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Media for Reflection: A Comparison of a Renaissance Mirror for Princes and Contemporary Research Based Management Education

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Media for reflection

A comparison of a renaissance mirror for princes and contemporary research based management education

Abstract

The paper develops the concept *media for reflection* in the interest of conceptualizing the interpretative frames that enable and limit reflection in management and leadership education. The concept ‘media for reflection’ allow us to conceptualize the social and cultural mediation of reflection without reducing reflection to an effect of the social structures and cultural norms in which it is embedded. Based on the developed theoretical framework, this paper analyses how a renaissance ‘mirror for princes’ and contemporary research-based management education mediate reflection. The content of the mediations is analysed as well as the societal and organisational background. Further, the means by which the two media enable and limit reflection in different ways is compared. Finally, the paper discusses possible implications of the analysis in terms of management and leadership education.

Keywords: reflection, reflexivity, management education, leadership, management learning, Heider, Luhmann, medium, mediations, research-based management education, mirrors for princes.

Introduction

I recently ran a course called Reflective Management Practice at an executive management programme for public managers along with two colleagues. The title was influenced by what has been coined *the reflective turn* (Cotter and Cullen 2012: 242; Quinn 2013: 8), in reference to the importance ascribed to reflection in management learning. The course offered participants the opportunity to reflect on self-selected issues, with instructor support via the organisation of processes (reflecting teams for instance) and the introduction of potentially relevant theoretical perspectives and literature. The course’s learning objective was to further reflection, but we did not ask the self-reflective question of what influence our

support, and the scientific-academic contextualization of reflection introduced, had on the content of the reflections of participants. This paper is an attempt to stay with this basic question: asking what the material (concepts, theories, ideas, prescriptions introduced) employed to mediate reflections does to the reflection itself. Instead of asking how we can further reflection, I want to investigate how different interpretative frames, referred to as ‘media for reflection’, enable and/or limit reflection in relation to managers.

The paper is guided by three questions: 1) How can we conceptualize the interpretative frames involved in reflection – without reducing reflection to a reflex? 2) How do different media for reflection enable and/or limit reflection? 3) How are the media related to societal and organisational contexts? In order to answer the first question the article develops the concept of media for reflection. Building on this conceptual framework, the article explores the two last questions by means of two cases related to management education, namely a renaissance mirror for princes and contemporary research-based management education. Mirrors for princes were widespread medieval and renaissance texts offering advice to rulers and high-ranking administrators – thus offering a mirror for a prince’s reflections of his own ruling.

The contribution of this study to management learning is twofold. Firstly, its theoretical contribution is to develop the term and concept of ‘media for reflection’. This term makes it possible to analyze the possibilities and limitations of reflection in terms of content in relation to different types of management education/development; as well as to investigate the relations between reflection and its socio-cultural grounding. Secondly, based on the theoretical framework, the paper contributes to the analysis of two specific media for reflection, namely mirrors for princes and contemporary research-based management education.

The paper is organised into five sections: 1) A discussion of the concept of reflection leading to the conclusion that the question ‘what is reflection’ should be complemented with the question ‘what lies behind reflection’. 2) A development of the concept ‘media for reflection’ in order to analyze ‘what lies behind reflection’. 3) An analysis of mirrors for princes as a medium for reflection. 4) An analysis of research-based management education as a medium for reflection. 5) A conclusion/discussion in which I compare the two media for reflection and discuss possible implications to providers of management education based on the conceptual framework.

Reflection in management learning

Reflection (and related concepts like reflexivity and reflectivity) is a broad term found in philosophical traditions since Locke – inspired by Descartes’ philosophy of consciousness – distinguished between

sensation and reflection (Locke 1995, book 2). Today there is hardly any discipline within the humanities and the social sciences which does not relate to reflection and/or reflexivity. This also goes for the field of management, organisation and learning. Traditions like action-learning (Raelin 2008; Revans 2011: 63ff; Schön 1983), experiential learning (Kayes 2002; Kolb 1984) and transformative learning (Mezirow 1998; Mezirow and Taylor 2009) emphasize the relation between practice, experience, reflection, and learning. Today reflection is widely ascribed across different learning schools as having a crucial role in management learning (Cunliffe 2009a; Gosling and Mintzberg 2006; Knausmüller and Meyer 2013; Mintzberg 2004; Quinn 2013, Quinn & Wennes 2008).

The conceptual literature on reflection is to a large extent characterized by the introduction and discussion of different distinctions and typologies. In a critical paper Lynch (2000) thus identifies 6 types of reflexivity and 14 subtypes. Prevalent distinctions are, for instance, reflection ‘in practice’ and ‘on practice’ (Schön 1983), self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Jun 2005), analytical and meditative reflection (Korthagen 2005), public and individual reflection (Raelin 2001) and reflection/critical reflection/reflexivity (Finlay 2008). Finlay furthermore distinguishes four types of reflexivity, namely introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique and ironic deconstruction (Finlay 2003, 2008: 6f.). Based on a literature review Grossmann (2009) distinguishes between reflection, meta-cognitive reflection, ‘self-authorship’ reflection and transformative/intensive reflection. As the many distinctions indicate – and as has been pointed out by comprehensive literature reviews (Cotter and Cullen 2012; Finlay 2008; Quin 2013; Vince and Reynolds 2009) - there is no clear and common definition of core terms like reflectivity, reflexivity, reflection, critical reflection, and self-reflection in relation to management learning. The many different conceptual distinctions and typologies pose a terminological problem in the attempt to give a broader literature review.ⁱ This article tackles this problem by following Gadamer, who claimed that to understand a text means to understand the question it answers (Gadamer 2013: 378ff). Here, I will therefore try to distil the central questions which the literature on reflection can be seen as answers to.

