Processes and socio-material presence in Performing leadership : the case of ubisoft

David Massé
Télécom ParisTech (i3-SES)
david.masse@telecom-paristech.fr

Thomas Paris
CNRS, GREGHEC; HEC Paris & École polytechnique (i3-CRG)
paris@hec.fr

Heloise Berkowitz
CNRS (UMR5303), TSM-Research
heloise.berkowitz@gmail.com

Résumé :

How does a leader perform, i.e. shape, her organization? Communicative Constitution of Organizing (CCO) approaches describe leadership either as a combination of microprocesses and influential acts, or as human and nonhuman agency, that give shape to organizations. This paper seeks to bridge the gap between these two approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership as a necessary coupling of processes and socio-material devices. Based on a longitudinal case study of a video game developer, this paper explores the emergence of a singular leader's vision. We study the operational translation and deployment of this vision in the organization through three stages of performativity, both successes and failures. We contribute to debates on CCO and leadership by showing the role of translators and trainers in coupling the leader's vision to its socio-material presence, as well as the importance of device density.

Mots-clés : intra-organizational performativity, visionary leadership, creative industries, devices, communication as constitutive of organizations

INTRODUCTION

How does a leader shape her organization? The recent literature on discursive leadership has shifted its focus from a leader's abilities such as personality traits or charisma, to her interactions with followers and institutional settings, or her material presence. To date, however, little work has thoroughly examined how a leader's vision gets enacted and succeeds or fails to transform her organization. Yet this is the objective of any leader: to become "performative", i.e. to shape the organization according to her own personal vision.

As a result, scholars endorse a narrative of leadership that either focuses on rules and activity coordination, or on socio-material devices in a communication as constitutive of organization approach. Ultimately, this leads to a fragmented conceptualization of leadership and its performance in organizations, falling short of providing a comprehensive understanding of the processes by which a leader's vision becomes performative.

This paper seeks to bridge the gap between two branches of leadership studies, to analyze leadership's performativity as a combination of microprocesses and influential acts aiming at coordinating actors, but also as human and nonhuman agency in organizations. However, studying how a leader's vision succeeds or fails to give shape to an organization raises methodological and empirical challenges.

To address these challenges, we conducted a longitudinal case study focused on a leader's vision in a video game company, Ubisoft. This firm has experienced various profound organizational changes over the years, putting to the test the vision the Chief Creative Officer had for his firm. We built our analysis on empirical material gathered through field work, semi-structured interviews and archival data.

We suggest that leadership's performativity is threatened by organizational distance and lack of formalization of a vision. Further, we explore how the performativity of a leader's vision is enabled through translation and deployment devices that have effects at different levels of the

organization. We study its operational translation and its deployment in the organization through three stages of performativity, both successes and failures. Our findings show that the density of socio-material devices is a condition for the success of a leader's performativity. In the process, the study reveals that a vision's socio-materiality is in turn shaped by the coordination tools that are implemented, and interactions with followers. Ultimately, we contribute to debates on CCO and leadership by adopting a processual and socio-material approach. We contribute to the literature by showing the role of translators and trainers in coupling the leader's vision to its socio-material presence.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we outline the academic literature on the evolution of leadership studies and communication as constitutive of organization approaches. We then present our methodology. The analysis builds on the three stages we identified in the performativity of the leader's vision. The discussion concludes on our contributions.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION AS CONSTITUTIVE OF ORGANIZATION

Originally seen as a unique ability, leadership has become a complex and multiform concept that the literature has tackled from various angles. Communication approaches to discursive leadership study how leadership may impact an organization through influential acts or socio-materiality.

LEADERSHIP: FROM AN ABILITY TO INTERACTIONS WITH CONTEXT

Traditional dominant literature in management studies leadership as a set of abilities or personality traits that make the leader a formidable individual (Bass, 1960, 1990; Messick, Kramer, & Kramer, 2004). In this context, functionalist studies aim to understand correlations in leadership, between personality features and leadership aptitudes: i.e. what makes a good leader (Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008) and different forms of leadership (Trottier et al., 2008; Vroom & Jago, 2007).

A recent growing body of literature examines leadership not as an ability that an individual possesses, but as a collective phenomenon that can be distributed and shared (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012) and which involves a form of performance in organizations (Peck & Dickinson, 2009; Peck, Freeman, Six, & Dickinson, 2009). This approach is illustrated by a large diversity of labels used to reach beyond the "heroic" and "romantic" view of leadership and to link the leader with her organization, such as performing leadership (Peck & Dickinson, 2009), transformational leadership (Bass, 1990), visionary leadership (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011; Harris, 2009), and discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2007).

Grint (2005) elaborates a theory of leadership as a social construction. Unlike classical approaches to leadership, leadership emerges as a multi-level construction anchored in a specific context. Leadership is co-created and locally enacted. In other words, local context matters, such as followers, and not just an individual's aptitudes. Relational leadership focuses neither on followers nor on leaders but on their interactions (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014).

In the same vein, Peck, Freeman, Six and Dickinson (2009) analyze relationships between leaders, followers and their institutional settings. They distinguish between two approaches to "performing leadership", i.e. first efficacy at being a leader, that is to say literally a performance, and seconds, happenings or metaphorically a performance. Both approaches strongly relate to institutional contexts that set the parameters of such performances, but develop into different research agendas. In leadership "as" performance, i.e. happenings, one of the major questions is to analyze performative "repertoires", i.e. arrangements of speeches, texts and actions, that leaders use to repeat their narratives and thus to keep their followers committed.

