Leadership style in managers' feedback in meetings

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Introduction[1]

This chapter investigates the professional identity of managers in meeting interaction. It shows that identity is related to the actions being carried out and to the style of communicating. More specifically, the analysis deals with how managers give feedback to their co-workers in reporting sequences in management meetings. It shows that in giving feedback the managers ascribe to themselves and their interlocutors various organisational and personal characteristics that are constitutive of their professional identity and consequential for their form of interaction.

In the current study, I analyze how identity is constructed in a particular setting, namely management meetings. Meetings constitute a format for interaction with certain common traits concerning such things as turn-taking, topic organization and sequential structure (for an overview see Asmuss & Svennevig 2009). However, meetings may also vary considerably concerning especially the formality of the turn-taking organization and the types of activities pursued. Typical activities in meetings have been divided into those dealing with the past, such as reporting and evaluating, those dealing with the present, such as problem solving; and those oriented to the future, such as planning (Holmes & Stubbe 2003).

Different meetings may thus be centrally involved with one or more of such types of activities. In the current study, one such activity has been singled out for analysis, namely reporting sequences. The focus of analysis in the current study is the Managing Director's responses to the reports presented. The senior manager here gives feedback to the middle-manager in question and in doing so, displays his role as the main responsible for the operations of the company. The aim of the study is thus dual. First, I investigate the sequential structure of the responses in order to identify the constituent actions and phases. Second, I

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discuss how the way of performing these actions present different conceptualizations of the roles and identities of the senior manager.

Professional identity and leadership style

This study takes a Conversation Analytic approach, and in this tradition identity is considered a relational and procedural concept. Identities are always established in relation to others, especially interlocutors, and thus constitute *outcomes* of interaction rather than prerequisites for it (Goffman 1959). Furthermore, they are not objects or essences, but processes, ways of being. People do not 'have' identities but enact and constitute them in pursuing their practical goals in situated activities (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998). Studying professional identity thus means analysing how work-related roles and relationships are made relevant through the interactional practices and stylistic features of conversation (cf. Richards 2006).

Leadership has been approached by researchers in the field of Conversation Analysis in dealing with types of actions that managers and other leaders accomplish in their daily professional interactions, especially in meetings. Leadership is associated with actions that gain predominance in mobilizing action and shaping organizational reality. For instance, leaders frequently act as chairs in meetings, and thereby gain a predominant position in the interaction by setting the agenda and managing the access to the floor (Ford 2008, Pomerantz & Denvir 2007). They also constitute their position as leaders by regularly assigning work tasks to their co-workers (Svennevig 2008). In discussions they may facilitate common agreement and impose solutions by the use of 'formulations of gist' (Clifton 2006, Barnes 2007). By reformulating and (re-)categorizing events reported by their co-workers, they may impose an organizational interpretation of the state of affairs (Nielsen 2009). Leadership may be enacted in different ways in different situations, and some CA studies investigate variation in the formulation of actions. For instance, in a study of appraisal interviews Asmuss (2008) shows that negative feedback is more problematic for the interlocutor when formulated in a mitigated way than in a more direct way.

The situated and relational character of identity makes it relevant to investigate how professional actors establish social relations with their interlocutors in their conversations. The establishment of social relations may be described along three dimensions: the epistemic, the normative and the emotional dimension (cf. Svennevig 1999). The epistemic dimension concerns how knowledge is claimed and displayed in interaction, thereby establishing

2

relations between people according to their rights to describe and assess events (cf. Raymond & Heritage 2006). Mutual knowledge of encyclopaedic information creates a relation of common *expertise* while mutual knowledge of personal background establishes *familiarity*. Professional actors may use their expertise to associate themselves with certain groups or individuals, and they may create in-group familiarity by emphasising common experiences.

The normative dimension of social relations concerns the rights and obligations people claim and enact toward each other. Different ways of performing a social action display differing degrees of entitlement of the speaker to perform the action and contingencies concerning its acceptance by the interlocutor (Heinemann 2006, Curl & Drew 2008). Patterns of interaction reflect and construct different types of social relations between the actors. When the distribution of rights and obligations is asymmetrical in a systematic manner, we get a relation of dominance between the interactants, and when it is symmetrical we get a relation of solidarity. Some rights and obligations may be grounded in institutional structures, such as job descriptions and organisational routines, but they are also established and negotiated in actual communicative events and may well go beyond what is institutionally defined.

Finally, the emotional dimension consists in displays of positive and negative affect towards an interlocutor. In expert-lay communication, the very concept of 'professionalism' seems to involve a normative expectation of emotional and attitudinal neutralism (Drew & Heritage 1992), but in in-group relations among colleagues, such as team members, interpersonal affect is routinely displayed (cf. Kangasharju & Nikko 2009).

Professional identity will thus be studied here in relation to the social relations that are established among the participants in the meetings. The different ways a manager may contribute to establishing such relations will be described in terms of leadership style.