A core question is *What is reflection?* This question is typically answered by introducing typologies and conceptual distinctions – as indicated above. The many conceptualizations make it impossible to answer the question unequivocally. The conceptualizations do, however, share an interest in learning/and or ‘questioning assumptions’ – as well as a self-reflexive dimension (learning from your own experiences, questioning assumptions which you also share...). Recently more papers also investigate the ‘what is reflection’ question by means of studies of reflection in action (Barge 2004; Corlett 2012; Pässilä, Oikarinen and Harmaakorpi 2015; Seggelen-Damen and Romme 2014; Xing and Sims 2012).

Another core question is related to the *subject* of reflection. The subject has been perceived as an individual (as in Schön's idea of the reflective practitioner), as a relational dialogical process (Raelin 2001; Cunliffe 2002), as an organizing process or a collective enterprise (Reynolds and Vince 2004; Vince 2002, Vince and Reynolds 2009). The question of subject also relates to the question of what reflection is. Barge for instance suggests to distinguish between reflexivity as an individual epistemological activity and a relational activity that involves a way of connecting with others in conversations (2004: 71). A third question concerns the *object* for reflection. That is: what is thought of, observed or talked about in reflective processes? Experience (individual and collective) may be identified as a core object across many papers. 'Assumptions' is another core object for reflexivity. Barge states that self-reflexivity is "typically defined as the conscious reflection on the assumptions, beliefs and perspectives that inform how one thinks and acts"(2004: 73). This can point to the assumptions of individuals or to collective assumptions shared by broader communities. It can also point at language, discourses and ideologies as the object for reflection (Cotter and Cullen 2012; Cunliffe 2009b; Alvesson & Willmott 1992; Alvesson and Willmott 2012; Fournier & Grey 2000; Reynolds 1998). Somewhere between individual experiences and language/ideology we find suggestions to focus on the structures and practices in which professional practice is embedded (Vince and Reynolds 2009: 93). Another focus is expressed with the term 'Productive reflection' (Boud, Cressey and Docherty 2005) pointing towards production and workprocesses as the object for reflection.

Why is reflection/reflexivity important is another often discussed question. Change and learning seem to be the two central figures in play here. Concerning learning: Reflection is seen as the bridge between experience and learning as reflection can transform experience to conscious knowledge (Kolb 1984; Gray 2007; Raelin 2001: 14f). In relation to change, reflection is typically related to characterizations of acceleration in societal and organisational life in which "...a unitary set of values and assumptions no longer dominate organisational life. Consequently, managers must become more reflective in their practice, and critical of the managerial knowledge they embrace."(Barge 2004: 71; see also Quinn 2013)). As Mannheim noticed in 1935, change creates a need to reflect on habits, concepts, and ways of thinking (1960: 56ff). Reflection is not only seen as a response to change, but even more as a crucial factor in the creation of change. Questioning taken for granted assumptions can make us receptive to alternative ways of reasoning and behaving (Gray 2007: 496). It is also clear that reflection is ascribed a positive normative value, for instance Gray states that 'reflection is a political process directed against irrationality and injustice'(2007: 497). Cunliffe sees reflection as a way to create more responsible and moral management as she claims that 'reflexivity carries with it an ethical and moral responsibility.' (Cunliffe 2009b: 416, see also Hibbert and Cunliffe 2015).

Following the approach to reflection, we find an increasing amount of papers discussing the question of *how to further reflection/reflexivity*. In this area, we find analyses of experiences with different educational formats intending to support (critical) reflective processes (Adriansen and Knudsen 2013; Berggren & Soderlund 2011; Broussine and Ahmad 2013; Gray 2007; Halpern and Richards 2012; Hibbert 2012; Meer and Marks 2013; Notten 2013; Smith 2011; Sutherland 2012 – see also the journal *Reflective Practice* for countless examples).

While expanding the answers given to the five questions listed above (ascribing more functions to reflection, expanding possible subjects from individuals to intersubjective relations to larger communities, expanding the object from individual experience to both collective experiences and discourses, ideologies and the like) the research has had a tendency to sideline the question of what lies behind reflection. That is: which interpretative frames enable the reflections and how is reflection related to social and organizational changes? I shall clarify this point in the next section.

The interpretative frames of reflection

Already in 1998, Boud and Walker stated that ‘consideration of the context in which reflective action is engaged is a seriously underdeveloped aspect of discussion of reflection.’ (1998: 196). A decade later this statement was supported by Swan’s claim that the widespread notion of (critical) reflection involves the notion that the social slips into the human thought processes through hidden assumptions (Swan 2008: 393). It is furthermore surmised that these hidden aspects of the social can be detected by questioning the assumptions and enabling the individual to step outside of socialised thinking. Reflection is, Swan claims, regarded as the center from which alternative ideas and activities can be analysed, evaluated and ingrained ideas can be changed. Drawing on Foucault’s analyses of confessional practice as disciplined and productive self-technology, Swan criticized this assumption for neglecting the inherent relation between self, reflection and power. The self and the person are not something that is established before the reflection. Instead, selves are produced through certain types of reflection. Swan states that “...the personal is culturally framed and shaped, and what we make of our experience depends on our interpretive frames, discourses and categories of analysis.” (Swan 2008: 390). In a similar vein Ailon coined the term ‘cultural grammar of reflexivity’ to capture the principles that structure reflexivity (2011: 142). Reflexivity is not conducted from some disembedded ‘outside,’ Ailon claims (2011: 160). This is close to a Gadamer’s hermeneutical critique of Husserl’s phenomenology:

“Husserl’s attempt to go back genetically to the origin of experience, and to overcome its idealization by science, obviously has to struggle especially with the difficulty that the pure transcendental subjectivity of the ego is not really given as such but always given in the

idealization of language; moreover, language is already present in any acquisition of experience, and in it the individual ego comes to belong to a particular linguistic community.”(2013: 356).