More recently, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) have argued in favor of a more critical approach to leadership that addresses the tensions of contemporary leadership. The leader has to find a balance between authority as a creative source of power and a harmful one, through what they call "deliberative leadership", i.e. collective decisions about when and how more individual authority is needed. Following this line of thought, Harding, Ford and Lee (2017) develop a

theory of resistance in organization studies to analyze behaviors of employees who refuse to submit to forms of power and oppression in organizations. They do so by studying the "performative constitution" of managerial resistance. They refer to an approach developed by Butler (1997) where performativity constitutes the self, based on political dimensions, and Barad's (2007) new materialism, based on material contexts. The authors argue that both dimensions (political and material) are needed to develop a performative theory of resistance.

PERFORMATIVITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

This concept of performativity has grown recently in organization and management studies (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2015). Although it has evolved in profoundly different research communities, performativity can be traced back to British linguist J.L. Austin (1962). Austin initially described performative utterances as those that performed an action. In management and organization studies, a rich "re-appropriation" of performativity is embodied in the school of Montreal, named "Communication as Constitutive of Organizations" (CCO) (Gond et al., 2015).

This school studies organizations not only as a given state or a set of members and stable activities. On the contrary, CCO analyses organizations as a set of processes centered around communication (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Wright, 2014). CCO studies how communication can perform, i.e. bring organization into being through textual agency, PowerPoint presentations, and other communication events (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2004; Schoeneborn, 2013; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Organizations indeed result from continuous processes of superposition, interconnexion and textual and speech agency (Allard-Poesi & Giordano, 2015; Blaschke, Schoeneborn, & Seidl, 2012; Cooren, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 1999). As Christensen and Cornelissen (2011, p. 405-406) observe, "Depending on the connections that individuals make while communicating, the organization and its identity [are] constructed rather than antecedently given or residing in individuals."

In this performativity approach, where communication is a key concept in accounting for organizational change and stabilization, language has a special role by giving form to organizations (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). Only

material and concrete communication anchors can produce organizations (Cooren, 2004). Communication therefore has to materialize in concrete processes (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2004), in objects, in architectural sites, or in socio-material devices such as PowerPoint presentations, emails or phone messages (Allard-Poesi & Giordano, 2015; Schoeneborn, 2013). According to the CCO approach, it is through a set of communication practices that organizations not only come into being (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), but also stabilize their identity (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015).

COMMUNICATION APPROACHES TO DISCURSIVE LEADERSHIP

Various studies of leadership have developed a communication approach. Transmissional leadership for instance focused on leadership as the transmission of a message, through inputs, processes and outputs (Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). In line with the power of language, Learmonth (2005) highlights the power of naming jobs, such as leadership, management, and administration. These words act as discursive resources that shape organizations, especially in the case studied: public sector organizations. Furthermore, through communication, it is leadership itself that can perform within a team (Allard-Poesi & Giordano, 2015).

Ford, Harding, Gilmore and Richardson's (2017) paper moves beyond leadership understood as the abilities of an individual, to see it as a set of material presences. Their paper builds on Barad's (2007) materialist theory to analyze micro-dynamics by which a leader's body is constituted through material presence. The authors' main claim is that leaders must materialize themselves as such in organizations (Ford et al., 2017). It cannot suffice to study leadership as traits or qualities, such as disembodied charisma; leadership also consists of a set of corporeal practices.

Further, the CCO approach to leadership provides an understanding of leadership as a combination of microprocesses and influential acts (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). There are two main communities: the Montreal school, which we discussed earlier, and the structurationists (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). In the Montreal school, nonhuman agency plays a key role in leadership, especially during crises (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009). Fairhurst (2007) shows that Rudy Giuliani's charisma during 9/11 resulted from

interactions of human and nonhuman agents, such as texts. These studies highlight the importance of socio-material devices. Conversely, the structurationist branch of CCO tends to focus on rules, resources and activity coordination rather than nonhuman agency (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009).

To date, however, little work has thoroughly examined how a leader's vision is enacted and succeeds or fails to transform the organization. Yet this is the objective of any leader: to become "performative", i.e. to shape the organization according to her own personal vision. As a result, scholarship endorses a narrative of leadership that either focuses on rules and activity coordination (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Putnam et al., 2009) or on socio-material devices (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009). Ultimately, this leads to a fragmented conceptualization of leadership and its performance in organizations. This vision falls short of providing a comprehensive understanding of how a leader's vision becomes performative. In this paper, we propose to bridge the gap between the two branches of CCO approaches to leadership, and study leadership as a combination of rules, coordination activities and human and nonhuman agency.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This article is based on a single case study (Yin, 2012) of Ubisoft, a leader in the video game industry. Given this context, and in order to understand a phenomenon that has received little attention in the literature, a single case study—in which dynamic processes are studied in organizations—appears to be the most suitable method (Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992; Yin, 2012). In the following description, we clarify the way we collected and analyzed data, and how our analytical frameworks emerged and were stabilized over time. This research project was developed in collaboration with the publishing and strategy departments at Ubisoft, whose goal was to better understand the evolution of the company's game design practices—and this within the context of their efforts to train staff and disseminate a way of doing design that is unique to the company.

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL

With the aim of analyzing the evolution of the design vision at Ubisoft, we followed methods that allowed us to ensure a high level of rigor during our analysis (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010) and to triangulate data from different sources. Interviews with people involved in game design (at different levels) at Ubisoft studios located in Montreal, Paris and Bucharest constitute the main source of data used in this article. We also collected secondary data from internal documents such as publishing department reports, training materials, an intranet site devoted to game design, PowerPoint presentations and videos. Other secondary data came from external sources such as online magazines specialized in game design, press articles and books about the creation of certain games. These secondary data (see complete list in appendix 2) were used to triangulate the interviews and thus improve the reliability of the data.

