doing” of authority and how authoring takes place in meeting interactions. But the claims, grants and ruptures of authority that take place in such conversations only give an insight into cross-sections of the overall struggle over meaning in the data; they do not display how authority shifts and evolves over time and, in the process, contributes to the taken-for-granted shared understanding of what the organization is. According to Taylor and Van Every (2014), such shared understandings derive from the authority of jointly accessible organizational texts. If the “doing” of authority manifests itself in the immediacy of meeting conversation, text represents the “done” i.e., the material representation of those conversations in spoken or recorded forms (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Texts can range from written documents to memory traces to verbal routines—all of which may be reconfigured through continued use (Derrida, 1988). Thus, we deemed it necessary to explore the text-conversation (Taylor and Van Every, 2000) relationship to address RQ2.

More specifically, our concern is with the authoritative text, which Kuhn (2008, 2012) suggests is the “abstract representation of the entire organization and the connections of its activities, which portrays the relations of authority and criteria of appropriateness that become present in ongoing practice” (Kuhn, 2012, p. 553). Such authoritative texts are performative of organizational reality and, according to Kuhn, are constituted by both **figurative** and **concrete** texts. Concrete texts “are signs and symbols that are inscribed in some (relatively) permanent form” (p. 1234), e.g., meeting minutes, images, strategy declarations, e-mails, and so on. Figurative texts are “abstract representations of practice sites, communities and firms” (p. 1234), which are taken up and repeated in organizational interaction. Combined, concrete and figurative texts create a shared understanding of what the organization is, which, in turn, creates (relative) organizational stability as it “furnishes the basis of shared sensemaking” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014, p. 197).
In order to find out how the authoritative text was produced over time in the data, we decided to look at the discussions that took place in leader group meetings over the course of the study. We found that the majority of discussions did not span across meetings, but were isolated to individual meetings; only four discussion\(^6\) topics in the entire data-set traversed significantly across several meetings. As expected, these discussions were teeming with claims to authority, grants of authority and, ever so often, ruptures, which drove the discussions forward through raising opinions, formulating ideas, and proposing alternatives. But, when tracked over time, most of the sub-topics and ideas raised in the discussions (even those heavily discussed and supported) faded into nothingness and were seemingly forgotten; Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of this. For example, in the discussions related to whether or not OA should continue to have information meetings, 24 out of of the total of 31 sub-topics that were raised, ended up with no observable lasting presence in organizational texts. This was important because, according to Kuhn (2008), texts (both figurative and concrete) need permanence in order to become part of the authoritative text.

However, of the 7 out of 31 sub-topics that did attain permanence, all 7 ended up as concrete texts with the department leader, Michael, having had the final say in the discussion (See Table 2). This tendency was apparent across all the issues that formed the foundation of the analysis. Out of the 20 sub-topics that resulted in a concrete text, 19 had the highest ranking leader, or someone mandated to have decisional authority by the highest ranking leader, have the last say in the discussion. Consider the following typical example, which took place during the discussion about whether or not the keep having information meetings (the so-called “morning meetings”). In the meeting preceding the meeting in question (1 week prior), Michael had tasked the team leaders to come up with an answer to what to do with the information meetings. But now, some confusion had occurred as to whether or not they had actually solved that task or not. As can be seen below, Michael steps in to clear things up:

**Example 4:**

\[^6\] For further insight into the nature of these issues, see the methods section of this paper.
Michael: “...the task was to begin with “we have to, very urgently, decide upon if we’ll continue with these morning meetings or not, and should there be anything put in their stead?” And the short answer is that, that was actually what we had to make a suggestion for today.

Christina: And do we have an answer or?

Michael: You have. *(Because) I actually think the attitude around this table is clear that we do not continue with these morning briefings.*

Christina: That was what I heard to begin with

Michael: We have to come up with something else

From that episode onwards, the question of whether or not the morning meetings should continue, a question which had been a prime objective of the entire discussion and had appeared across four meetings, never appeared again.