We can enhance Gadamer’s statement and say that not only experience but also reflection (including reflections on experience) is not done by a ‘transcendental subjectivity’, but is always embedded in language. Taking the linguistic turn seriously means there is no place outside language from where we can make and reflect on experiences and question assumptions, discourses or power. If we want to understand reflection better – also in its relation to management and learning – we must therefore find ways to discuss reflection which do not side-line the complex interpretative frameworks, the language, employed in the process of reflection. We must complement the questions posed to reflection so far with a second order self-reflection investigating the language in which the reflection is taking place.

As an analytical strategy for the analysis of the interpretative frames of reflection I suggest to introduce the concept of medium and the distinction between medium and form. In the next section I shall elaborate the meaning of medium and form – and the concept of ‘media for reflection’ in particular.

Media for reflection

Reflection in the everyday sense is sometimes used in reference to the act of ‘thinking more’ about a certain issue. This paper defines reflection more formally as the process by which a self establishes a relation to itself (Luhmann 1995: 437ff). Reflection indicates something that belongs to the self engaged in reflecting. If we by reflection understand ‘questioning of assumptions’ it is our *own* internal assumptions that we refer to, not the assumptions of others. Reflection thus means that a self refers to something that is contained in the self. The self can be an individual or a social system (an organisation for instance). The reflection can be in relation to different aspects of the self, for instance: identity, role, activity, others, thoughts.

Reflection has an intricate structure as it is done by a self with a contingent result. But it is not done by the self alone. As the etymological roots of reflection indicate, it is a mirroring process that involves a third part, namely material that ‘bends back’ (re-flects) the image and allows the self to observe itself. The concept ‘media for reflection’ is inspired by the literal aspect of the term ‘reflection’ – *something* (for instance the glass-mirror or the painting) reflects some aspect of me; the observation of myself is enabled by a medium. For instance, a relation to the self can be generated by means of a psychoanalytical language – or by means of art. An organisation can produce a relation to itself by means of its accounts, by means of employee satisfaction measurements or by means of an organisation chart. Similarly reflexivity understood as a critical questioning of ones own assumptions is enabled by a

medium – for instance by means of Foucault's concept of discourse or by Derrida's concept of deconstruction. Claiming that self-relation is mediated raises the question of what it means that something is *mediated*. Drawing on the psychologist Fritz Heider and the sociologist Niklas Luhmann I shall elaborate the concept of medium.

In 1926 Heider introduced the difference between form and medium to explain the perception of objects that were not in direct contact with the body, for instance visual or acoustic perceptions. Something must mediate – relate – the distanced objects and the eye or the ear: "...the object of perception or cognition does not affect the sense organ directly but by means of some kind of mediation.(...) When the ticking of a watch is the object of perception, the vibrations of the air mediate between the watch and the ear" (Heider 1959: 1). Ticking and the vibrations are not the same, but we normally do not distinguish these, as the medium is not perceived as something separate.

Luhmann generalized Heider's ideas and expanded the concept to cover not only perception, but also communication (1987; 2012: 113ff). But the basic component of the concept is the same, namely the distinction between loosely (medium) and strictly (form) coupled elements. That the elements are loosely coupled means that they are independent of each other (Heider 1959: 5). As Luhmann says "...we shall characterize media by their higher degree of dissolubility together with the receptive capacity for fixations of shape (Gestalt) (...). Forms by contrast arise through the concentration of relations of dependence between elements, i.e. through selections from the possibilities offered by a medium."(1987: 102). A medium consists of loosely coupled elements which form a reservoir for potential forms. It is the loose coupling of the elements of a medium that enables its elements to be combined in multiple specific forms. A form is a combination of some of the elements of the medium in a strict coupling. The air molecules mediating the sound are loosely coupled as they can be coupled in many different ways and thus mediate many different sounds and sensations. Like Lego bricks loosely coupled to each other (each brick can be combined with almost all other kinds of bricks), they can form a medium for the construction of endless specific Lego-buildings (forms). Similarly, light waves can mediate many different specific images (that is forms) because the elements making up light waves are loosely coupled to each other. We can also observe language as a medium in which the different words are loosely coupled to each other which is why they can be combined in infinite forms. The two media to be analyzed later in the paper are both of a linguistic nature.

The distinction between medium and form is a suitable frame for an analysis of reflection in that it allows us to observe the social mediation of the self and reflection without reducing the reflections of different selves to an effect or a reflex of social structures and cultural norms. The individual selves engaged in reflections possess their own emergent complexity. How they interpret, combine and use

the loosely coupled elements of the medium is not determined by the medium. Specific reflections can be observed as forms (tight couplings of elements) that draw on a medium with many loosely coupled elements. Relating to the educational programme mentioned in the introduction: the theories and methods presented were the medium and the participants specific selections and couplings of theoretical concepts and perspectives the forms.

