

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Managerial Lives

Organizations are often complex and unwieldy, and many managers have difficulty in combining ideals and positive identities with the complexities and imperfections of life. They are expected to be strategic and competent, while at the same time human and empathetic. This engaging book takes a fresh look at managerial work as experienced and understood by managers. It examines the central tenets of managerial life, such as the work expectations that managers have, the significance they assign to different activities and the difficulties that they face. It also takes a wider view of working life by looking at subordination in the managerial context. The theoretical material is supported by in-depth interviews with a number of managers from different organizations. This book will appeal to those with an interest in management, and leadership and identity questions in modern working life.

STEFAN SVENINGSSON is Professor of Business Administration at Lund University, Sweden. He has been visiting researcher at Cardiff Business School, Melbourne University, Auckland Business School and University of Sydney. His research interests include strategic and organizational change, leadership and management of knowledge work. His most recent book is *Changing Organizational Culture, Second Edition* (2015) with Mats Alvesson.

MATS ALVESSON is Professor of Business Administration at Lund University, Sweden; at University of Queensland Business School, Australia; and at Cass Business School, London. His research interests include critical theory, gender, leadership, identity and organizational image. His most recent books include *The Triumph of Emptiness* (2013) and *Constructing Research Questions* (2013), with J. Sandberg.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Managerial Lives

Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

STEFAN SVENINGSSON

School of Economics and Management, Lund University

MATS ALVESSON

School of Economics and Management, Lund University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107551756

© Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson 2016

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2016

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-12170-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-55175-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

List of figures	<i>page</i> vii
List of tables	viii
Preface	ix
PART I MANAGERIAL LIFE: MANAGERIAL WORK AND THE MANAGERIAL IDENTITY	
1 Introduction	3
2 Management: work, identity and leadership	24
PART II MANAGERIAL LIFE: ROLES AND IDENTITIES	
3 Why management?	67
4 The manager as change agent, strategist and networker	99
5 The manager as humanist and moral example	126
PART III MANAGEMENT: IRONIES, LABYRINTHS AND PITFALLS	
6 Self-view and managerial ideals meet reality: managerial work in practice	159
7 Feedback, ignorance and self-esteem: the ironic elements of managerial life	199

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi CONTENTS

8	Managerial life and forms of identity work	241
9	Leadership and identity in an imperfect world	279
	A final word	331
	Appendix: our method	334
	References	339
	Index	349

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Figures

9.1 Anxiety positions	<i>page</i> 313
9.2 Anxiety strength	317

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Tables

2.1	Mintzberg's (1973) ten managerial roles	<i>page</i> 31
8.1	Identity outcome in identity work	266

Preface

This book is the result of a number of studies of managerial work, identity and organization which we have conducted over more than a decade as members of the organization studies group at the Department of Business Administration at Lund University. Our main purpose is to examine essential elements of modern working and organizational life at close quarters. This has been done through in-depth studies of a number of people who work as middle or senior managers. Our aim is to understand the typical relationships between experience, work situation and identity in an organizational context. In doing so, we attempt to highlight how organizations and occupational groups work. We address the dilemmas and problems which lie beyond the impression given by more formal and official descriptions.

Organizations are often complex and unwieldy, and many occupational groups and managers have difficulty successfully combining ideals and positive identities with the complexities and imperfections of life. Modern-day working life is, in many ways, contradictory and complicated – what seem like good ideals and clear recipes for success can easily cause deadlock and become traps for managers.

The research which has led to this study has taken place in a number of sub-projects, with varying emphases. We are grateful for the research grants received from FAS, Vinnova and Handelsbanken's Research Foundation. We would also like to thank our colleagues Johan Alvehus, Tony Huzzard, Dan Kärreman, Daniel Nyberg, Jens Rennstam, Robyn Thomas and Robert Wenglén, who have contributed with both empirical material, which we have used in the book, and creative discussions on managerial work and identity.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12170-6 - Managerial Lives: Leadership and Identity in an Imperfect World

Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

X PREFACE

We would also like to thank the managers who have taken part in the studies – in particular the thirteen people we studied in depth, who with immense candour (and perhaps not a little courage) placed themselves at the disposal of research. But the other eighteen interviewees also deserve our thanks, as do Johan Alvehus, Ola Håkansson and Nadja Sörgärde, who have read and commented on the manuscript.

Lund, February 2016

Stefan Sveningsson Mats Alvesson