CA as an approach to leadership and meeting interaction has many similarities with studies within Interactional Sociolinguistics (cf. for instance Holmes, Schnurr & Marra 2007). However, some methodological principles distinguish the two approaches. Some of these will be presented in the next section.

Data and method

The data for this study comes from a corpus of management meetings in a large Scandinavian manufacturing company producing paint and other coating products. The meetings are held in overseas subsidiaries in Malaysia, Dubai and Spain and are conducted in lingua franca

English. The Managing Directors of the subsidiaries are Scandinavian expats and the rest of the participants are mainly locally employed managers in the roles as heads of section.

The meetings have been video recorded and the extracts are transcribed according to the notation system used in the tradition of Conversation Analysis (CA). The analysis itself is a qualitative analysis of extracts involving managers' feedback in reporting sequences. The principles guiding analysis in CA may be described as an inductive orientation, an emic perspective and a sequential approach (cf. ten Have 2007). First, the formulation of problems and objects of analysis should be based on the data and the participants' concerns in them rather than on pre-defined theoretical problems or hypotheses. In the current study, the point of departure for the analysis is the activity manifestly relevant to the participants, namely reporting and giving feedback. Leadership is studied as is emerges in and through the concerns of the speakers in carrying out their job.

Second, an emic – or participant-based – perspective involves including in the analysis only the context the participants themselves invoke in and through their talk, rather than the external contextual categories the analyst may find relevant. Especially concerning identity, each participants in a conversation may 'objectively' be categorised according to a vast array of different social groups (gender, occupation, age, nationality etc.) and situational roles (father, interviewer, stranger etc.), but in order to know which of these contextual features may be relevant to the participants we need to see how they make various identities relevant through their forms to talk. This does not mean that they will have to mention explicitly certain social categories, but that they will perform certain actions or use a style conventionally associated with a certain type of social group or role, so-called *category bound activities* (Sacks 1992). In our case, we will not interpret everything the senior manager says as 'leadership talk', but look for practices that may be associated with acting out this role in the activities accomplished in this setting. Furthermore, we will not be making claims about aspects of identity are not oriented to by the participants as relevant to their concerns in the extracts (the requirement of *procedural consequentiality*, cf. Schegloff 1992). In the current data, this concerns such characteristics as nationality (Norwegian ex-pats and local managers from Malaysia and Dubai), gender (practically all participants are male) and age.[2]

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[2] The requirement in CA of grounding claims in manifest participant orientation has received quite a bit of criticism from sociolinguists interested in social macro-categories and from critical discourse analysts interested in supraindividual patterns of dominance (cf. Coupland, Coupland & Robinson 1992, Wetherell 1998). However, the object of study in CA is not co-occurrence patterns of linguistic forms or conversational strategies (amenable to cross-tabulation with predefined social macro-categories) but rather the social norms that speakers draw on and constitute through their talk. This (often unconscious) organization of practices is only accessible through the manifest normative orientation of interlocutors in ways of speaking (cf. Schegloff 1992, 1997, 1998).

Finally, the basis for interpreting the utterances is not the analysts understanding of them, but the interlocutors' reactions in subsequent turns at talk, the so-called *next turn proof procedure*. The object of analysis is thus the *participants'* understanding of each other utterances as displayed in their reactions and responses. This requires a sequential approach to data analysis, in which each utterance is interpreted by reference to the responses it engenders by the co-participants.

Focus of analysis

The activity of reporting occurs regularly in the management meetings studied, and displays certain common interactional features. The reports are introduced and invited by the Managing Director, who in my data also acts as meeting chair. The reports themselves are presented by various middle managers acting as heads of section and usually deal with the section's projects or current status of operations. They take the form of extended presentations, often supported by slide shows displaying the detailed information in tables and diagrams. After each presentation there is a response by the Managing Director, sometimes followed by a general discussion among the meeting participants. The activity of reporting is thus realised in the meetings in a three-part sequential format, involving a request for a report, the report itself, and a feedback response to the report.

In the following, I analyze three instances of managers' feedback to a report. My aim is firstly to describe the actions and practices characteristic of this type of response and their internal structure. The second aim is to describe the stylistic features of the formulation of these actions, especially with respect to how they index and construct interpersonal relations and leadership style. The overall aim of the analysis is to show how these sequential actions and styles of communication constitute the professional identity of being a leader.

The reports analysed all involve a problem of some sort that is addressed by the manager in his response. The choice of problem reports as object of analysis is done to contrast different leadership styles. But apart from that, the extracts are quite different with respect to the nature of the problem, the type of business dealt with etc. This variation is chosen in order to strengthen the claim that common practices found in these excerpt represent generic features of such responses.

Extract 1: 'We need to dig more into it'

The first extract comes from a management meeting held in Malaysia. The Sales Manager Eddy – a native Malaysian – is about to finish a lengthy presentation about the financial results from their sales in different parts of Malaysia. Nils – a native Norwegian – is the Managing Director of the Malaysian subsidiary of the company. Present at the meeting are also twelve other middle managers, most of them native Malaysians.