A medium has a double nature, as the elements of a medium are characterized by loose couplings that “yield to influences from outside” (Heider, 1959: 20). The elements can be selected and combined in different forms depending on medium’s external influences. In relation to reflection: what I observe is also influenced by what I look at. Using a personality test as a medium, for instance, all people will not get the same result. On the other hand, in discussing measurement instruments as media, Heider also claims that, “they are to some extent internally conditioned; they abstract certain properties of the influence and change them into forms which can be perceived with a greater degree of exactness”(1959: 20). The personality test will abstract certain properties of the influence, like other media. Form is not dictated by medium, but a specific medium offers a limited amount of possibilities from which certain elements can be selected. In the renaissance discussion of mirrors for princes this point was captured by the expression that ‘the mirror is living,’ meaning that the mirror influences how the mirrored is reflected (Ritter & Gründer, 1995: 1379f). Just like Lego bricks favour angular constructions while clay favours constructions in the round.

The double nature of a medium as both formable (loosely coupled and therefore formable) and to some extent internally conditioned is helpful to the understanding of self-reflection. Reflection is realized as the tight coupling of elements. These elements are selected from a medium and by describing the medium we can describe the horizon of possible forms. The elements of the medium cannot be exhausted in one form, but these elements limit the type of possible forms. Different media for reflection facilitate different types of reflection making different self-relations possible. If the relation to oneself is facilitated by the idea of a profession, different selves are made possible in comparison to other selves using affirmative therapy as a medium. A manager’s reflection of his or her relation to an employee has a different horizon if using law as a medium in comparison to pedagogy.

To describe a ‘medium for reflection’ is to describe the limited amount of possibilities from which individuals or social systems can select elements for their reflections. We can ask: what questions different media for managerial reflection make it possible to ask and to answer? What do managers perceive when they use different media for reflection? The concept ‘medium for reflection’ offers the possibility of discussing both potentials and limitations of different media for reflection.

In the two empirical cases I shall demonstrate how different media enable and limit managers' reflections in two cases. I shall furthermore illustrate how these different media are connected to different societal and organisational structures and problems. I ask two questions: 1) What characterizes the content of the media for reflection? 2) What societal/organisational problems are the media related to?

Methodology

Methodologically, this study takes inspiration from Niklas Luhmann and his theory of social systems. Luhmann writes that

From a constructivist point of view, the function of methodology cannot be limited to ensuring that reality is correctly (and not incorrectly) described. It is more likely to be concerned with refined forms of intrasystemic information generation and processing. Methods can thus enable scientific research to surprise itself. This requires interruption of the direct continuum of reality and knowledge initially assumed by society. (2012: 13)

The functional method is one such way to create a distance between a phenomenon and our knowledge of it (Luhmann 1991, 1995; see also Bednarz 1984; Knudsen 2011, Wagner 2012). Basic to Luhmann's functional method is to attempt to generate observations by means of the distinction between problem and solution – but keeping the exact nature of the problems and/or solutions open. The basic methodological step is to ask: to which problem could this phenomenon be a solution? Or similar: How is this problem solved? Here we can use both theoretical problems (for instance the paradox of decision-making – Luhmann 2000, Seidl and Becker 2005) and empirical problems. Solutions and problems are relative to each other: a phenomenon will look differently if observed as solution to a different problem and vice-versa. The method does not imply that problems are causes and solutions effects in a deterministic way. Luhmann claims that "The function is not a causal cause, but a regulative formula of meaning that organizes an arena for comparisons of equivalent solutions" (1991: 14; my translation). Something is explained as a possible but not necessary solution to a problem, a contingent solution.

In this paper, the basic ideas underlying this "functional method" has informed the analyses in three different ways. A) Firstly, I developed the concept 'media for reflection' as a solution to a problem. This was inspired by Hahn who, in relation to the emergence of Christian rituals of confession in the Middle Ages, says that, "the look of the individual into himself would soon come to an end, if he was not given a map of his inner landscape" (1982: 412). This raised the question: how is this problem (the facilitation of 'the look into oneself', that is: self-reflection) solved? The answer has

been the development of the concept ‘media for reflection’. B) Secondly, I relate the specific media for reflection with their societal/organisational context by asking which societal problem they can be seen as answers to. C) Thirdly, the choice of a historical example and its comparison with a current medium for reflection is in line with the functional method which Luhmann has characterized as ‘equivalence functionalism’ because it studies couplings of problems and solutions in the light of alternative couplings of problems and solutions. As media for reflection the two examples can be seen as different solutions to the same problem (the facilitation of reflection). At the same time they are different solutions and can as such demonstrate the contingency and limitations of each other. The historical example helps reminding us that the contemporary focus on reflection is also embedded in a societal context.

Mirrors for princes – case 1

Historians adopted the term ‘mirror for princes’ to reference “literary works that offer advice to rulers and high-ranking administrators”(Marlow 2013: 523). These mirrors had an educational and admonitory aim and were directed to (future) kings, princes and also other subjects (Anton 1968, 1999; Schmidt 2015; Singer 1981). Even though the mirrors, in their form, were directed to the prince, and often to a specific prince, they were in substance typically addressed to the broader political and intellectual elite. As a genre, the mirrors for princes were not direct political advice in specific situations, but political moral philosophy dealing with the legitimacy of the royal office and its obligations to subjects. This is also why the mirrors were often public – distributed in copies or in printed books after the wide distribution of the art of printing. As management education does today, the mirrors formed a medium for the reflections of rulers.