After Michael pronounced that everyone agreed that the morning meetings should be discontinued, the discussion was effectively shut down. We thus see the “final say” of Michael become a figurative text, as it had become a “tacit understanding” (Taylor & Van Every, 2014, p. 197) of the way things are to be. Noticeable, two days after the episode displayed above, this decision of Michael’s was turned into a concrete text, as it was announced on the municipality’s intranet that morning meetings would be discontinued. In this situation, it appears that hierarchical position is an important factor in which ideas end up shaping the authoritative text, because through hierarchical authority, the highest ranking leader can create figurative texts by “signing off” on what “should be” or what is presumed to be “the situation here and now.” Through the prerogatives his rank gives him, Michael has the declarative power (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) to create a durable text. The fact that he, as leader, signs off on it gives it a stamp of durability; and this durability is further increased as it becomes a concrete text.

This makes hierarchical position unique in its ability to author meaning, as neither authoring through leadership role nor authoring through expertise was seen produce such long-term results; and this holds true for ruptures of authority as well. While ruptures of the normal flow of authority were present, it was not possible to track any
consistent influence to organizational outcomes created through such ruptures. Thereby it seems that hierarchical position has a unique role to play vis-a-vis what in the end becomes the ways in which authority gets performed.

**Discussion**

Through a five and a half month ethnographic study, we studied the performativity of authority vis-à-vis the struggle over meaning as it occurred through claims, grants, and ruptures of authority during a restructure of a department in a Danish municipality. Through a pragmatic iterative analysis we were able to show how authoring takes place over time in everyday meeting interaction, by referring to three levels of analysis of authoring. Specifically, our first research question sought to understand; 1a) what forms “authoring” takes, 1b) what forms “resistance to authoring” takes, and 1c) how they interrelate in struggle mode. From our analysis we found three categories of authoring, namely “authoring through hierarchical position”, “authoring through expertise”, and “authoring through leadership role”.

In earlier explorations of authority, such as Barley’s (1996) study of hospital technicians, Aghion and Tirole’s (1997) model of formal and real authority, Bendor et. al’s (1985) model for legislative authority, Savage’s (1991) study on female managers’ authority, Bunderson et al.’s (2000) models of organizing, and Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) exploration of “authoring”, only the authority dimensions akin to position and expertise appeared. But of the studies that produced these models, none were like the organization we studied, in that our Danish municipality had an (aspirational) ideology of “distributed leadership” (Parry & Bryman, 2006). A distributed leadership organization should be marked by opportunities for authority to emerge through whoever might advance the task (e.g., *speaking on behalf of employees, overt responsibility taking*, and so on) regardless of hierarchical position or expertise. Oftentimes, the persons who "speak up" when others don’t, volunteer for the unpleasant but necessary tasks, draw the right conclusions, or supply perspective, are those to whom we look to lead. Our labeling of such moves as taking on a "leadership role" is thus consistent with process views of leadership as "influential acts of organizing" (Hosking,
definitions of leadership as advancing the task (Gronn, 2002; Robinson, 2001), and empirical studies of leadership process that identify the interactional moves leading from discussion to action (Carroll & Simpson, 2012; Wodak et al., 2011). Thus, one contribution of this study is to add another dimension (i.e., "leadership role") to authority beyond expertise and hierarchical position, a dimension that is particularly salient in situations of shared power and control.

Besides the three categories of claiming authority, three ways of granting claims to authority also appeared from the data, namely “affirmation”, “non-response”, and “attributing expertise” (RQ1b), showing authority as an inherently social process of claiming and responding. This much has long been known about the performativity of authority (e.g., Aghion & Tirole, 1997; Simon, 1951); as the old joke goes, when your boss says, "Jump," you say, "How high?" What is less well known is how authoring and its responses represent an ongoing struggle over meaning (RQ1c). In our study, these are mostly minor skirmishes, to be sure, much as we saw in tit-for-tat games of interrupting one another to claim authorship. However, we saw stronger versions of these skirmishes in the authority ruptures involving the use of humor, conflict, and resistance to break the status quo of authoring taking place. While petulantly hoisting Michael on his own petard, expressing (potentially) conflict inducing strong emotions, or playfully exposing Thomas' leader/not-yet-leader status are not the co-authored acts of revolutionaries, they set the waters of change resistance into motion.