This research started as an exploratory study with six semi-structured interviews with directors and managers involved in areas related to innovation and game development (between May 2011 and December 2012 at the Paris head office) seeking to understand the company's context and the issues facing the organization in terms of game development, and to translate them into a suitable research question. The researchers paid particular attention to the company's well-known capacity for creation and innovation, and were expecting it to be explained by the literature on innovation and creativity management. However, the interviews revealed a much more complex picture, where a vision of game development developed by one of the company's leaders appeared to play a critical role in the way game design is done at the company.

We therefore decided to focus our analysis on the influence of this leader, the evolution of his vision and associated game design practices. We sought to describe and explain a temporal sequence of events involved in a major organizational change for the company (Van de Ven & Huber, 1990). Following Ritchie et al. (2013) and Patton (2002), we built our sample on an intentional selection criterion: the interviewees had to have a direct or indirect connection with the practice and/or thinking about game design at the company. Consequently, we carried out 32 semi-structured interviews (between November 2012 and September 2013) with directors/managers, vice-presidents, course instructors (design academy), gameplay programmer and game/level designers. To complete our data collection, we met with 9 directors/managers and 3 former employees in June 2013 to collect information thought to be

lacking, as well as information on recent changes in the organization (the list of interviewees is available in appendix 1).

With the help of a company employee, the selection of people to interview was done carefully to ensure diversity (Patton, 2002) in terms of hierarchy, seniority, geographic distribution, and involvement at different times and levels in the thinking on game design. Most of the interviews were carried out face-to-face in Paris and Montreal, the others by video-conference. Interviews were transcribed. The interview protocol was the same for all interviews in order to facilitate the comparison of data and also coding. In order to describe and explain the evolution of the leader's influence and his vision in the company, we used a technique called "temporal bracketing" (Giddens, 1984). Interviewees were asked to trace on a timeline the stages and important events that have marked the history of game design practices and thinking at Ubisoft. For each stage, they considered important, interviewees were asked to describe the history of the stage (How did it begin? How did the situation evolve? What were the results?), the key actors involved in these stages, and the communication and decision-making processes.

ANALYSIS AND RELIABILITY OF DATA

Once collected, we analyzed the primary and secondary data in two stages: pre-coding and coding.

In the pre-coding phase, we sought to identify the major stages that characterize the evolution of the vision of game development as perceived by the interviewees. Our analysis of the chronologies of events revealed three major phases: the creation, translation and deployment of the vision. We set up a work session with the directors and managers of Ubisoft to show them our analysis and get their feedback. This process sought to ensure the reliability of the study through the principle of "low inference descriptors" (Silverman, 2013). As suggested by Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010), all of the data collected, the preliminary analysis and the notes taken during the work session were stored in the same place (on line), so that it would be available to all the researchers and also readily accessible for future analyses.

Following an exploratory approach, we conducted a series of inductive coding (Thomas, 2006). The aim here was to identify categories related to the three stages so as to better characterize the vision, means of communication and effects on the organization in each of

the stages. For example, coding archival training documents helped to characterize the translation stage through three types of formalization. Coding interview and questionnaire responses helped to specify the effects of training on the company's game development process. During the coding stage we used NVivo 9 software to analyze content. Finally, as suggested by Eisenhart and Graeber (2007), we synthesized the emerging categories in tables (see Tables 1 and 2) containing a description of the categories and quotes from the data that illustrate them.

THE UBISOFT CASE

Ubisoft, a videogame publisher, was founded by the five Guillemot brothers in 1986 in a small village in Brittany called Carentoir. In a few years, the number of small French game publishers grew rapidly, but only a few managed to gain a solid position in the market. Ubisoft was one of the few that did, becoming an international firm, going public in 1995, and is now one of the three largest independent game publishers in the world (behind Activision-Blizzard and Electronic Arts).

- Key figures -

- 2015-2016 sales: 1.394 billion USD
- 2015-2016 operating income: 169 million USD
- 9200 employees
- 29 production studios in 19 countries
- 19 blockbusters (games selling more than a million units).
- Examples of games: Rayman, Les Lapins Crétins, Assassin's Creed, Tom Clancy

Today, the company is recognized in the industry for the quality of its games, their creativity and uniqueness in the video game market. This recognition owes a great deal to the leadership of Serge Hascoët (now Chief Creative Officer), who since the very beginning initiated, nourished and deployed a unique vision of game development based on an analysis of the experience afforded to the player. Over the course of Ubisoft's history, this vision was implemented in the organization in three periods: the creation of a unique vision (1987–2000), its operational translation (2000–2010) and its deployment (2010–2013).

SERGE HASCOËT AND THE CREATION OF A UNIQUE VISION (1987–2000)

At the end of the 1980s, the video game industry was relatively young, growing and was consolidating its conventions and knowledge. There was still no proper video game school

and the industry was just slowly professionalizing. Methods for developing a game (and game design in particular) were far from universally established. Game designers were recruited on the basis of their good empirical knowledge of video games and their creative flair, which resulted in great diversity in the video game market.

Serge Hascoët joined Ubisoft in 1987 as a video game tester. In this rapidly growing company he quickly came to supervise the development of the first games, some of which enjoyed significant commercial and critical success upon release. Based on his empirical practice of game design and development management, he gradually developed the foundations of a vision for video game development. For him, the starting point for a game should be the sensations that the game designer wants to offer the player, and these sensations should guide the entire development process. Game design should also be thought out in a rational manner, the term "rational" being defined as a logical and methodical way of setting a challenge for the player. While intuition plays a role in choosing the emotions the game designer seeks to procure for the player (creative intention), how these emotions are provided must be rooted in a rational approach. This logic gives rise to a sequence in game design: the designer must first decide what sort of challenge he wants the player to tackle, and then think about the resources he needs to bring into play to realize his creative idea.