Mirrors for princes are primarily associated with the Middle Ages and the renaissance, but the genre does not have clear boundaries neither when it comes to style and content nor to place and historical epoch. The concept ‘Fürstenspiegel’ or ‘mirror for princes’ does not appear before the 12th century (Blum 1981: 1). But mirror-like texts were found in the ancient Near East, in the Antiquity (Kaplan 2012), as well as in medieval times, in the renaissance and up to around 1700. Geographically Asian, Arabian (Gelder 2001, Marlow 2013) as well as West-European examples have been found (Blum 1981; Légü 2011). Content-wise the genre unfolds a broad spectrum from relatively simple lists of moral virtues to more complex political philosophical reflections on the state and issues like the relationship between politics and Christianity and between the prince and his subjects. With Christianity, the mirrors in general introduced a theological horizon and the ruler was described as one who should be a mediator between earth and God (Blum 1981; Meens 1998). When it comes to

chronology, the mirrors had their heyday around 1500-1600. In Denmark, for instance 10 mirrors for princes (in different formats) were recorded in the second half of the 16th century (Olden-Jørgensen 2003: 15ff). The best known mirror for princes is perhaps Erasmus of Rotterdam's (1516) mirror for prince Charles *Institutio principis christiani* (The Education of a Christian Prince) (Erasmus 1997), which was widely translated. In 1513 Machiavelli wrote his famous *The prince* (not published until 1532, though). While the medieval mirrors for princes were typically characterized by what Grabes (1973) called exemplary mirrors, that is, mirrors with a moral-ethical content, *The Prince* became (in)famous for its analysis of power. *The prince* was in the late sixteenth century followed by an international anti-Machiavellian tradition with increasingly complex discussions of the relation between power, politics and (Christian) morality (Bireley 1990).

The mirrors for princes in 1500-1600 were not the only kind of texts with mirror (e.g., looking glass) in the title (Grabes 1973, Pendergrast 2003, 115 ff). Grabes distinguished between what he terms factual and exemplary mirrors; for instance: *Myrrour or glasse of helth* (1539), *Mirroure of merchants* (1609) and *the mariners mirroure* (1588). The latter included maps of the European coasts and ports, tables for navigation and astronomical charts. The exemplary mirrors were more widely distributed. Just as one may use an ordinary mirror to beautify ones' looks, these mirrors were used to improve thoughts and behaviour (Grabes 1973: 49). There were, for instance, mirrors for virgins, for loyal subject, for unmarried ladies of noble rank, for judges – even for the blind there were mirrors (Grabes 1973, Singer 1981).

In order to demonstrate more clearly what the princes saw when they looked in the mirror, next I shall focus on one mirror: *Alithia*. *Alithia*, which means truth, is a Danish mirror for princes written by Johan Damgaard (probably a theologian) in 1597 for the Danish king Christian IV.

***Alithia* – a Danish mirror for princes**

Alithia is 60 pages long in the printed version (Damgaard 2003). The text builds on two former mirrors by Jens Skafbo (from 1590 and 1592) drawing on a Danish translation of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *The Education of a Christian Prince* (Olden-Jørgensen 2003: 15). The original version of *Alithia* was handwritten and included a note by Damgaard (the author) that he had discussed the book with Christian IV during two weeks in the autumn 1597.

Alithia is written with considerable gusto, using different poetic devices and style. The first part consists of two letters, one from Satan to his faithful servant 'incredulity' and one from Christ to his 'loyal queen Faith.' The rest of the mirror alternates between prose and verse. Throughout the text are demonstrations of virtues and vices. Among the vices saluted by Satan, are "idolatry, heresy, fanaticism;

Tyranny, violence and injustice; adultery, murder and manslaughter; drunkenness, gluttony and exuberance; robbery, stealing, forgery, fraud and swindle; haughtiness and greed; hate, quarrel and enmity” (Damgaard 2003: 99, this and the following quote translated by the author). The text intimates that the king should cure these miseries “with the following remedies and cures: a true worship of God and knowledge, temperance, humility, gentleness, mildness, fairness, truthfulness, chastity and love” (Damgaard 2003: 99). Apart from such lists of virtues and vices there are also warnings against hypocrites, sycophants and backbiters just as there are several praises of Jesus Christ, the royal family, the estates – and a warning about ‘Videt omnia’ (the eye of the Lord that sees everything). The last part of *Alithia* is more concrete and has the title “what a young man should think of and bear in mind when he has got the crown, royal regime and command. And how to know a king from a tyrant” (Damgaard 2003: 99). Here, the king is described as a role model for the community. *Alithia* also offers more concrete advice. For instance, it warns against war, which leads to the ruin of countries and kingdoms, to the destruction of towns and cities and to the misery of widows and fatherless children. Typical for the genre, a longer section expounds the difference between a king and a tyrant. The tyrant is characterized as a slave driver, a corruptor, a destructor and a bloodsucker. Both the king and the tyrant answers to God on the Day of Judgment, as stated repeatedly in *Alithia*. Christianity is a very present frame of interpretation and supplier of arguments: the king must govern according to the Holy Scripture.

Relating to the suggested concept of medium *Alithia* offered discursive material (virtues and vices, ideals, ethics) for the reflection of royals. It consisted of many loosely coupled elements that, taken together, form a medium upon which the king could reflect the relation to himself, the community and God. Moral virtues and some good advice were the medium that *Alithia* offered the prince to cultivate his reflection of his own government. According to Singer (1981) it is characteristic that the mirrors are not constitutional documents, they are not about the state as an organisation, but concern the prince as a person (Singer 1981: 24f). A mirror remains ‘tractatus ethico-politici’ and does not become ‘tractatus iuridico-politici.’ It is ethics for princes. This is demonstrated by Singer’s summaries of 56 German mirrors (from 1400-1600). They illustrate that *Alithia* was typical in its focus on moral virtues. It should be noted, though, that anti-machiavellian mirrors contemporary with *Alithia* were more complex in their reflections on how to govern. In his well-known book *The Reason of State* (from 1589) Botero for instance does give good advice to the ruler in the tradition of the mirror for princes but he also has broader reflections on the relationship between virtue, reputation, and power (see for instance book II in Botero 1956: 34ff).ⁱⁱ

Media for reflection do not drift in a historical vacuum. In the next section I shall make a brief historical contextualization focusing on the period around and after *Alithia*.