In other words, with humor, conflict and resistance, we can clearly see how the relatively calm seas of mundane authoring and its grants become disturbed to a greater degree by the struggles over meaning that are much more consequential and potentially unpredictable for the long term survivability of change efforts. By understanding authority as a struggle over meaning, it becomes possible to see how the operations of power actually convert to day-to-day action and, as we will see with our second research question, unfold over time vis-à-vis the work in which they were engaged. For now, however, a second contribution of this paper is to understand authority process not just in terms of individual acts of authoring involving position, expertise and leadership role, but as part of an ongoing relational struggle over meaning in organizations-as-they-happen (Boden, 1994). Finally, we would be remiss if we did
not point out how the ongoing struggles over meaning we recorded also had material consequences. They included such things as relocating people and furniture, instantiating new meeting schedules, creating new meeting formats, implementing new online knowledge-sharing initiatives vis-à-vis the intranet.

The second research question sought to understand how leaders (re)produce their authority in formal meeting interaction over time. We demonstrated this using Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) text-conversation dynamic in which the ongoingness of conversation becomes text once spoken or written, i.e., “authored” in Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) more recent terms. Kuhn’s (2008, 2012) distinction between authoritative texts that are figurative versus concrete subsequently allowed us to document the means by which texts become figurative once they gain a measure of durability as legitimating devices for next-authored actions. In this way, figurative texts temporarily stabilize meaning to enable certain actions and to prohibit certain others. Our study shows that such text durability coincides with the conclusion drawing “final says” of a person with hierarchical positional authority, and further that these figurative texts subsequently become concrete texts in the form of intranet postings. Through a detailed analysis of the evolution of four issues, we were able to show how the authoring rights of Michael, the highest-ranking organizational leader, significantly influenced the outcomes of the discussions in the leader group meetings.

Such a finding would seem to conflict with the findings from the first research question, which demonstrated the emergence of the leadership role—assumed by anyone who advanced the task—as a source of authority, in addition to hierarchical position and expertise. However, herein lies the value of a temporal analysis. Leader group team meetings can be wildly participative, even disruptive, thus providing potentially many opportunities for non-hierarchical displays of authoring. However, when they are book-ended by the hierarchical leader (or his proxy) scheduling meetings, introducing meeting topics, controlling the meeting agenda, and having the final say in conclusion drawing figurative texts and announcement-like concrete texts over time, authority can both be a product of struggle and a systematic attempt to close down meaning through positional claims to procedure control (Deetz, 1992). Understanding the sequentialized forms of the performativity of authority thus constitutes a third contribution of this study, particularly in the ways in which authoritative texts emerge to play a significant role over time.
Finally, insights gleaned into the performativity of authority suggest a multiplex view of leadership. For example, in this study leadership could be cast simply as advancing the task (RQ1a), i.e., influential acts of organizing based on expertise or leadership role in a discussion (Hosking, 1988). Leadership might also be equated with hierarchical position; the person who leads is the one with the legitimate right to decide. Alternatively, leadership might be cast as a kind of dialectic (Kelly, 2013), operating at the intersection of control and resistance (and related tensions) (Collinson, 2014). That is, leadership is less about the management of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1982) and more about the struggle over meaning and holding incompatibilities together, by turns embracing the struggle or closing it down. By contrast, leadership becomes an attribution (Calder, 1977; Grint, 2000) related to the evolving outcomes of the change intervention, such as whether these first several months of a change effort merely represent token authority that will never be truly shared, or whether they are a way station to more meaningful change that can only develop over time. Indeed, sometimes authority is “loaned, not owned” (p. 56), because “if a boss gives a subordinate authority then the boss can take it away” (Baker, Gibbons, & Murphy, 1999) (p. 69); these are the conditions of token authority. Alternatively, this study took place only in the first months of the change implementation; perhaps these are only the first steps toward more fully distributing leadership. (One of the limitations of the study is that this ethnographic investigation concluded before the change effort could be fully realized.) Finally, authority performativity could also be just one more manifestation of the myth of leadership (Kelly, 2013). If we take a practice perspective at face value (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008b), we can only see leadership by looking at what leaders and members are doing, because leadership itself is an empty signifier with a negative ontology (Kelly, 2013). Its empirics cannot be fully known because they are buttressed by unacknowledged and often romanticized ideologies (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). However, the practices of leadership-as-authoring (Taylor & Van Every, 2014) can be observed. In that sense, we can use leaders and members “doing” authority as an anchoring point through which to view the operations of leadership as an ideology (e.g., in this case, so-called “distributed leadership”). As such, a fourth and final contribution of this study is the realization of the multiplexity of leadership afforded by the insights of authority performativity, i.e., the aforementioned claims about leadership and authority may all be true (and, of
course, untrue) in equal measure. Instead of one view of leadership prohibiting another or reflecting indecisive scholarship, each can support and inform the others.

