Introduction

This paper is about the relation between self-reflection and executive management educations. Self-reflection is often seen as a key ingredient in executive management educations. Contrary to subjects like chemistry, physics or history of arts executive management educations (the theories, methods and educational practices) concern the practice and the contexts of the managers themselves. Thus the educations call for reflections of the relation between the tasks, experiences, opinions of the managers and the theoretical concepts and models presented in the educations. They call for managers’ discussions of their own practice in the light of theories, they call for self-reflections. Both the management educational programmes and the literature on management educations thus typically emphasize the notion of reflection.

Even though there is a huge amount of literature on the relation between reflection and executive management educations (some authors talk of a ‘reflective turn’ (Cotter and Cullen 2012: 242; Quinn 2013: 8) the concept of reflection is captured in an unfortunate distinction between inner thinking and outer rules and habits. In order to overcome that distinction and be able to conceptualize how self-reflection is socially mediated I suggest to introduce the concept ‘media for reflection’. By means of this concept the paper analyzes how different media for reflection make the managers visible to themselves (that is: reflected) in different ways. The term displaces the attention from the activities performed in the reflection (like ‘questioning assumptions’) to the discursive (in a broad sense including all kinds of
relevant meaningful expressions) material in which the reflections take place. By focusing on the media for reflection it becomes possible to point to different possibilities and limitations of the media and thus of specific kinds of reflection. It furthermore becomes possible to establish relations between reflections and the societal context.

In order to get closer to the importance of the medium for reflection I analyze and compare two different media for reflection, namely modern, public management educations (a la MPA’s) and an example of a renaissance ‘mirror for princes’. Mirrors for princes were widespread medieval and renaissance management handbooks with prescriptions of good top management – thus offering a mirror for the prince’s reflections of his own management. Neither attempts to educate managers nor self-reflection are new phenomena. This makes it possible to make historical comparisons and thus get a distance to today’s dominant forms of media for reflection. It also becomes possible to investigate the relations between media and societal background. In the comparison of the mirrors for princes and the education medium I ask two questions a) what do the managers see when they look in the mirror? b) which societal/organizational problems can the medium be seen as answer to?

The paper has the following sections 1) A discussion of the concept of reflection and media for reflection 2) An analysis of mirrors for princes as medium for reflection 3) An analysis of research based management educations as medium for reflection 4) Discussion and conclusion.

The concept of self-reflection

The notion of reflexivity is key in a discussion of rigour and relevance in relation to management education. Reflexivity (reflection, reflectivity, reflecting, critical reflection…) is in scientific papers on management education/development often treated as the activity which makes the rigorous scientific knowledge relevant for practice. Papers on reflection tend to be normative, claiming that reflection is the way to go and what should be supported (Quinn and Wennes 2008). It is seen as the activity which connects theories with experience, remembering, and new challenges. It is described as a kind of mediator, a connector which makes rigorous academic knowledge relevant. Gosling and Mintzberg state that “The key to learning is thoughtful reflection.(…) Sustained and critical reflection in the classroom is key to learning…”(2006: 422f). Quinn follows ups and states that “Reflexivity as a keystone of mid-career education can ensure that public managers develop integrative, investigative and innovative capacities.”(Quinn 2013: 15). Quinn also argues ”why the fostering of reflexivity should be a vital and valued element of mid-career education for public managers.” (Quinn 2013: 8).

Cotter and Cullen state that there is a disorientation when it comes to the diverse ways in which ‘reflection’ and ‘reflexivity’ are used in relation to management learning (2012: 229). This disorientation
includes a conceptual disorientation as there is no overall consensus regarding the meaning of terms like reflectivity, reflexivity, reflection, critical reflection, and self-reflection. In spite of this disorientation there are some patterns in the discourse on reflectivity. 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). Cotter and Cullen have a similar observation as they in a review of literature on what they call ‘reflective management learning (=RML) state that “The phrase ‘ taken for granted assumptions’ is a recurring term across virtually all the RML literature.”(Cotter and Cullen 2012: 239). Cunliffe simply states that “Critical reflexivity means examining and unsettling our assumptions, actions and their impact…”(2009: 98). Swan concludes that “In sum, then critical reflection is seen to involve this extra layer of questioning at the level of social and political taken-for-granteds in order to expose power relations and enhance democracy..”(2008: 389).