Societal context of the (decline of the) mirrors for princes

The mirrors from 1500-1600 were situated in a complex emergence of ideas associated with the renaissance and social development, which led to the early modern state and to the dismantling of the society based on 'estates of the realm.' In Europe this period was characterized by increased governmental centralization (Reinhard 2002). With military innovations and the build-up of central military administrations (Parker 2003) came huge growth in the central collection of taxes. This led to an increase in civil servants and the construction of a new type of administration based on public positions and separate from the private sector (Heiberg 2006, Jespersen & Petersen 2000, Harste 2001). It has been calculated that the amount of civil servants positions in France increased from 7-8.000 in 1515 to more than 100,000 by 1661 (Harste 2001: 38). Government centralization and the growing number of civil servants created an increasing need for administrative competencies and systematic procedures. In his great work on the process of civilization, Norbert Elias (1993) showed how the old war élite was de-militarized and changed into a nobility of the courts (Bd 1: 351ff). The court-positions of the nobles became paid permanent positions and the new permanent staff demanded new requirements.

Mirrors for princes can be seen as attempts to establish moral limitations to the royal power. The typical warning against tyranny points in this direction. But the growth of the amount of mirrors in the renaissance can also be seen as a manifestation of the need for supportive and orienting self-descriptions of princes and the high nobility as the governmental affairs became more centralized and complex. And while the increasing amount of mirrors in 1500-1600 can be seen as a reaction to the emergence of the early modern state, it can also be claimed that the same formation of state gradually rendered the mirrors less relevant.

The legal historian Stolleis (1990) wrote, "as the administration itself becomes broader and more nuanced so does the literary descriptions of it. In the end we do not have the noble prince together with a small and learned circle of friends as it had been imagined by the humanists. Instead we have a powerful >>apparatus<< which mediates the governmental impulses of the sovereign by means of its own professional knowledge and legal system" (207, my translation). The political reflection concerns less and less the person of the ruler and more and more the 'apparatus.' And, as Schmidt (2015) wrote, "the discretionary character of the subject finally disrupted the textual body of mirror for princes and prepared the ground for an early modern political reflection, which focused less on the person and

more on the institution – as for instance Jean Bodin (1529/30-1596) did in his work “*De la République*” (5, my translation). As the absolutist territorial state was formed, the medium for reflection was displaced from the qualities of the ruler to the quality of the administrative apparatus. The dominant political discourse changed from ethics to law and power.

Jumping 400 years ahead, it is striking to note the increasing development of media for reflection directed towards the ruler (manager) as a person. The apparatus creates mirrors to reflect itself as if it were made up of persons. Or to be more precise: it is striking how policy papers in the 1990s start to talk about managers as persons and not (only) as civil servants, that is as *their roles*. While the person disappeared into the apparatus during the 17th century, it re-emerged now as ‘the personal leader.’ This personal leader is offered different media for reflection. In a Danish context, MPA-style research-based management programmes have grown immensely. Reflecting himself in the mirror for princes the ruler could observe himself as a more or less virtuous person. What reflection is the manager offered if he reflects himself in a research-based management education? That is the question guiding the next section.

Research-based management education

Recently the Danish public sector has seen a remarkable growth in both in-house leadership and management development programmes and in formal leadership and management education. Today it is an official governmental goal that all leaders of institutions such as kindergartens, elderly homes, hospitals and schools have at least a bachelor degree in management. This has led to a huge increase of educations within the field. For instance more than 700 public managers attend the executive public masters programmes at CBS (against app. 75 managers in 2007). My argument is that such education today forms a common medium in the facilitation of the self-reflection of public managers. How education works as a medium for reflection depends of course on the specific programme and the level of education. Below, I shall focus on management education at a graduate level for executive public managers. In Denmark these programmes (i.e., Master in Public Governance and Master in Public Administration) are enrolled in (primarily) by managers with prior managerial experience, with participants typically between 35 and 60 years of age. The programmes are offered in accordance with the ‘Masterbekendtgørelsen’ – the statutory order on executive graduate programmes – that forms the legal frame to which the different master programmes apply. It is here stated that

§ 1. Master programmes are *research-based further education* within the system of continuing education for adults[...].

§ 2. On a *scientific basis* a master programme shall give the students knowledge, skills and competencies which give the qualifications to manage highly qualified functions in companies, institutions etc. The individual master programme must secure that the student is able to use *the scientific methods and concepts* of the subject area (Masterbekendtgørelsen no. 1187, 07/12 2009; my translation and emphasis).

With this legal frame as an indicator for the content of the master programmes it is clear that scientific knowledge in the form of theories, methods and concepts are meant to form the medium for reflection. Here is a closer look at Master of Public Governance (MPG), which is run as a collaboration between Copenhagen Business School and University of Copenhagen. It is the largest master programme in public administration in Denmark with more than 700 students currently active (in 2007 there were approximately 75 public managers attending the executive master programme at Copenhagen Business school – and none at University of Copenhagen). Instead of a lengthy description of all of the courses, I shall give two quotes from the official statutes of the programme ('studieordningen').

The programme should enable the student to use a wide range of methods, theories, and perspectives that contribute to knowledge and visions for the real conditions and possibilities for professional management in a political and public context (MPG Study Programme, p. 12, my translation).