This vision stands in contrast to the rather "artisanal" practices that were prevalent in the video game industry of the 1990s. The importance given to the interaction with the player broke with an industry that was dominated by games built on story and plot, where interaction with the player was considered secondary. At this stage, Hascoët's vision had not yet been formalized, but it was nevertheless rooted in an analysis of game development that would allow him to structure the common principles to organize game development in the company.

> [Serge Hascoët] is among the one percent who focus on gameplay and the sensations of the game... rather than on the story.
>
> —A creative director

In practice, this vision has led to Hascoët's influence on the development teams in the studios, particularly through the various comments he makes during informal discussions with the

teams. The dissemination of the vision throughout the company is facilitated by the direct supervision of the teams, the geographic proximity of the leader, and the human scale of the projects.

> Hascoët is a visionary. He shows the way and he may well say "why don't you try it this way, it will be much better!"
>
> —A game designer since the early days of the company

In the 1990s, Ubisoft entered a significant growth phase after the Rayman game was released in 1995. This phase was characterized by the development of activities (opening new studios, growth of teams), but also structuring, specialization of tasks, and the implementation of control systems. Production was then organized in large projects with a "head office" structure based in Paris to handle support functions for the group. The teams were located in different studios around the world and mobilized for game projects that might involve hundreds of people. Each studio worked on several projects and some projects involved several studios.

The growth of the teams and the major international expansion of the company had an impact on its game development activities. As studios were gradually acquired around the world, direct supervision and informal discussions were no longer possible, making it hard to instill the creative vision in the teams in a natural way. These circumstances diluted and impeded the dissemination of the leader's vision in the organization, which resulted in a great disparity in how the vision was perceived and operationalized in the company.

"GAME LAB" AND THE OPERATIONAL TRANSLATION OF THE VISION (2000–2010)

In the early 2000s, the strong growth of the company prompted head office to implement a "stage gate" type of project management process (Cooper, 1990). Part of the team in charge of a project would be asked to come and present their progress on the game to the publishing management team headed up by Serge Hascoët, who would check the quality of the game and whether or not his vision was embodied in the form it took. This method revealed a failure in

terms of the performativity of the vision: Serge Hascoët observed recurring errors in game design, his vision was not found in the games that were put forward, and he had trouble communicating his intentions to the teams. From this analysis emerged the desire to formalize the vision and translate it operationally.

> I saw that we were always a little too empirical and that we needed to lay down some theoretical foundations, at least to know what a challenge is, what an ingredient of level design is, what an objective is.... The vocabulary was very fuzzy, and even the people on the teams got confused or gave wrong answers because they didn't know what we were talking about.
>
> —VP Creation (Montreal), former Director at Game Lab headquarters

A research department for game design called "Game Lab" was created to respond to the need to operationalize this vision. Its three main objectives were:

1. Test Serge Hascoët's intuitions about game design that he had developed previously. The goal of this more "scientific" approach was to systematically analyze numerous successful video games (from Ubisoft, but also the competition) and to determine good practices.
2. Enrich and translate this vision through the formalization of principles and a clear "editorial line" , i.e. comprehensible and usable for all.
3. Constantly improve and experiment with game design practices. The games produced in the studios were tested by users in this laboratory. The game lab gave feedback to the production teams on the results of tests.

After a few years of observing games in the laboratory, a certain number of principles emerged: what worked and what did not work in terms of game design, as well as the right responses to certain design issues. These principles address questions such as how to present the player with a game objective or a control for moving a character, the amount of information that players are capable of absorbing in a certain amount of time, how to address the challenge or present it to the player, or the choice of vocabulary. A gap appears between these good design practices that emerged in the laboratory and the game development practices followed in the studios. Game design errors were repeated in different Ubisoft games because the game designers failed to provide players with the right answers.

In addition to these discrepancies between the formulation and dissemination of certain principles, there were communication difficulties between the publishing team and the project teams owing to fuzzy vocabulary. Indeed, it is quite complicated to explain errors detected in the game lab about how to present the challenge to the player if the very notion of "challenge" is not clearly defined and shared by the teams. To respond to this need to boost the design skills of the teams, the company tasked the director of the game lab with developing a more systematic approach to design and implementing it in the teams.

This assignment resulted in the formalization of the vision in three types of outcome (see Table X): a meta-rule (the affirmation of a development philosophy axiom), technical terminology (precise vocabulary about game design and its structure), and a logic for orchestrating game ingredients. The results of this reflection would serve as the foundation for rational methods in game design.

Table 1: Three types of outcome stemming from formalization in the laboratory

Types	Objective(s)	Example(s) from training materials
META-RULE Affirmation of an axiom as a development philosophy	Coordinate efforts thanks to an easy-to-remember slogan that gives the teams a common direction	• "Form follows function"
TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY Definition of vocabulary for game design and its structure	Improve communication about practices thanks to shared vocabulary and established conventions	• "Gameplay is a set of game mechanics that are linked to a defined challenge." • "A game system is a set of gameplays, each of which comprises a set of mechanics."
ROUTINE Orchestration of game ingredients	Monitor the player's learning through progressive, multiple, varied challenges	• "The objective is to keep the player in the flow [as per Csikszentmihalyi, (2013)], i.e. to present the right challenge at the right level of difficulty at the right time in the game in relation to the player's learning."

