

Panel proposal for ISLC 2023, Copenhagen, 10-12 December.

**Command and leadership in and around organizations:
practice, power and social imperatives**

Command has occupied an awkward and perhaps marginalized role in the leadership literature, due to its association with coercive forms of power and authoritarianism (e.g. Wheatley, 1997). Most leadership scholars make a sharp distinction between leadership and command, the first emphasizing a softer form of power (e.g. Grint, 2005). More often than not, the distinction is based on the normative ideal of overcoming coercive forces in organizations, which would liberate the sphere of work (e.g. Seddon, 2003). Recently, however, the question has been posed of whether command and leadership are not co-dependent, in that command can be seen as a necessary condition for leadership (Spoelstra, 2022).

In this panel discussion, we wish to explore the interrelation between command and leadership, by bringing together military practitioners and leadership scholars. The goal is to gain insight about the role of commands in leadership practice and theory. Part of these reflections concerns the relation between commands and other imperatives (such as instructions and requests).

The military studies literature provides a fertile springboard for this discussion, in that command can here be viewed as a practice or social phenomenon entailing more than merely a particular form of power. In his work on command, military sociologist Anthony King (2019) explores the changes in command through an analysis of command functions. His work emphasizes, in particular, the changes, to the managerial function of the divisional commanders and their staff from the 20th to the 21st century. Echoing popular versions in current leadership literature, he argues that command has become collective (Klitmøller & Obling, 2021). Another relevant book is Lawrence Freedman's (2022) *Command: The Politics of Military Operations from Korea to Ukraine*, consisting of multiple historical cases of the actions of commanders, and their political counterparts. I

These (and other) books show that the military studies literature is quite different from the leadership literature, in that one can conceptualize command as a military practice, in which the commander occupies a formal role within the military hierarchy. This fact, we believe, provides a

fertile ground for a discussion on the relationship between command and leadership, in that command is associated with holding a particular position in the military hierarchy, and thus is not a rather abstract theoretical concept of a more coercive form of power, but a practical day-to-day role to which a part of the military personnel is educated and trained. This allows us to challenge and explore the extent to which command and leadership can be understood and explored in isolation from each other; both in practice and in research.

The panel, will take the form of four 10-minute presentations by the panelists, capturing both the practical experience of military practitioners and the perspective of leadership scholars. Subsequently, we envision a 50 minutes structured discussion with the audience, about the interrelation between command and leadership. The guiding questions for this discussion will be:

- How does the context of organizational hierarchies shape the practice of command and leadership?
- What are the differences between command as a social practice (organizational role and position shaped by military (educational) structures), and command envisioned in the leadership literature?
- What are the relational elements between command and leadership as different authority forms in different organizational settings (military/non-military; public/private)?
- How can we envision command more broadly, viewing it as constitutive for particular order (s) embedded in the organizational structure, and evoked in a non-explicit manner in the form of social imperatives?

Panelists

Major **Merete Strømberg** is originally educated as Tactical Control Officer from the former Danish Ground Based Air Defence – DeHawk. After the Defence agreement 2004, in which it was decided to close down the GBAD system, she changed her career into Mission Support as Deputy Flight Commander at 727 Fighter Squadron at Skrydstrup working with INTEL and mission planning. Moving towards higher level in the Danish Defence, Merete worked

several years with different aspects of plans, policies and acquisition, including two years as part of the New Fighter Program as program coordinator. In 2010 Merete was deployed to Lebanon as part of the UN mission UNIFIL. In 2018 she became deputy head of Planning Section North in the Joint Operations Staff changing her focus from force development to force deployment. This included six-month period in the MoD department working with Security and Operations where she was involved in the political decision to deploy forces to Mali as part of Takuba Task Force. Currently, Merete is head of Center for Joint Operations at the Royal Danish Defence Academy. She is the daily leader of 18 military officers, civilian specialists and associate professors.

Commander **Johannes Kidmose** joined the Royal Danish Navy in 2000. Upon graduation from the Royal Naval Academy he spent several years at sea in both the High North and off the African coasts conducting anti-piracy missions. He also held command of the minor patrol vessels in Danish waters. Later on, Commander Kidmose served in both national operational staffs as well as US Navy staffs onboard US carriers. His operational service has over the years been combined with desk work at both the University of Copenhagen, Centre for Military Studies, as Executive Assistant to Admiral Danish Fleet, and lately as Head of Centre for Maritime Operations at the Royal Danish Defense Academy. Today, Commander Kidmose is appointed Chief of Staff in the Danish Task Group, which is building up capability to lead naval maritime groups on task group level. Commander Kidmose is furthermore a graduate from the US Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

Keith Grint is Professor Emeritus at Warwick University, where he was Professor of Public Leadership until 2018. He spent ten years working in various positions across a number of industry sectors before switching to an academic career. Since becoming an academic, Keith has held Chairs at Cranfield University and Lancaster University and he was Director of the Lancaster Leadership Centre. He spent 12 years at Oxford University and was Director of Research at Saïd Business School. Keith has published several seminal books on leadership and management. The relation between leading and commanding has been a central interest in many of his works.

Sverre Spoelstra is Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, and at Lund University, Sweden. His research interests include leadership, organizational play, algorithmic management, and organizational philosophy. Sverre is currently working on a book about the relation between leadership and the imperatives of work. He is the author of *Leadership and Organization: A Philosophical Introduction* (Routledge, 2018).

Moderator

Anders Klitmøller is Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Defence College. His main research interest is centered around command and different aspects of leadership, including leadership trends such as authentic and caring leadership, philosophy and leadership ethics and leadership and politics.

Litterature

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