The emphasis is clearly on the development of (theoretical) knowledge and not on, for instance, tools or solutions. This is also evident in the description of the masters dissertation from the study programme (curriculum). The masters dissertation is prescribed to the last 20% of the entire course of study. It is here stated that:

The purpose of the masters dissertation is that the students on the basis of their own educational plan and the previously completed educational modules can demonstrate that they can competently compose one or more *research question(s)*, *analyse/work up the research question(s)* and *give a report* on the results of the project work. (MPG Study Programme, appendix, p. 24, my translation and emphasis).

The description demonstrates how science and knowledge is intended to form the medium for reflection for the students. They must compose research questions, conduct analyses and finally relate these analyses to their own role as managers of organisations. Almost all exams of the programme have

a similar structure: in preparation for an oral exam the students must write a short essay about themselves and their own work practice/organisations and relate that to the curriculum in the specific courses.ⁱⁱⁱ

When the public manager reflects himself and his practice in the above mentioned research-based educational medium he does not primarily observe the ideal manager, managerial virtues, proverbs or recipes for good management. What he sees is himself, his organisation and activities in the light of theories, scholarly analyses and scientific methods. The aspired value is not, as in *Alithia*, moral correctness but knowledge, insight, and truth.

Societal context for management education

The current dominance – in a Danish context – of educational programmes as the medium for managers' reflection has to do with changes in the way relations between organisations and managers are conceived. In the 1950s it had been stated that the public sector becomes increasingly complex as it has increasing importance in the society. This notion of the complex state mirroring the complex society was replaced around 1980 by a problem-definition in the temporal dimension: society changes constantly – and so should public organisations (Andersen 2013). Following this, the manager was increasingly ascribed the role of change-agent. The manager becomes, internal the language of the public sector ('the apparatus'), a figure outside of the organisation ascribed with the ability to change and innovate the organisation (Rennison 2007, Knudsen 2015). The picture of the manager in central policy documents is not that the roles, tasks and functions of the manager is given by a bureaucratic structure, it is the other way around: the organisation is given definition, innovation, and meaning by the manager who is responsible for the production of the precondition of organisational production. The idea that the manager comes before and constitutes the organisation raises the question: what constitutes the manager? The emergence of the idea of 'the personal leadership' can be seen as an answer to this question.^{iv}

In the semantics of public sector the notion of 'personal leadership' emerged in the 1990s – a new expression in the public sector, not only in a Danish setting (Peck 2006, Storey 2004). As the manager is seen as critical to the evolution of the organisation, the manager cannot (only) now be ascribed an organisationally defined role with formal competencies, duties and limitations. Instead, it is now assumed that good leadership means that a manager is "accepted and respected as the natural leader"(Overenskomstforeningen og Foreningen af Tjenestemænd og Chefer i DJØF 1995: 6). As 'the person' becomes the name for this extra-organisational force a new question arises: How to manage the personal leader who is exactly constructed as being outside of the organisation? Here it has become

ambiguous for organisations to form the medium for reflection for the managers. There are two reasons for that:

- a) As the manager is imagined as an outside, extra-organisational dynamic force that can instill and facilitate desired change, then it becomes ambiguous for the organisation to decide how the manager should reflect upon himself. On the one hand, the leader cannot be left with his potentially arbitrary ideas and whims. On the other hand, if the organisation forms the medium for the reflection of the manager it risks losing what it attributed to the leader: a power that constantly can change the organisation.
- b) The organisation does typically not have a communicative complexity that can adequately form a medium for the reflection of its managers. Organisations tend to be inferior to their own complexity as they are host to for instance powergames, conflicts, dynamics, structures, memories and narratives that resist adequate description. Consultants to the HR departments typically only have a relatively superficial knowledge of the tasks and conditions on the 'floor.' The mirror they can offer managers and employees at theme and developmental days risks insufficiency – sometimes even provocative in its unintentional demonstration of ignorance concerning the issues at stake in the organisation. The organisation thus assumes the risk of managers' distancing themselves from the media for reflection offered.

The organisations hesitate to form the medium of the managers at the same time, as the organisations cannot do without some kind of oversight of the self-management of the managers – or what Popper called the 'institutional control of the rulers' (1962). The solution to this ambiguous situation – as described above –in recent years has been to displace the education of managers to the educational system, allowing research-based education to shape the media for their reflections.

Conclusion and discussion

It is time to sum up the answers to the three questions posed in the introduction. The first question concerned how we can conceptualize the interpretative frames involved in reflection. I here suggested to introduce the concept 'media for reflection'. Reflection is performed within a self, but it is enabled by a medium, drawing on Heider and Luhmann, I recommended conceiving as loosely coupled elements. The medium both enables and limits the possible forms that can be made out of the elements. The concept of medium has two advantages a) it offers a way to conceptualize the interpretative frames of reflection without reducing reflections to a reflex of the interpretative frame b) it bridges the relation between specific reflections and societal/organizational context.

The second question concerned how different media for reflection enable and limit reflection. I analysed two different media, in order to explore this. We can sum up the main results with the diagram on the next page.