1) Malaysia (42.05-43.48)

1	Eddy	and now for the dealers uh: dealers uh: (.) of the central dealers we are doing very
2		well. I think that one of the reasons because of uh: (>there have been<) more (.)
3		open up of uh new uh: dealers and also multicolour centres (°and everything.°)
4		°you know°.
5		(0.5)
6	Nils	I think that is a k- the picture here [Eddy is]
7	Hong	[( )]
8	Nils	that you have some very- very strong performers here.
9	Eddy	mhm
10		(0.5)
11	Nils	Klang Valley dealers, Klang Valley: projects,
12	Eddy	mhm
13		((7 lines omitted, where Nils lists names of dealers and Eddy confirms))
14	Nils	and then you have some uh (.) may we call it uh non-performers?
15	Eddy	[mh]
16	Nils	[that is] the south,
17	Eddy	mh yeah that´s right.
18	Nils	and that is the whole Eastern Malaysia,
19	Eddy	mhm
20	Nils	and that is the project government sector.
21	Eddy	mhm
22		(4.0)
23	Eddy	yeah this area ((points to screen))
24		(0.6)
25	Eddy	(the upper side)
26		(1.8)
27	Nils	and with these three s- non-performers, (1.0) we need to dig more into it.
28		>as we are already doing< to see (0.6) ((Eddy nods)) is it because the market,
29		like the government projects, or is it uh: (.) related to internal things that we
30		can control. for instance that (.) the people↑ (.) we have there is not good enough.
31		(2.8) ((Eddy nods))
32	Nils	there is in a way th- (.) alt- the main alternatives.
33	Eddy	yes.
34	Nils	but to <u>me</u> it seems that where we are performing <u>well</u>. we have good people.
35	Eddy	mh
36		(4.2)
37	Nils	and that is a k- ve(h)ry mu(h)ch link (.) between (.) good regional management,

38		and the performance.
39		(2.0)
40	Eddy	yes.

Eddy's report ends with a piece of 'good news', namely positive results from the central dealers, and a possible explanation for this (line 1-4). The first thing to note about Nils' response in line 6 is that it is not local. It does not address either of the final components of the prior turn but rather the report as a whole. The introductory formulation 'I think that is a k- the picture here Eddy is that…' presents the forthcoming utterance as a condensed description of the situation, summing up what Eddy has reported. I will call this a *diagnosis* of the situation. The diagnosis is presented in the form of two central statements: 'you have some very- very strong performers here.' (l. 8) and 'and then you have some uh (.) may we call it uh non-performers?' (l. 13). Each of these is followed by a list of the dealers or customers in question.

The diagnosis is delivered in a rather cautious manner. The epistemic authority is reduced by the subjective modal marker 'I think'. The description of the situation is produced in way that makes it possible and relevant for Eddy to confirm or reject the interpretations made along the way. Nils leaves lengthy pauses after each turn constructional unit, and Eddy uses these opportunities to confirm the assumptions made (lines 12, 15, 17, 19 and 21-25). This orientation towards getting confirmation from Eddy along the way is also evident in the appeal for response to the suggested designation 'non-performers' (l. 12).

In addition to diagnosing the situation there is also an implicit *evaluation* in this description. It does not just describe the matters, but also evaluates them by characterizing certain results as positive ('strong performers') and others as negative ('non-performers'). The evaluation here can be characterized as down-played and positively biased. This is based on three observations. First, the evaluation is downplayed by the fact that it is integrated in the diagnosis and thus rendered less salient than if it were presented explicitly in a turn on its own. Second, a positive bias is realised by presenting the positive results first, and thus giving them the most prominent placement in the turn. Third, the positive bias is further displayed by the systematic upgrading of positive characterizations ('*very* strong') and downgrading of negative characterizations, in this case by reducing the epistemic commitment to the characterization of some dealers as 'non-performers' ('*may we call it* non-performers').

After getting confirmation from Eddy of his diagnosis and evaluation Nils starts giving directions for what needs to be done about the problem identified (the three non-performers). This takes the form of a self-oriented expression of need rather than an other-oriented request

for action: 'we need to dig more into it' (l. 26). This may be considered a mitigating device in that it makes the directive force implicit and thereby gives the interlocutor the possibility of treating the utterance as something else, such as a statement of a fact (cf. Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski 2005). Also the use of the inclusive 'we' mitigates the directive force in that it portrays the action as a common project rather than a task assigned unilaterally to the interlocutor (cf. Vine 2004:97). The colloquial and metaphorical form 'dig into' (rather than a more literal and formal term such as 'investigate') may also contribute to reducing the seriousness of the problem and the scope of the service requested. Finally, the addition of the parenthetical insertion 'as we are already doing' (l. 27) further softens the directive by portraying the suggested action as something already in course. Several aspects of this formulation of directions for future action thus yield a non-imposing style.