Also in critical management studies the notion of reflectivity is related to the questioning of assumptions – and is seen as one of three characteristics of Critical Management Studies (Fournier & Grey 2000). This question of assumptions is typically related to a characteristic of acceleration of societal and organizational life in which “…a unitary set of values and assumptions no longer dominate organizational life. Consequently, managers must become more reflective in their practice, and critical of the managerial knowledge they embrace.”(Barge 2004: 71).

Even though reflexivity is associated with ‘questioning of assumptions’ the notion of reflexivity seems to contain some unfortunate assumptions which hinder a better understanding of reflexivity as phenomenon. What for instance is left undebated is the question from which position this questioning of assumptions takes place. It is as if it is possible to do the questioning from a position outside society, outside language or from a position beyond assumptions. Cunliffe, who is often referred to when it comes to reflexivity can illustrate this point. Cunliffe identifies self-reflexivity as self-interpretation that involves talking from within, not categorizing from without using personality and leadership instruments (introvert/extrovert, people or task oriented etc)(Cunliffe 2009: 92). Selfreflexivity means ‘reflexively questioning my assumptions and actions.’(2009: 92). The question is, though, if the distinction between ‘talking from within’ and ‘categorizing from without’ is sustainable. It seems to be based on the assumption that we have some pre-linguistic experiences. But the “…dialogue with self about our fundamental assumptions, values, and ways of interacting”(Cunliffe) is not floating in a vacuum. It does itself have some conditions of possibility. On the one hand it is recognized that organizational life is socially constructed and inherently ideological and political (Cunliffe 2009: 93). But

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1 One of the early sociological reflections of the role of reflection can be found in Mannheims analysis of rationality (1960: 56 f.). Mannheim anticipated the current repeatedly stated connection between change and reflection.
on the other hand it is as if we by means of reflexivity can find a place outside the social constructions, or beyond the taken for granted assumptions.

Swan (2008) generalizes this point as she claims that the notion of critical reflection involves the idea that the social slips into the human beings through the hidden assumptions that people think with (Swan 2008: 393). These hidden aspects of the social in the individual can then be detected by questioning the assumptions. As Swan writes “It is assumed that there is an individual who can step outside of the wrong version of socialised thinking. In essence theirs (Fook and Gardner 2007) is a model of the socialised self rather than a model of a self produced through ways of reflecting.” (2008: 393). Drawing on Foucault and his analyses of confessional practices as a disciplining and productive self-technology (Foucault) Swan claims that this model neglects 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 claims 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.(…) The personal itself need to be understood as already political.” (Swan 2008: 390). “Talking from within’ presupposes a language that comes from without.

Swan asks “…what kind of selves are created through critical reflective practices’ (Swan 2008: 390). Swan argues that the notion of critical reflection is too individualised as “not only has reflection been understood as an individual activity, but the category of experience, seen as the focus for reflection, has not been understood as part of social and power relations of class, racism, gender, age, caste and sexuality.” (Swan 390). Swan concludes that we ‘would need to acknowledge that the interpretative frameworks that we use to represent our experience can themselves contribute to a political agenda…’ (2008: 396).