For practitioners, our findings have two important, interconnected implications. First, our findings indicate that, even if unintended, the highest-ranking leader will have a high impact on what becomes the organizations authoritative text. Our study took place in an organization in where the highest ranking leader overtly lauded distributed leadership ideologies, but even so, what we see in the data is that the highest ranking leader is highly influential in affecting what issues should be further pursued or not. Deetz (1992) argues that in cases of systematically distorted communication, participant can be deceiving themselves as they are caught in a dominant form of reasoning (p. 176). This could be also the true for the case we have displayed in this study. Michael, the department leader, is perhaps so blind to the workings of the bureaucratic system of which he is a part (the top manager has ultimate decision right) that he does not see that it distorts the management ideology he is pursuing (distributed decision rights).

**Conclusion**

To summarize, we show that: 1) authority enactments extend to position, expertise and leadership role, 2) Authority is part of a continuous struggle over meaning, whether in mundane or ruptured interactions, 3) Hierarchical position plays a key role in shaping the authoritative text of the organization, as hierarchical positional authority creates opportunities for high-ranking leaders to close down meaning via figurative and concrete texts, and 4) The practice of authoring can illuminate leadership as process. This demonstrates that, clearly, the study of authority remains a vital part of understanding organizations and leadership today as much as it did in times past.


Parsons, T. 1958. *Authority, legitimation, and political action*.


Safian, R. 2012. This is generation flux: Meet the pioneers of the new (and chaotic) frontier of business. *Fast Company*, 9.


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### Table 1

**Mundane acts of claiming and granting authority**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of authoring</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoring through hierarchical position</td>
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<td>Authoring through expertise</td>
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<td>Authoring through leadership role</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authoring by virtue of being the highest hierarchically ranked person present or by temporarily having been given mandate to fill such a hierarchical position.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Authoring by any organizational member, through displays of specialized knowledge, skills, or business acumen.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Authoring by any organizational member, through situated displays of responsibility to advance the task.</td>
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| Opening and closing meetings | Authoring through convening a collective or dismissing it | **Example 1:**  
Michael: **We start off with the office cabale** and then we will go to Christina’s agenda after that. Is there anything else that’s urgent we need to talk about now?  
Linda: The weekly “Good Story”  
Michael: Yes.  
**Example 2:**  
Christina: … and then we’ll readdress this agenda when we meet next time. **Okay, I don’t have anything left (to say).** Thank you for today.  
Several: thank you  
((meeting ends)) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Agenda Control** | Authoring through directing the progression of a meeting, e.g. through presentation of the agenda, ad hoc introduction of topics to be discussed or imposing a structure through physical and temporal manifestations of the agenda | **Example 3:**  
Michael: Great, thank you. **Otherwise, then for the next hour and twenty minutes that we’ve got for you here, the plan is that we will try to give a brief picture of where the Dicken’s I think we have moved towards for the last 3 months…** [Michael continues to speak uninterrupted for the next XX minutes]  
**Example 4:**  
Charlotte: Can we count on that we will stop on time today, because I have another thing scheduled.  
Michael: **yes, in two minutes**  
Charlotte: Yes, I just had to know  
Michael: **As soon as we have figured out what we do with this thing.** |
| **Responsibility delegation** | Authoring through assigning tasks to be done in the future and/or articulating expectations for responsibility taking, either individually or collectively | **Example 5:**  
Michael: I also think that in all those teams we have today … it is also really important that we give the employees an experience of business as usual. **So keep doing that.** That is actually also another thing on the to-do list [Michael continues to speak uninterrupted for the next 20 seconds]  
**Example 6:**  
Michael: **But John has an overall transverse responsibility in relation to getting (these) things streamlined** [Michael continues to speak uninterrupted for the next 40 seconds] |
| **Topic closure** | Authoring through ending a topic of discussion, e.g., by drawing conclusions or summing up. | **Example 7:**  
Michael: **So I think we should write a post on the intranet, (which says) that to support knowledge sharing, knowledge of each other’s tasks and competencies support the documentation of our work and all these arguments that was mentioned** |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Textual closure</th>
<th>Using organizational texts, e.g. meeting minutes, to close down meaning</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Example 8:     | Christina: and we have the answer for that or?  
|                | Michael: *we have*, I actually think that the attitude around this table is clear that we do not continue with these morning briefings.  
|                | Christina: That’s at least what I’ve heard to begin  
|                | Michael: We have to come up with something else |