The final part of the response is devoted to a new diagnosis component, this time an attempt to identify the causes of the variation in results, namely the quality of the regional management (l. 33-37). As with the first diagnosis, this one is also marked by reduced epistemic authority in that it is introduced by a subjectivizing modal marker: 'to me it seems that…' (l. 33).

The actions represented in this piece of feedback thus centrally involve diagnosing the situation, evaluating it and giving directions for future action. Now I turn to summarizing some of their stylistic features, especially concerning the expression of interpersonal relations with Eddy along the epistemic, normative and emotional dimensions (presented above). First and foremost, I have noted that Nils rather consequently reduces his epistemic authority when formulating diagnoses and invites Eddy to confirm them before continuing. He thus emphasises common expertise and equal rights to assessing the situation. Second, I have noted that the evaluations are cautious and positively biased. His displays of emotions and attitudes thus lay the ground for mutual sympathy. Finally, the directions for future action are non-imposing and affiliative, thus downplaying asymmetries of rights and obligations. All this adds up to a communicative style that can be characterized as egalitarian and collaborative. Nils thus enacts a leadership style that promotes equality and affiliation with his subordinates, more akin to that of a close colleague than to that of an authoritative supervisor or expert.

Excerpt 2: 'This is something you have to control now'

The next excerpt is from another subsidiary of the same company, located in Dubai. The Managing Director Jon, a Norwegian man, responds to a report by Kavin – a man of Indian descent who has rather recently been employed as the company's Financial Controller. His report concerns the status for the company's collection of dues from dealers and customers and the average collection period (referred to in the extract as DSO - Days Sales Outstanding). The report identifies three groups of customers where the collection period is excessively long and needs to be reduced. In the first lines of the excerpt Kavin is accounting for the measures taken to reduce risk in initiating business with new customers.

2) Dubai (1.32.18-1.33.40)

1	Kavin	the only way to control it is (.) we are taking (.) a very very limited exposure in the
2		initial days with the customer. for example we start off only twenty thirty thousand
3		when we are not very much clear about the customers so the (.) exposure is limited
4		to that. instead of (.) opening it for a hundred thousand customers.
5		[that is] the only way to control it as of now.
6	Jon	[(is it-)]
7	Jon	why is there no improvement in this: area (.) Kavin?
8		(1.1)
9	Kavin	[which?]
10	Jon	[which] you show there.
11		(1.0)
12	Kavin	ah (.) Northern Emirates, the major problem is on <u>three</u> customers, which is we have
13		just (displaced) them, which is one is known as the dealer of this (Al Masen.) (.) (
14		) he is paying me fifteen thousand of past dues. So that is one which is- element
15		which is hitting our DSO, apart from that the dealers´ (.) practice in Northern
16		Emirates is taking one eighty days. (0.7) So the dealers are the ones who are taking
17		most (which has to be) reduced, which is- We are trying to implement (it but it's)
18		taking a long time. But it's one eighty to two hundred and ten days [(in practice.)]
19	Jon	[Why do you-] why we don´t put them on stop (.) delivery,
20		(0.9)
21	Kavin	We are putting them on stop delivery only for the values, if they increase the limit
22		all the exp- eh:m [( )]
23	Jon	[There's] not one single dealer in the Middle East except from those
24		you are talking about who has uh such credit [( )]
25	Kavin	[ºSuch] a credit uhmº (0.7)
26		[from second ( )]
27	Jon	[I mean uh and ALL THE THREE] branches that's their (.) asset is is dealers
28		[which they can control.
29	Kavin	[yes
30	Jon	So this is <u>fa:r</u> from acceptable.
31		(0.8)
32	Kavin	We are not talking about ( ) the hundred and eighteen days, we look at the
33		dealers alone.
34	Balavan	Hundred and thirteen.
35	Kavin	Pardon?

36	Balavan	Thirteen.
37	Kavin	One three.=
38	Jon	=But this is something <u>you</u> have to cont<u>rol</u> now [in your] new job.=
39	Kavin	[Sure]
40	Jon	=You are able to control this and stop these deliveries to these people.
41	Kavin	↑<u>Y</u>eah yeah we can stop them. The only thing is this (kind of) special is coming on
42		because of this (web) these dealers are supporting some of the contracts.

Jon's question in line 7 seeks to clarify an aspect of Kavin's report. It is not locally occasioned but refers back to a previous part of Kavin's report, namely the large amount of outstanding dues. The non-local character of the response marks the question as part of the overall feedback addressed to the report as a whole. However, Jon does not leave any pause to mark the termination of the report (he even tries to enter the floor in overlap with Kavin in line 6), and does not produce any introductory components signaling this shift in topical focus either (as was the case in example 1 'the picture is…'). This makes the topical shift rather abrupt and may partly explain why Kavin hesitates and initiates repair in line 9 (cf. Drew 1997 on repair after topic shifts). Another feature of this question which may make it problematic for Kavin to respond to is the ambiguity contained in it. *Why*-questions have been shown to be interpretable either as information-seeking questions or as accusations (so-called *accountability questions*, cf. Clayman & Heritage 2002). When he finally responds, Kavin chooses the former interpretation by providing an account of the problems of collecting the dues (rather than accepting or denying the blame for the situation).