The three types of outcome are described formally and explicitly in written training documents (mainly in the form of PowerPoint presentations) available on an internal company website. Using this knowledge in games then became one of the requirements to pass various stages in the game development process (stage-gate process). Project team members had to complete documents in the form of Excel tables in order to show that the principles stated in the training documents had been followed correctly. However, the teams did not fully embrace this procedure in designing new games and saw the obligation as an additional administrative constraint. Hence we observe the development of perfunctory behaviors without any added value for the project, where the requirement to justify using these outcomes was met *a posteriori*: the documents were completed as quickly as possible to get them out of the way.

> I admit that nobody really understood anything about the files we had to send to the publishing department. We completed the files in a hurry, after the fact, just before passing the gate, hoping that Serge and his team wouldn't look at them too closely.
>
> —Creative director of a game project

Management quickly realized that the new publishing directives were counter-productive for the development teams. They decided to relax the requirements and provide better support to the teams in using this knowledge—knowledge which had not yet been fully understood by the game designers.

THE "DESIGN ACADEMY" AND DEPLOYMENT OF THE VISION (2010-2013)

This second failure led to the idea to set up a training program to deploy the vision operationally in all of the company's studios. This took the form of a two-week training course held at an external location. The training program operated regularly from January 2010 to April 2011 with two courses per month, which amounted to 25 courses over the entire period. The courses were delivered by three main trainers and occasional internal instructors

to small groups of 15 to 25 people. The participants chosen for this training were people with jobs related to game design from all of the studios and company projects.

The two-week training course comprised sessions on theory during the first week and a practical application in the second week, aiming to integrate what had been learned. The goal of the theory courses was to develop a shared vocabulary and reflexes in game design for all of the teams. Each building block of the theory course was discussed during the presentation and then applied in small groups to an actual game. During the second week, everything that had been learned in the first week was applied to a concrete project to be realized in small groups: a paper version of a video game. The team gradually put together a prototype of the game using paper, toys, Lego pieces and figurines. This stage was a quick way of checking on the experience offered to the player (proof of concept) and making quick adjustments and improvements. The week ended with a presentation of the prototype to all the participants, then the trainers and audience would comment on the game and the formalization produced on paper.

During the training, certain participants raised the need to develop tools to facilitate adoption of the methodology. For example, game development support tools were developed within the framework of the training. They were mainly based on the use of lists and matrices.

- One tool aimed to challenge the intuition of the designers. During the creative process, the game designer intuitively tends to use design responses that are similar to those from past experiences. Using lists helps to move past the game designer's first intuition and get him to think about a range of possibilities for a given challenge.
- Another tool was a "variety" matrix whose aim was to have the designer vary the ingredients of the game. The purpose of this exercise was to test new associations that may not be intuitive.

The use of lists and the variety matrix obliged the game designer to explain his creative process, in particular getting him to specify the elements he used in the game while encouraging experimentation with new combinations of elements.

Following the deployment of these training courses in the company, the performativity of Serge Hascoët's vision in game design was observed in changes that affected several aspects of the development process: (1) convergence of teams toward the same vision (2) opening the development process to new ideas and (3) greater productivity in game development (Table 2).

Table 2: Effects on the game creation process

Type of effect	Effects on the creation process	Illustrative quotes
Convergence	Identify design intentions	• "It [the meta-rule] helps to identify the core substance of the gameplay and get rid of the superfluous"— A game designer . • "RDG [Rational Game Design] helps to determine exactly what the game is and the right challenge and their parameters that we want to offer the players"— A game designer
	Clarify and choose design intentions	• "The training gives you better control over player experience thanks to a set of elements that allow you to set and change the level of difficulty through the game... it is much clearer with this method" —A level designer • "It is now much easier for me to explain my gameplay intentions because RGD allows you to make choices, to keep a design simple, and to have a much clearer image of the overall design of the game" — A level designer
Openness	Generate ideas and variety in the game	• "Back on the project... using the variety table was a good way of finding new original gameplay situations" — A game designer • "Rational methods... give you a different way of thinking and seeing problems with fresh eyes"— A level designer • "On AC (name of the project), using the variety table was a good way of finding innovative ideas"— A game designer • "Paradoxically, when we use the RGD tables we create variety and we bring out new ideas by getting rid of some game mechanics rather than by adding them... It's rather counter-intuitive because we used to make the game more complex with a lot of elements, we no longer saw the originality and we tended to reuse the same recipes."
Productivity	Make prototypes quickly to identify problems sooner	• "The idea is to test ideas and 'to fail as often as you can', but to do so in the prototyping stage" —A game designer • "The rational methods are very useful in the design stage and when the prototyping begins. Later, it helps to greatly reduce the endless iterations by doing more of the thinking upstream."— A game designer
	Improve communications	• "The greatest benefit is the common language, shared mainly by designers and programmers, and that's across the different studios" —A VP for Creation • "RGD offers a common language, a shared comprehension of design between the different tasks, which simplifies communication when the team agrees to use it" —A game designer

The dissemination of the vision has led the teams to converge on the same vision of game development. With an easy-to-remember phrase, the formulation of a meta-rule (form follows function) encourages the designer to identify his true creative intentions upstream. The benefit of this meta-rule is to form a much clearer image of what a game's design should be, notably by setting clear objectives and a common thread in terms of design. Refocusing on the form also obliges the creator to make choices from a range of possibilities, to concentrate on the essential and to keep the design simple and efficient.

Additionally, we observe an opening up of the game development process to new ideas. The tools that were developed during the training sessions have helped creators to generate more diverse ideas. Tools such as the variety matrix and the lists help to fight against the reliance on automatic reflexes and offer the creators' a way of thinking differently, especially by prompting them to see design problems in a new way.