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<tr>
<th>Handing over mandate</th>
<th>Authoring through handing over hierarchical authority to direct reports</th>
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| Example 9:           | Michael: *Now Linda has hopefully written a lot of these (things) down (in the meeting minutes)*  
|                      | Linda: *yes*  
|                      | Michael: *we will try to collect it into sort of a description of what it is that you have said (that)* you want. *There are some good recipes in this* Charlotte: mmm  
|                      | *[…]*  
|                      | Michael: *then we will try to create an agenda from that and define some meeting moderating and such things.* |

| Example 10:         | Michael: *And this talk about the form of the leader meetings, we’ll have to do that again because Linda has made a recap on this about, how was it, wishes and perspectives and such things that you had a week ago, for how the hell we’ll get these leader meetings to have some energy and be your meetings.*  
|                     | *(papers are send around the room)* |

| Example 11:         | Linda: *So the next subject, wishing round or office relocation, you decide*  
|                     | Michael: *Yes*  
|                     | Linda: Should I say something?  
|                     | Michael: *Yes, won’t you do that. Because you are more into the details than I am*  
|                     | Linda: *An office relocation work group has been assembled*… |

<p>| Example 12:         | Michael: <em>And therefore I also let go of the meeting moderator role and the facilitator role and hand it over to Christina and will be stepping in around the table with you in this process. And therefore it</em> |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Authoring through expertise</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
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<td>Example 31:</td>
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be able to use each other in the best manner possible. **But it is also super important that we** can get the right relations for our collaboration partners. Therefore, the development relations are **a completely crucial and important parameter** in relation to the understanding of ourselves we must have.

**Example 32:**
*Monika*: I imagine that **the first thing we need to do**, as a goal for 2013, could be that we have this development process under control and have written a model for it.

**Example 33:**
*Monika*: I **can tell that we are going to the top executive group today with a brief on digital co-creation.** And that is about trying to set data free to our citizens so they have a possibility of using that data to create new services; that could be a new app or some other thing.

**Example 34:**
*Monika*: I **can also tell that we are in a process of announcing Heather’s position, the temp job.** That is a three year position and Brian has promised to help. It will be really interesting to move that process along using competence profiles

**Example 35:**
*John*: It’s also damned that the movers cannot work on Friday
*Linda*: **They are**
*Michael*: They are moving for…
*Linda*: **(they) will be moving both Friday and Monday**

**Example 36:**
*Thomas*: Then it has to be more SCRUM like, where you have a meeting of an quarter of an hour standing up or something…

*Micheal*: The morning briefings actually also lasted fifteen minutes when they started
*Thomas*: Okay
Michael: It was simply “come and then we’ll tell if there’s something new…”
Thomas: Yes
Michael: … and if there isn’t anything new, then we basically don’t tell anything”.

**Informed projections**
- Authoring through predictions of the future, based on exclusive information or ‘executive guesses’

**Example 37:**
John: I’m thinking that it would be possible that somebody else instead of me will come into the leader group. Whether that will be a new vacancy or we find somebody who (inauible) some leadership that…

**Translations**
- Authoring through framing events or concepts as “here’s what it means for us”

**Example 38:**
Michael: Well, if one uses it as an argument that “we try to set up the offices in a manner so we take into consideration the tasks you have”, (then) that also means that there has to be some dynamism in things, in one way or the other

**Example 39:**
Michael: …This means that when Thomas is put as responsible for the ‘Organization Service Collaboration,’ then he will (have to) think across all of Organization Advancement. Then he is, in principle, the boss of Organization Advancement when it comes to collaboration with Organization Service.