Jon's next question in line 19 is another *why*-question, this time in the format of a *negative interrogative*, which presents stopping deliveries as the expected or natural thing to do (cf. Heritage 2002). This makes the question more clearly interpretable as an accusation for not having done so yet. And this time Kavin addresses the implicit accusation in that he refutes a presupposition in Jon's question (that they are not putting them on 'stop delivery'). However, before he gets to the projected conclusion in his defense Jon interrupts him in line 23. His utterance is also highly confrontational in that he ignores the content of Kavin's defense (and thereby *sequentially deletes* it). Instead he backs up his accusation by providing reasons for stopping the deliveries. What he presents here is a diagnosis of the situation in highly negative terms, mainly achieved by the *extreme case formulation* 'not one single dealer' (cf. Pomerantz 1986).

When Kavin quite hesitantly starts responding to this diagnosis Jon again blocks his access to the floor by raising his voice and thereby winning the competition for the turn. Here he provides yet another characterization of the situation which speaks in favor of stopping the deliveries (namely that the dealers are exploiting their negligence to get benefits for themselves). He then concludes with an explicit negative assessment of the situation in line 31, which takes a hyperbolic form ('far from acceptable'). The fact that this situation is Kavin's responsibility makes it an accusation against him – and a highly confrontational one.

As with the previous accusations from Jon, Kavin pauses quite long before answering. In ordinary conversation, assessments make relevant a second assessment, agreeing or disagreeing with the first (Pomerantz 1984). We can note that this is not what Kavin produces here. Instead, he orients to the implicit accusation contained in it by resisting the grounds for Jon's negative assessment. He addresses a possible misperception by Jon ('we are not talking about x') and presents information that serves to reduce the magnitude of the problems. Once again, Kavin's attempt to defend himself against the accusation is ignored by Jon, who instead continues by admonishing him to take control and stop the deliveries (line 38 and 40). These directions for future action are delivered with strong deontic modality expressing obligation ('you have to'). He also changes from the pronoun 'we' (line 20), which presents the measures as a collective responsibility, to 'you', which makes it Kavin's personal responsibility. In addition, these utterances repeat and upgrade the accusations against Kavin. The presupposition of his claims is that Kavin does not control the situation and that he has not stopped the deliveries. The formulation 'you are able to' furthermore claims that the problem is not his possibilities, thus yielding the potential interpretation that it is his willingness or determination.

Kavin emphatically agrees with Jon's assertions in line 39 ('Sure') and 40 ('yeah yeah we can stop them'). This is a preferred response to the request for future action and the preferred format it is delivered in indicates that he overhears the implicit criticism involved and just orients to the request aspect of it. In line with this we can also note that Kavin does not follow up Jon's change of pronouns but continues to talk in the plural ('we').

In this example, we see the same component actions that were observed in the previous example, but they are not always easy to distinguish from each other. The clarification questions that initiate the feedback (lines 7 and 20) are not only

11

clarification questions but in addition convey a great deal of (negative) evaluation. In addition, they contain implicit diagnoses of the situation in their presuppositions (namely that there is no improvement and that measures such as stopping deliveries has not been effectuated). The second of these questions in addition conveys implicit directions for future action. As Kavin consequently resists the negative implications of his superior's construal of the situation and implicit call for action Jon becomes more explicit (and also more insistent) from line 31 on. Here he produces explicit assessments and directives.

In terms of leadership style and interpersonal relations this extract represents a quite opposite line of action in relation to the previous excerpt. Jon does not in any way modalize his epistemic authority in describing the situation, but on the contrary takes his diagnosis of the situation to be indisputable by expressing it in presuppositions rather than in explicit assertions (that would make relevant an expression of agreement or disagreement by Kavin). And when Kavin resists this diagnosis by rejecting some of the presuppositions he is either ignored (as in line 20) or interrupted (as in line 24). Jon thus displays an authoritative stance and a unilateral (rather than dialogical) approach to diagnosing the situation, thereby displaying asymmetry in expertise and in communicative rights and obligations. Furthermore, his assessments are negatively biased and take an upgraded form through extreme case formulations and hyperbolic expressions. This creates an emotional distance recognizable as hostility. Finally, his directions for future action do nothing to reduce the imposition but on the contrary upgrade it by markers of strong deontic modality ('you have to'). All this adds up to an authoritarian leadership style and a display of interpersonal distance and asymmetry.

Extract 3: 'so first of March we should be ready for hundred percent office'

The next extract is from the same meeting as the first extract, from the Malaysian headquarters. Here the senior manager Nils asks for a report from the team responsible for conducting tests of a new technology for tinting paint (referred to as MCI tinting test).