Finally, the dissemination stage has considerably increased productivity in game development. Starting from a situation where each team had its own game design vocabulary, the translation stage produced a common vocabulary that helps to improve communications in projects (between the different activities involved in design), and also relations with the head office in Paris during project management meetings. Additionally, tools such as paper versions of video games contribute to productivity because they are used to prototype an idea very quickly and evaluate it without entering the development phase. This practice helps to significantly reduce iterations during production, by ruling out potential paths that may lead to problems. One of the benefits is therefore to have something "fail quickly" so as not to repeat the same errors in future stages of design and production.

Table 3: Creation, translation and deployment of the vision in game design

	CREATION 1987 – 2000	**TRANSLATION 2000 – 2010**	**DEPLOYMENT 2010 – 2013**
Materialization of the vision	Intuitions based on empirical practice	Rationalization based on a meta-rule, common vocabulary and principles	Tools for thinking and conceptualizing through lists and matrices
Transfer mode	Informal (mentoring, tutoring)	Formal (documentation and guidelines via emails, PowerPoint, Excel files)	Formal (PowerPoint, video capsules, Excel files) +Informal (workshop, community of practice)
Method of communicating the vision	The leader and his proximity to teams (direct supervision)	Applied research laboratory in game design (Game Lab)	Specialized training on the practice of game design (Design Academy)
Organizational challenges	Growth of the organization (opening new studios, growth of teams)	Professionalization of the industry (learning and codification of a practice)	Coordination of development teams (spread the vision by sharing it in the organization)
Effects	Progressive dilution and loss of the vision in the organization (first failure of performativity)	Clarification and theorization of principles on the basis of good practices, but little impact on practices (second failure of performativity)	Convergence of teams toward a single vision, openness to new ideas, productivity

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we sought to better understand how a leader's vision could become performative, i.e. give shape to her organization. To do so, we carried out a longitudinal case study of Ubisoft, combining field work, semi-structured interviews and archival data analysis. We aimed to identify the obstacles to the performativity of a vision in an organization, and how they could be overcome.

First we showed that the vision of Serge Hascoët first emerged as singular and strategic, but increasingly failed to perform in the organization as it grew in size. We therefore suggested that organizational distance and lack of formalization of a vision threaten a vision's performativity. We then showed how the vision's operational translation resulted in communication devices such as a meta-rule to guide game design or a common vocabulary among designers. Finally, we showed that these communication devices were not enough to ensure the vision's performativity. A last necessary step was the deployment of the operationalized vision across the organization through decision-making tools and training courses.

By highlighting these three stages that we identified in the performativity of the leader's vision, our results reveal the heterogeneous nature of the communication devices used by the leader in the company to make sense of, enact and legitimize his vision. In this section, we discuss our results and make several proposals to guide future research on a leader's performance.

Proposal 1: The necessary recoupling between an "orphan" vision and "orphan" devices

Our first contribution is to show that both the vision and communication devices can appear as "orphans", i.e. decoupled from the organization, when they fail to "perform" it, i.e. to give it shape.

In the initial situation, the leader directly supervises his teams and thus there is coupling between the leader, his vision and the communication devices of the organization. By nature, the coupling is total because the leader expresses his vision directly through a

direct and informal transfer mode (tutoring or mentoring). At the end of phase 1, the vision itself is an orphan due to the decoupling with the teams and game developers. As a result of the organization's significant growth, the teams misunderstand or misinterpret this vision. Or worse, they are unaware of its existence. The role of the translation through a device such as an experimental laboratory is key to recoupling the vision with the organization in phase 2 through devices. In this stage, the vision become communicable as it is materialized through devices, i.e. a meta-rule, technical terminology and routines. However, here again, the devices first appeared to be "orphans", and actors did not adopt them. The teams did not understand these disincarnated devices because the leader was no longer there to make sense of them. In the phase 3, trainers helped to recouple the socio-material devices and their use by actors within the organization. They would play the role of intermediary (between the leader and the devices) which gives meaning to devices by promoting their adoption through concrete use in training sessions.

This first contribution of this article stems from the analysis of performativity failures and the company's responses to these failures. This particular approach contributes to the "communication as constitutive of organizations" (CCO) perspective of performativity, which focuses on successful cases (Cooren, 2004). The empirical context conducive to the performativity of communication (and more broadly the language) of this research makes it possible to show that concrete communication devices such as PowerPoint, emails and SMS (Allard-Poesi and Giordano, 2015, Schoeneborn, 2013) perform in the company and reaffirm the idea that language in the organization not only describes but also creates social reality (Austin, 1961). Thanks to the longitudinal approach, the case analysis allows us to explore the more complex reality of performativity processes. The first two failures of performativity highlight the need to deploy this vision through a set of devices for the vision to perform in the company.

PROPOSAL 2: THE DENSITY OF SOCIO-MATERIAL DEVICES IS A CONDITION FOR THE SUCCESS OF A LEADER'S PERFORMATIVITY

Far from the traditional literature that studies leadership as a set of abilities or personality traits (Bass 1960; Messick, Kramer, and Kramer 2004), we bridge the gap between the two branches of CCO approaches, and study leadership as a combination of rules, coordination activities (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Putnam et al., 2009), and human and nonhuman agency

(Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009). From this approach, the notion of "density" emerges as a condition for the success of performativity. Indeed, the performativity of the vision relies on a superposition of devices acting at different levels.

Beyond our study of processes and devices, it appears that this density is a necessary condition for a leader's vision to successfully shape an organization.