[Michael speaks uninterrupted for 3 minutes]

**Authoring through leadership role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asserting the right to talk</th>
<th>Authoring through talk-overs or interruptions indicative of an assumed right to be heard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example 19:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael: We will find out where…</td>
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<td>Charlotte: (interrupts Michael) the quarterly meetings will be instead of the briefings, because it is two completely different things.</td>
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<td>Steffen: Yes yes, but (short pause) We will have some shared meetings for the entire OA.</td>
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<td>Example 20:</td>
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<td>Christina: What has to be our shared foundation in Organizational Advancement, what is it we must..</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Monika: (interrupts Christina) So it’s not what we want to meet about? It is not about meeting, it is not about getting together?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christina: well, when I write “get together” then I mean a meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Speaking for the employees | Authoring through indicating knowledge of what the employees think, need and want. | Example 21: Michael: Well, *for the majority it actually somewhat works* ⋯ perhaps you need somewhere where you can withdraw to and work (alone). But we’ll get that now I think. Louise: Mmm

**Example 22:** Thomas: So it might be that I should try to bring this (idea of) the ‘silence zones’ with me too, because I know that there are some employees that are very, what’s it called, for whom it is a great desire. (Indistinct talk from several sources)

| Presumptive we | Authoring through presuming the capacity to speak on behalf of a collective of people already present in the meeting, regarding actions that must be taken by this collective. | Example 23: Monika: In the first phase I think that we can easily say “this is what we want from these quarterly meeting, this is why we do it”. But I think we owe to look at, when 6 months or a year has passed, if we are where we want to be. Louise: mmm Monika: And are the employees satisfied?

**Example 24:** Charlotte: *We have to find* out what it is we want to send. I think what is important for them is to get information. So *we have to* figure out what form we think that should take. Michael: Yes Monika: But which information is important? Charlotte: Well, what it is that is happening right?

| Association with Authoritative Documents | Authoring through the association with or endorsement of one or more texts (e.g., new organizational chart, web pages, research, expert testimony, and so on) | Example 25: Monika: ⋯ a lot of little signals that such a change process is difficult. And we also know, from literature and other places, (that having) attention on this transition⋯ we have to be really good at that. [Monika speaks uninterrupted for 6 minutes]

**Example 26:** Monika: Then I just have two things, which is some of what we know. *Because we know from research* that the closest leader is the most important source of information for employees. [Monika continues to speak uninterrupted for 2.5 minutes]

| Association with authoritative people | Authoring by referring to organizational members or groups of a higher organizational rank | Example 27: Monika: *We have in the leader group* decided that we will do another process and that we have to be done before the summer vacation with (figuring out) how it’s going to look like in the end. [Monika]
continues talking uninterrupted for 1 minute and 50 seconds]

Example 28:
Louise: But I also think that it is something which, I don’t know about Victoria (head of administration), but (something) which certainly Jonathan Mathews (Municipality director) also actually stands for, when I have heard him verbalize (those things) more directly
Christina: Mmm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt Responsibility-Taking</th>
<th>Authoring through protectiveness, direct responsibility-taking, or regard for organizational well-being of direct reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 29:</td>
<td>John: but otherwise, as said, if there is any insecurity, if there is something you’re struggling with, something you are worried about or something else, then grab hold of me, I will try to be here as much as possible the next period of time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 30:
Michael: So I hope everybody can go on Easter vacation with a good feeling. (And) if there’s something that rumbles, well then talk to someone or talk to me or send me an email or talk to their leader and get some peace (of mind) that way.