(3) Management meeting, Malaysia (6.52-8.48)

1	Nils	MCI tist- uh tinting uh test, (.) okei we are running that for three months,
2		(5.0) (NN: SOFT LAUGHTER)
3	Nils	[huh?] anything news there?
4	NN	[( )]
5		(3.0)
6	Nils	three months without testing?
7	Rashid	well actually we just uh initiate uh (.) start work on the framework.
8		until uh last evening to make use of the MCI.
9		we have start only in March (.) on the full usage of the MCI.
10		because it it needs further study especially on process and everything.
11		we have a a detailed record for it. °in the uh ( ).°
12		and uh the task is (0.8) coordinated with the mi- milieu: (.) department.
13		°( )°
14	Nils	so what are you saying, (.) they will start first of March?
15	Rashid	yes.
16	Saladin	by first of March we are trying to actually turn up volume.=
17	Rashid	=volume
18	Saladin	basically.
19	Saladin	but what we are doing now is that the machine has been calibrated,
20		(13 LINES OF EXPLANATION OMITTED, 7.50-8.23)
21		so: a couple of things that we need to: °take into consideration.°
22	Nils	so up to first March,
23	Saladin	ye[s]
24	Nils	[you] will follow up
25	Saladin	yes
26	Nils	with uh testing?
27	Saladin	that´s right.
28	Nils	and first of March (.) [(you expect)]
29	Saladin	[we should] be getting volume [turned up] yes
30	Nils	[to be]
31		(.) on uh full fledged °(according) [to the]°.
32	Saladin	[yes] (.) that´s right.
33	Saladin	actually then we will decide should we (.) change the order level policy on
34		uh [( )]
35	Nils	[is it] right that it´s uh Tun Sheng that is following up,
36		or is it Saladin and uh:
37		(2.0)
38	Saladin	I think when it comes to this uh the second part it is uh it´s me.
39	Nils	Saladin (.) okay.
40		(.)
41	Nils	so first of March we should be ready (.) for (.) hundred percent (°office.°)
42		(.) (SALADIN SMILES AND NODS)
43	Nils	well. uh: okay JDP,

This report is solicited by a general announcement of an agenda item, which does not specify the nature of the report or designate the next speaker (cf. Svennevig 2010). The long pauses that follow without anyone volunteering to speak (both in line 2 and 5) are interpreted by Nils as signs of trouble, which can be seen from his suggestion of a candidate answer in line 6

('three months without testing?'). This diagnosis construes the situation as problematic in that it relates the potential no-news report to the time elapsed, which is rather long.

At this point the Laboratory Manager Rashid finally takes the floor and gives a short report, which partly confirms Nils' diagnosis. However, he also counters the construal of the situation as problematic by changing the perspective of the description from the time elapsed to the time remaining, and by showing that the routines for carrying out the testing have been established.

Nils' response in line 14 takes the form of a *formulation of gist*, a condensed description of what is taken to be the essence of the prior talk (Heritage & Watson 1979, cf. also Barnes 2007). It is introduced by the inference marker *so*, which, in addition to presenting the formulation as a conclusion, also indicates that it is not locally occasioned, but relates to the prior report as a whole. The formulation singles out the starting date as the essence of Rashid's report. This is presented as an explicit diagnosis of the situation and is offered for acceptance or rejection by Rashid. Nils thus seeks common agreement in a dialogical way. Agreement is indeed offered by Rashid, but at this point a more senior manager involved in the project, the Customer Service Manager Saladin, comes in with a response that can be considered a partial disconfirmation of the formulation (and thereby a third position repair, cf. Schegloff 1992). He proposes a revised description of the situation that replaces 'starting' by 'turning up volume', which indicates a more gradual and less dramatic change occurring the first of March. He follows up with a longer report about what they are engaged in at the moment (not all shown in the transcript, cf. lines 19-21). All this contributes positive results about the testing and thus presents the situation as less problematic than what Nils had construed it as.

Nils responds in line 22-31 by a new formulation of gist focusing on the starting date of the implementation of the MCI technology. The formulation is produced in short 'installments' which are incrementally offered for acceptance by Saladin. Saladin emphatically confirms by strong forms of agreement ('that's right', cf. line 27 and 32) and a collaborative completion (line 29). The diagnosis is thus again established in a dialogical process. However, it is interesting that this is the second time Nils produces a formulation that leaves out the reports about the tinting process and only focuses on the result (the starting date). This result focus is also apparent in the way he resists Saladin's collaborative completion in line 29. Instead of just accepting the completion he continues his own utterance in course, partly in overlap with Saladin's, and completes it after Saladin has proposed his completion. He thereby rejects Saladin's proposal for a completion – which focused on

14

process ('turning up volume') – and proposes an alternative one which focuses on result (being 'on full fledged according to the…', line 31).

At this point, Saladin self-selects to expand on his report, but this is interrupted by Nils in the middle of a turn constructional unit, before he has come to the point of his utterance. Nils instead asks for clarification concerning who are responsible for the process. After having received information about this, he once again repeats his formulation about the starting date for the implementation (line 41).