Characteristics Medium	Content	The aspired value	The question which the medium allows the ruler/manager to answer	How the manager becomes visible to himself	Societal/organisational background
<i>Alithia</i>	Virtues and vices Morally correct behaviour	Christian morality	What is the morally correct behavior?	As a moral-Christian person	Increasing complexity and centralization of the governmental affairs
Research-based management education	Theories, analyses, methods, cases	Knowledge, insight, truth	What is the case/what lies behind?	As knowing, ignorant and analyzing	The emergence of the idea that the manager should be a change agent and is constituted outside the organisation

The diagram does not claim to be comprehensive and the different characteristics noted are of course open for debate, but it highlights that different media for reflection mirror managers to themselves in different ways. The diagram also intimates how a manager *cannot* come into view for himself in the different media. If the manager reflects himself by means of *Alithia*, the elements that mediate his relation to himself are not facts and knowledge, but virtues and vices. With the research-based medium, he can come into light as knowing or ignorant, as studying and analyzing. With research-based education as the medium the manager does not have elements that make it possible to relate to himself as a morally responsible person. In neither *Alithia* nor research-based education is the manager mirrored as a person who must present himself and come forward, which nonetheless also can be part of the managerial role.

The diagram also indicates that different media make it possible to ask and answer different questions. None of the media can answer the managers' question *how* one solves a certain task or reaches specific goals. Mirrors for princes aim to answer how one ought to act; research-based education cannot answer that question. This does not mean that scientific knowledge is morally or politically neutral. But the central validity claim for knowledge in the social sciences is not, that it can answer what one ought to do, but that it produces knowledge about sections of the world. Managers on the other hand have a legitimate interest in getting answers to questions of what to do. This schism between management practice and research-knowledge is today managed by educational institutions through the development of new pedagogical practices, endeavouring to make it easier for managers to observe theoretical knowledge and scientific analyses as resources in order to find out what to do and how to manage (Berggren and Soderlund 2011; Adriansen and Knudsen 2013; Paton, Chia and Burt 2014).

My third question concerned how the media are related to societal and organisational contexts. In the literature, reflection is traditionally seen as a reaction to or as a way to further change. I do not disagree, but it is also a very general explanation of reflection. The two cases introduced demonstrated that the concept of media for reflection makes it possible to specify the content of the reflection. When we do that it also becomes obvious that media for reflection can be related to more specific societal and organisational changes, problems and structures. In the first case the renaissance mirrors for princes were thus related to early state formation and the increasing complexity of the governmental tasks. I also related the disappearance of the mirrors for princes to the emergence of a more and more encompassing administrative apparatus, which, in turn, became the important 'self' to reflect. The increase in research-based management education I have interpreted as symptom of the changes in the semantics on the relationship between the organisation and the manager. It is an attempt to combine

the idea of ‘personal leadership’ with the need to manage self-reflections of managers – a need organisations have problems fulfilling and they now displace to educational institutions.

Implications for management education

Hibbert and Cunliffe (2015) see an inherent and positive relationship between reflexive practice and morality. The analysis above would indicate that there is no such inherent and necessary relation. The relation between morality and reflexive practice instead depends on the medium for reflection. The concept of media for reflection calls for more attention to the ways in which we, as educators, substantially attempt to facilitate reflection. The question ‘how to further reflection’ should be supplemented with questions regarding the potentials and limitations of the educational substance.

Critical discussions of the identity and purpose of management programs today seem to advocate more hybrid programmes combining ethics, epistemic knowledge and aesthetics (Mintzberg 2004, Ghoshal 2005, Khurana 2007, Rippin and Fleming 2007). A cost of this strategy is a risk of obscurity when it comes to the values and criteria on which reflections and subsequent decisions are made. An alternative path would be to foster an increased awareness of the strengths and limitations of particular media. To ask if the current media for reflection allow good answers to questions of current relevance. To foster the knowledge that for instance research based educations as media for reflection do not support reflections of a moral character. Such an awareness of limitations is not an excuse for accepting the limitations. On the contrary: it calls for vivid discussions of how to compensate for the limitations. If more scientific knowledge is not a solution to unethical management, what do we as educators do, then? At research based educations our authority as educators primarily stems from our expertise when it comes to knowledge. On which basis would we claim authority when it comes to other kinds of media for reflection? These are the kinds of questions which the concept ‘media for reflection’ enables and frames.

Further research

The analyses of the two media above can both be qualified by further analyses and be supplemented with analyses of other media for reflection. It could for instance be studied what kind of medium in-house management development programmes form. It should also be noted that the media for reflection are formed by their use. A medium is an offer for possible reflection and does not guarantee that (or how) the managers use it. *Alithia* and its moral warnings against all kinds of excesses was written for, read and discussed by the Danish king Christian IV. But this did not prevent Christian IV from engaging the country in unhappy warfare, having several illegitimate children and heavy drinking. Similarly, education and knowledge do not necessarily prevent managers from behaving ignorantly,

acting in bad faith or grounding their actions on hope rather than on knowledge and experience (Brunsson 2006). To understand reflection better thus requires the study of how the elements of different media are used, translated and combined into strict couplings. Compared to the amount of studies describing educational programmes, there are surprisingly few studies of how executive managers who have been attending educational programmes actually use elements from these programmes in their practical, work-related reflections. In order to get a fuller understanding of how management education facilitates reflection further studies of the use of different media for reflection are needed.

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ⁱ In the remaining parts of the paper I use 'reflection' as the most generic term.

ⁱⁱ See Bireley (1990) for an overview of the most important anti-Machiavellian authors and the dominant motifs in this tradition.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a thorough presentation of the programme see (Greve 2013).

^{iv} I here relate the introduction of the idea of 'leadership' to changes in the role attributed to the manager in the Danish welfare state. A more thorough analysis would have to see this in relation to broader international trends in the use of the leadership concept. For instance Khurana claims that 'leadership' is an idea that business schools have seized upon since the early 1990s for a renewed definition of purpose (2007: 352ff).