Types of grants of authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>Non-response to claims of authority, which in the situation can be seen as an affirmation of the claim to authority</td>
<td>Example 40: Linda: I have been allowed to start (the meeting) Employees: No response [Continues to talk for xx minutes] Example 41: Michael: I think that that both that thing about strategy and that thing about goals, we can wait with that Team leaders: No response [Michael continues talking for c. 20 seconds]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>Utterances of agreement to claims of authority</td>
<td>Example 42: Michael: So that is also some of that which belongs to putting an item on the agenda Louise: Yes Michael: That is to answer those two questions Louise: Yes, exactly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Attributed expertise | Authoring by presuming another organizational member has expert or hard-to-attain knowledge | Example 43:  
Monika: Because sometimes we end up talking about structures without us actually knowing what we want to get out of it  
Charlotte: Mmm  
Louise: Yes, exactly  
Example 44:  
Martin: The thing about strategic communication in the welfare area … is Christopher still project leader on that?  
Michael: Yes  
Martin: Okay  
Example 45:  
Martin: What kind of forum is it you are in with the mayor on Monday?  
Michael: It’s the executive group meeting  
Martin: Okay, so the mayor is in that?  
Michael: Yes |
Mundane acts of claiming and granting authority – Issue 1

Mundane acts of claiming and granting authority – Issue 2
Table 2

Examples of highest ranking member having “final say”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion topic</th>
<th>“What to do with morning meetings?” #1</th>
<th>“What to do with morning meetings?” #2</th>
<th>“Having department meetings”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threaded arguments over time</td>
<td>(04-03) Michael: I’m not quite sure what to do with the morning meetings</td>
<td>(05-16) Michael: It doesn’t make sense to continue having the morning meetings as they are now</td>
<td>(05-22) Monika: Perhaps have department meetings instead of morning meetings</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(04-03) John: As long as we haven’t relocated yet, we should use the meeting structure we have.</td>
<td>(05-16) Monika: Morning meetings are not fruitful</td>
<td>(05-22) Susanne: Revive the “hot, spot and applause” concept</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(04-03) Thomas: I agree with John. It will take time to create new meeting structures (so let’s keep the ones we have now)</td>
<td>(05-22) Martin and Charlotte: Shouldn’t continue having the morning meetings</td>
<td>(05-23) Michael: Perhaps have quarterly meetings or something like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(04-03) Michael: We will continue having morning meetings as usual (final say)</td>
<td>(05-22) Michael: We can’t continue with the morning meetings</td>
<td>(05-22) Martina and Charlotte: Quarterly meetings sound fine</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>(05-22) Michael: It seems that everyone agrees that the morning meetings should be cancelled (final say)</td>
<td>(05-22) Michael: Don’t want a fixed schedule for the department meetings</td>
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<td>(05-22) Christina: The employees need a fixed schedule for the meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(05-23) Michael: Employees do not need a fixed schedule, but the department meetings will be planned in advance by the leaders and announced to the employees (final say)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcomes (notifications on the intranet)

- **So far we will keep having shared meetings on Monday mornings**
- **The morning meetings on Mondays and Fridays will be discontinued**
- **Instead department-wide meetings will be held on a regular basis**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Having ad hoc meetings”</th>
<th>“Use the intranet”</th>
<th>“Continue team meetings”</th>
<th>“Creating a work group”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(05-22) Michael: Ad hoc meetings can be a possibility if needed (final say)</td>
<td>(04-03) Martin: The intranet is useful for information</td>
<td>(04-03) Michael: We will keep doing (team) meetings as usual</td>
<td>(05-22) Christina: The leader group will need help from the employees to plan the department meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(05-16) Monika and Linda: We could start using the intranet as an alternative to morning meetings</td>
<td>(05-22) Martin: The intranet has been good for delivering information and news</td>
<td>(04-17) Michael: Team meetings should continue as they do now (final say)</td>
<td>(05-22) Monika: We should let the employees come with suggestions of how to do meetings in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(05-22) Michael: Have to use the intranet more. It is the primary source of information from now on.</td>
<td>(05-22) Martin: The intranet is really great</td>
<td></td>
<td>(05-22) Michael: The employees should not decide over department meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>(05-22) Michael: The leader group need to become more active in using the intranet (final say)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(05-22) Monika and Christina: The employees should help – the leaders “own” the meetings, but the employees can help with the content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If it is needed, short morning meetings will be arranged.
- The leader group will continuously and increasingly use the intranet as an information channel.
- We will continue our other meetings as always, among them team meetings.
- A work group will be given the task to look at how we can build a general meeting structure in OA.