In this extract, Nils seems to be mainly concerned with diagnosing the situation with respect to the starting date for implementing the MCI technology. And his diagnoses seem rather cautious in that he presents them as merely summing up the gist of what the responsible actors have reported. On the surface, he refrains from independently evaluating the status of the testing process so far or giving directions for future action. However, there are implicit elements of both evaluation and directives in his responses. The fact that the formulation is so selective and focuses exclusively on a future event makes it prone to the interpretation that it is not just a summary of what the interlocutors have said, but a statement of a goal that they will be held responsible for attaining. This turns it into an implicit directive (cf. Vine 2004:86). Furthermore, the twofold repetition of it makes it more insistent.

As for evaluation, Nils produced a candidate answer in the beginning that was hearable as a potential complaint ('three months without testing?'). However, after the reports are produced he does not give any explicit evaluation of their work to indicate that he has changed his stance. And since evaluation seems to be an expected action in a manager's feedback this may thus be heard as *holding back* an assessment, which may give rise to an interpretation that something is not quite right (acceptable, appropriate) with the report. That Saladin orients to such an interpretation is evident by the fact that he keeps expanding on his account (line 33) after Nils has made a bid for closing the topic by producing a formulation (which is a typical sequence-closing third position move, cf. Schegloff 2007).

This extract is a bit more ambiguous also concerning the regulation of interpersonal and professional relations. Concerning communicative rights and obligations, Nils seems quite non-imposing in that he does not express his potentially negative evaluations explicitly, and in that he does not give explicit directions for future action. Instead, he merely repeats and sums up what the interlocutors themselves have committed to, and thereby ascribes the authorship of these claims to them. Furthermore, he formulates his conclusions in a tentative manner that seeks confirmation from them. By doing this he ascribes to them the epistemic authority and the rights to make the decisions necessary. And his lack of evaluation displays

emotional detachment from the case at hand. On the other hand, his insistent and selective repetition of their commitment to meeting the starting date makes his directive intention quite recognizable and imposing. Also the way he ignores and interrupts Saladin's accounts of their achievements displays a rather non-appreciative stance towards their efforts. This may be considered implicit, but nonetheless quite strong displays of authority. In this ambiguous line of action we may discern a leadership style that consists in not appearing authoritarian and imposing but at the same time getting through a rather insistent directive intent. The implicit way of communicating this clearly has advantages in terms of saving the interlocutor's face, as can be seen if we compare this extract with the previous one.

The structure of feedback responses

The responses studied here have certain structural features in common, despite their differences in realisation. First, they are parts of a reporting *sequence* involving an initial request for a report, the report itself, and finally the manager's response as a conditionally relevant third position move. The middle managers' reports in the data are addressed mainly to the Managing Director. This is evident both by the main bodily orientation and gaze of the presenter, and by the fact that the Managing Director is implicitly appointed as the next speaker after the presentation is concluded. The responses address the prior report *as a whole* rather than a local part of it. As third position moves, they constitute sequence closing actions, typically initiating closing of the topic or the agenda item.

As normatively required sequential actions, there are certain expectations of what the feedback response should contain. From the data investigated here, the central constituent of such responses seems to be an *evaluation* of some sort. In some form or other the Managing Director presents an assessment of the situation. In addition, the responses also typically contain other features, namely *clarification*, *diagnosis* and *directions for future action*. The clarification component is generally constituted by requests for clarification concerning the situation presented, and typically precedes the other types of responses. The diagnosis is also usually an early component and consists in a condensed description of the situation. The evaluation itself typically follows or is embedded in the diagnosis. The final component is giving directions for what needs to be done in the future. Especially when the report presents problems the feedback will centrally include advice, requests and orders for what should be done about the problem.

The constituent parts of the responses have a typical order and some typical features of realisation. Clarification questions may be simple requests for additional information, but as we have seen in extract 2, they may also be harbingers of dispreferred actions such as negative assessments in the subsequent part of the manager's feedback. The diagnosis frequently takes the form of formulations of gist introduced by markers indicating a summary ('the picture is…') or a conclusion (the inference marker *so*). Diagnosing the situation may be done in a collaborative (or dialogical) way, by actively soliciting confirmation from the presenter, or in a unilateral way, by just presenting one's own description as authoritative.

Evaluations may be positive or negative. In the cases considered here the reports are all problematic to some degree, and this poses specific challenges for evaluating the situation, since negative assessments will constitute dispreferred actions. In some cases (such as extract 1) we can observe that managers orient to the dispreferred status of negative assessments by reducing or mitigating the negative aspects and compensating for them by upgrading positive aspects. In others (such as in extract 2) there are direct and unmitigated negative assessments, which embody a confrontational and accusatory tone. It is worth noting that, in contrast to in ordinary conversation, these assessments are not treated as response-relevant. The report-deliverer does not agree or disagree with the assessments made, and thereby orients to the authority and privilege of the manager to assess the situation.