This suggests that further research is necessary to investigate and assess the level of density that makes leadership performative. This could be studied in terms of an optimal density point, before which leadership fails to shape the organization, but beyond which it becomes inefficient.

CONCLUSION

Our work has revealed that the density of socio-material devices is a condition for the success of a leader's performativity. Ultimately, we contribute to the debates on CCO and discursive leadership by providing a processual and socio-material approach to leadership performativity. In particular, we contribute to the literature by showing the role of translators and trainers in coupling the leader's vision to its socio-material presence.

REFERENCES :

Allard-Poesi, F., & Giordano, Y. (2015). Performing Leadership. *M@ n@ gement*, *18*(2), 102–131.

Alvesson, M., & Spicer, A. (2012). Critical leadership studies: The case for critical performativity. *Human Relations*, *65*(3), 367–390.

Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional Amendments:"Materializing" Organizational Communication. *Academy of Management Annals*, *3*(1), 1–64.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Avolio, B. J., Walumbwa, F. O., & Weber, T. J. (2009). Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*(1), 421-449. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press.

Bass, B. M. (1960). *Leadership, psychology, and organizational behavior* (Vol. xiii). Oxford, England: Harper.

Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, *18*(3), 19-31. https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S

Blaschke, S., Schoeneborn, D., & Seidl, D. (2012). Organizations as networks of communication episodes: Turning the network perspective inside out. *Organization Studies*, *33*(7), 879–906.

Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research: Distributed Leadership in Organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *13*(3), 251-269. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London: Routledge.

Christensen, L. T., & Cornelissen, J. (2011). Bridging Corporate and Organizational Communication: Review, Development and a Look to the Future. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *25*(3), 383-414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318910390194

Christensen, L. T., Morsing, M., & Thyssen, O. (2013). CSR as aspirational talk.

Organization, *20*(3), 372–393.

Cooren, F. (2004). Textual agency: How texts do things in organizational settings. *Organization*, *11*(3), 373–393.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2013). *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (Reprint edition). New York: Harper Perennial.

Denis, J.-L., Langley, A., & Sergi, V. (2012). Leadership in the Plural. *The Academy of Management Annals*, *6*(1), 211-283. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2012.667612

Dobusch, L., & Schoeneborn, D. (2015). Fluidity, identity, and organizationality: The communicative constitution of Anonymous. *Journal of Management Studies*, *52*(8), 1005–1035.

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of management journal*, *50*(1), 25–32.

Fairhurst, G. T. (2007). *Discursive Leadership: In Conversation with Leadership Psychology*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Connaughton, S. L. (2014). Leadership: A communicative perspective. *Leadership*, *10*(1), 7-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715013509396

Fairhurst, G. T., & Cooren, F. (2009). Leadership as the hybrid production of presence (s). *Leadership*, *5*(4), 469–490.

Ford, J., Harding, N. H., Gilmore, S., & Richardson, S. (2017). Becoming the Leader: Leadership as Material Presence. *Organization Studies*, 0170840616677633.

Gibbert, M., & Ruigrok, W. (2010). The''what'' and''how'' of case study rigor: Three strategies based on published research. *Organizational Research Methods, 13*(4), 710-737.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.

Gond, J.-P., Cabantous, L., Harding, N. H., & Learmonth, M. (2015). What Do We Mean by Performativity in Organizational and Management Theory? The Uses and Abuses of Performativity: Organizing Performativity. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 1-24.

Grint, K. (2005). Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. *Human relations*, *58*(11), 1467–1494.

Harding, N. H., Ford, J., & Lee, H. (2017). Towards a Performative Theory of Resistance: Senior Managers and Revolting Subject(ivitie)s. *Organization Studies*, 0170840616685360.

Harris, A. (2009). Distributed Leadership: What We Know, 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9737-9_2

Learmonth, M. (2005). Doing things with words: The case of 'management'and 'administration'. *Public Administration*, *83*(3), 617–637.

McPhee, R. D., & Zaug, P. (2000). The communicative constitution of organizations. *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, *10*, 1-16.

Messick, D. M., Kramer, R. M., & Kramer, W. R. K. P. of O. B. R. M. (2004). *The Psychology of Leadership: New Perspectives and Research*. Psychology Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd Revised edition). Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Inc.

Peck, E., & Dickinson, H. (2009). *Performing Leadership*. Springer.

Peck, E., Freeman, T., Six, P., & Dickinson, H. (2009). Performing leadership: Towards a new research agenda in leadership studies? *Leadership*, *5*(1), 25–40.

Pettigrew, A. M. (1992). The character and significance of strategy process research. *Strategic Management Journal*, *13*(S2), 5-16. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250130903

Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. (Éd.). (2009). *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York: Routledge.

Putnam, L. L., Nicotera, A. M., & McPhee, R. D. (2009). Introduction: communication constitutes organization. In L. L. Putnam & A. M. Nicotera (Éd.), *Building Theories of Organizations: The Constitutive Role of Communication* (p. 1-19). New York: Routledge.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice* (2 edition). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Schoeneborn, D. (2013). The pervasive power of PowerPoint: How a genre of professional communication permeates organizational communication. *Organization Studies*, *34*(12), 1777-1801.

Schoeneborn, D., Blaschke, S., Cooren, F., McPhee, R. D., Seidl, D., & Taylor, J. R. (2014). The Three Schools of CCO Thinking Interactive Dialogue and Systematic Comparison. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *28*(2), 285-316. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318914527000

Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of information*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (4 edition).

London ; Thousand Oaks, California ; New Delhi ; Singapore: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Taylor, J. R., & Cooren, F. (1997). What makes communication 'organizational'?: How the many voices of a collectivity become the one voice of an organization. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *27*(4), 409–438.

Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (1999). *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface*. London: Routledge.

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *27*(2), 237-246.

Trottier, T., Van Wart, M., & Wang, X. (2008). Examining the Nature and Significance of Leadership in Government Organizations. *Public Administration Review*, *68*(2), 319-333. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00865.x

Van De Ven, A. H. (1992). Suggestions for studying strategy process: A research note. *Strategic Management Journal*, *13*(S1), 169-188. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250131013

Van de Ven, A. H., & Huber, G. P. (1990). Longitudinal Field Research Methods for Studying Processes of Organizational Change. *Organization Science*, *1*(3), 213-219.

Vroom, V. H., & Jago, A. G. (2007). The role of the situation in leadership. *American Psychologist*, *62*(1), 17-24. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.17

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science*, *16*(4), 409–421.

Westley, F., & Mintzberg, H. (1989). Visionary leadership and strategic management. *Strategic management journal*, *10*(1), 17–32.

Wright, A. (2014). Organizational routines as embodied performatives: A communication as constitutive of organization perspective. *Organization*, *23*(2), 147-163. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508414533165

Yin, R. K. (2012). *Case study research: design and methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Appendix 1. List of Interviews

N°	Function of the interviewee	Interview location	Interview length
1	Chief Strategic Innovation Officer, Paris Headquarters	Paris	2 hrs
2	Course instructor, Design academy, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1.5 hr
5	Course instructor, Design academy, Paris Headquarters	Paris	45 min
6	Course instructor, Design academy, Paris Headquarters	Paris	45 min
7	Creative Director	Montréal	45 min
8	Creative Director, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	50 min
9	Director of design at "Direction Métier", Ubisoft Montréal	Montréal	1 hr
10	Director, Art and Animation	Montréal	40 min
11	Director, Game Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1 h
12	Director, International Training Dep., Paris Headquarters	Paris	2.5h (1.5 hr + 1hr)
13	Executive Producer, Ubisoft Montréal	Montréal	50 min
14	Executive Producer, Ubisoft Montréal	Montréal	1 h 10 min
15	Former game designer, Ubisoft Montpelier	Phone	50 min
16	Former Managing Director, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	1hr
17	Game designer, Red Storm Entertainment	Phone	30 min
18	Game designer, Ubisoft Bucharest	Phone	30 min
19	Game designer, Ubisoft Montpelier	Paris	30 min
20	Game designer, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	20 min
21	Game designer, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	30 min
22	Game designer, Ubisoft Toronto	Paris	30 min
23	Gameplay programmer, Ubisoft Montréal	Montréal	40 min
24	Gameplay programmer, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	20 min
25	Level designer, Ubisoft Montréal	Montréal	1hr
26	Level designer, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	30 min
27	Level designer, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	30 min
28	Line-design Director, Paris Headquarters	Paris	40 min
29	Manager, International Training Dep. Headquarters	Paris	50 min
30	Manager, Strategic Innovation Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	40 min
31	Manager, Strategic Innovation Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	45 min
32	Playtester, Game Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	20 min
33	Playtester, Game Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	21 min
34	Pre-production Director, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1 hr
35	Process and Methods Director, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1 hr
36	Projects Director, Strategic Innovation Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1 hr
37	Projects Director, Strategic Innovation Lab, Paris Headquarters	Paris	45 min
38	Rational Game Design Ambassador, Ubisoft Montreal	Montréal	50 min
39	Rational Game Design Ambassador, Ubsioft Bucharest	Phone	1 hr
40	Senior game designer, Ubisoft Annecy	Paris	20 min
41	Senior game designers, Ubisoft Paris	Paris	30 min
42	Studio Operations Director, Paris Headquarters	Paris	45 min
43	VP Creation, former Director at Game Lab headquarters	Montréal	1.5 hr (1 hr + 30 min)
44	VP Editorial, Paris Headquarters	Paris	1.5 hr

Appendix 2. Types of Secondary Data

N°	Title of the document.	Type
1	Accessibility	Department reports
2	Atomic Design, Introduction to atomic design	Training material
3	Atomic Parameters	Department reports
4	Atomic parameters, Social skill based mechanic	Training materials
5	Atomic Sign and Feedbacks	Department reports
6	Design Academy	Internal Video
7	Design Academy	Intranet site
8	Design Academy In A Nutshell	Department reports
9	Design Academy, Introduction	Training materials
10	Dynamic Design	Department reports
11	Flow, game progression	Training materials
12	Ingredients & LD patterns	Training materials
13	L'histoire de Rayman	Book
14	Mechanic experience	Training materials
15	Mental Skill based mechanics	Department reports
16	Michel Ancel - 1. Biographie d'un créateur de jeux vidéo français	Book
17	Michel Ancel - 2. Biographie d'un créateur de jeux vidéo français	Book
18	Motivation	Training materials
19	Paper video game Workshop	Training materials
20	Prototypes, Tests, Tools	Training materials
21	Rational conception process	Department reports
22	Rational Design: The Core of Rayman Origins	Website article
23	Rational game design, Short brief	Training materials
24	RGD Définitions	Training materials
25	RLD Distribution Table	Form (xls)
26	RLD, Game progression	Training materials
27	Serge Hascoët : « Dans les prochains jeux vidéo Ubisoft, il y aura de moins en moins de narration »	Press article
28	Serge Hascoët (Ubisoft) : "On fait du divertissement et on essaye d'apporter du plaisir"	Press article
29	Serge Hascoët, le jouisseur créatif d'Ubisoft	Press article
30	Variety and Workshop	Training materials
31	Workshop : physical skill based RGD	Training material