Giving directions for future action is most needed when the report is construed as problematic in some way. The directives may be formulated in more or less direct and imposing formats. We have not attempted a systematic description of the full range such forms here, but we have seen an example of a non-imposing practice, such as merely formulating a need (extract 1) and an example of a direct and imposing format, where action is demanded (extract 2). We have also seen an example of an implicit request for action, in which the manager leaves it to the interlocutors to infer the need to take action (extract 3).

Leadership style

In all the extracts the managers' responses are centrally involved with three types of action that are central to a professional identity as a manager, namely diagnosing the situation, evaluating the subordinates' efforts and giving directions for future action. The Managing Directors thus constitute and confirm their position as the senior manager by carrying out actions associated with institutional (and interactional) authority.

The variation in realisation of the actions described also gives considerable room for acting out different leadership styles. The three extracts analysed yield large differences in how the senior manager enacts his role as a leader and how the different leadership styles enact different types of individual and collective identity. In the first extract, Nils promotes team identity by emphasising in-group solidarity and personal relations between the members. He affiliates with his co-workers by claiming mutual rights and obligations rather than imposing his will ('*we* need to dig more into it'). He does not claim superior knowledge, but offers his point of view as a colleague ('to me it seems…'). And he reduces the threats to the interlocutor's face by minimizing the negative and upgrading the positive, thereby displaying positive affect and contributing to a positive interpersonal climate.

In the second, Jon to a larger extent emphasises the participants' organisational identity by downplaying their personal relations and instead orienting to their institutionally defined roles and relationships. He displays superior knowledge of the situation and a strong opinion about what measures need to be taken. He gives clear directions for action and thereby takes responsibility for the solutions chosen. And, as he defines the relationships as primarily an institutional relation, he does not handle disagreement or imposition as face threats in need of mitigation or compensation.

In the third extract, Nils may be considered as contributing little to collective identity and instead promoting individuality, leaving it to the individual members to take responsibility for their projects. He seeks information about what goes on in his departments but does not contribute expert knowledge or opinions on the problems that arise. He gives his co-workers a large degree of freedom and independence in carrying out their projects and restricts his own responsibility to monitoring the work and controlling that it 3proceeds on schedule. He himself is quite reticent and implicit, and lets them infer by themselves what is expected of them. In showing respect for their personal and professional integrity he does not do much to develop the interpersonal relationships.

These variations have been described in terms of interactional practices related to three dimensions, namely knowledge, communicative rights and obligations, and emotion. Concerning the epistemic aspect of social relations, we have seen that managers may claim superior knowledge in relation to the subordinate, both in diagnosing the situation and in prescribing a solution to the problem. This marks an asymmetry between the parties and constructs the manager as having the main epistemic authority concerning both situational and expert knowledge. But we have also seen a different line of action, in which the manager

invites expert opinions from his co-workers in a more collaborative way, thus marking equal access to knowledge of the situation and the expertise required to deal with it.

Concerning the communicative rights and obligations claimed and displayed in these excerpts, we have seen that managers may present directions for future actions in more or less imposing formats. They thereby construct the social relations as being either one of solidarity, involving collaboration towards a common goal, or dominance, involving a unique privilege of the manager to identify the solutions required and impose them on their co-workers. We have also seen a practice of pursuing both of these objectives in an intricate balancing act (excerpt 3). Here the manager underlines the independence and self-determination of the co-workers, while at the same time implicitly conveying a strong directive intent.

Finally, emotional aspects of the interpersonal relations are conveyed by various evaluative devices in these responses. Closeness and mutual sympathy are promoted by boosting positive and downgrading negative evaluations of the interlocutors' efforts, and by using a personal and informal style. Emotional neutrality is displayed by holding back displays of emotional stance (as in 3), whereas hostility is created by direct and unmitigated criticism, presented in public in front of the co-worker's colleagues (as in 2).

In this way, professional identity and interpersonal relations are established by observable practices of speaking and interacting. Rather than taking identities and social relations as a point of departure, the CA approach starts by analysing the actions performed by social actors and the linguistic and sequential practices used to implement them. Only by showing that the participants themselves orient to a specific distribution of rights and obligations in their ways of speaking and interacting can the analyst claim that certain types of identities and relationships are relevant.

This approach also underlines the situated character of such identities, in showing that they are enacted and constructed relative to specific communicative activities and tasks, and can change according to the situation at hand. The identity as a leader can take different forms according to differences in the character of the organisation or the situation, or in the personality of the actor. Therefore, approaches to leadership based solely on personnality traits (such as 'charisma') or organisational characteristics are bound to encounter problems in identifying the central characteristics of leadership. A communicative approach such as the current one is instead focussed on the central actions and interaction patterns associated with the daily work practices of leaders and may thus contribute to clarifying the central processes of leading co-workers and the associated identity ascriptions. The curent study is thus a

contribution to this type of empirical investigation of leadership as practice, and to leadership identity as jointly constructed by participants in interaction.

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