This notion of a more recursive relation between self and the social (as presented by Swan in the tradition from Foucault) problematizes widespread distinctions in relation to the concept of reflection – distinctions between rule-following and rule-questioning, between ‘embedded ways of thinking and acting’ (Quinn 2013: 14) and questioning of such ways, between ‘habits of mind’ and ‘critical reflection’ (Mezirow 1997), between ‘talking from within and categorizing from without’. My claim is that if we want to understand reflection better – also in its relation to leadership and leadership development – we have to find ways to discuss and analyze reflection which does not observe it as an individual, cognitive activity outside society. It must be ways which take the “complex interpretive frameworks

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\(^2\) What could be the counterconcept for reflection? Automatism, following rules and expectations without blinking. But this would in my sense overestimate the power of rule. Rules tend to be inadequate to determine actions 100% (Ortmann 2003).
through which events, processes and facts are *constructed*.” (Rattansi 1992: 33) seriously. These complex interpretive frameworks can be approached in different ways. I shall do it by means of the concept ‘media for reflection’. My suggestion is to redirect the focus away from reflection as a practice (questioning assumptions…) and instead focus on the media which enable and limit reflection.

**Media for self-reflection**

The self needs a social language in which it can reflect itself and its activity. As Hahn has expressed it in relation to the emergence of Christian rituals of confession in the Middle Ages “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). Theological ‘summa’, that is compilations of central theological sentences or catalogues of sins and virtues, were developed as such maps (Hahn 1991). In the early middleages we can also see the emergence of specialized handbooks for the use of confessors, the so called penitentials, which catalogued all kinds of sins with their proper penance (Meens 1998: 345 ff). Our experiences (of sin for instance) are not immediate, even though we perceive them as such. They are mediated by a language in its broad sense.

This also goes for the ‘reflective manager’ who needs media (in the form of concepts, ideals, visions, proverbs, knowledge, narratives, works of art…) which can facilitate his self-reflection, his questioning of assumptions and his inner talk. Today, management education is merely one way out of many ways in which the manager can become visible to herself. 360° management evaluation, appraisal interviews, coaching sessions and mentoring are current examples of different types of institutionalized self-reflection.

If we want to understand the content, the possibilities and limitations of managers' reflections, we have to displace our attention from the reflective activity (=‘questioning of assumptions’ and a cognitive activity by individual persons) to what I suggest to call ‘media for reflection’. This concept is inspired by the literal aspect of ‘reflection’ – *something* reflects (the glass-mirror, the dark water etc) me; the observation of myself is enabled by a medium. Reflection is sometimes used in the everyday sense of ‘thinking more’ about a certain issue. This paper suggests that we define reflection more formally as the process by which a self (be it a social system or a human being) establishes a relation to itself (Luhmann 1991: 100). The advantage of this relatively formal definition is that it allows us to compare different forms of reflection as we still recognize them as reflection. Instead of 'questioning of assumptions' I thus suggest to see the self-relation as the core element of reflection. Self-reflection as the observation of the self by the self is mediated by something else. My suggestion is to displace the
focus of interest to this medium which with the words of Rattani works like an interpretative framework.

The concept of medium is inspired by the psychologist Fritz Heider (1959) and the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann1992: 181ff). Heider introduced the difference between form and medium in order to explain the perception of objects that were not in direct contact with the body – for instance visual or acoustic perceptions. According to Heider this perception is only possible because of a medium and the perception depends on the medium. His point of departure is the basic statement that “the object of perception or cognition does not affect the sense organ directly but by means of some kind of mediation.”(Heider 1959: 1). This means that one entity is represented by another (7) which is also why Heider talks about signs (1959: 18) in relation to medium. The sound wave in the air is a sign of something else (a stone dropping in the water for instance). A medium consists of loosely coupled and therefore formable elements – like air particles which can mediate many different sounds. As Heider says "the messengers can act as signs only because they are independent of each other"(Heider: 18). In this very abstract sense language or telegraphic codes an also be seen as media (7). The letters can be combined in many different ways – parallel to the way the air can mediate many different sounds. A medium must on the one side be sensitive to influences from the outside, on the other side it also abstracts certain properties of the influence. Heider writes

'In an apparatus which serves as an indicator, there must be a flexible element which yields to influences from outside, that is a mediatorlike element. To be sure, measuring instruments are not common mediators which simply transmit the influence which affects them. 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.”(Heider 1959: 20).

This double nature of a medium is helpful in the understanding of self-reflection. The distinction between form/medium makes it possible to observe more general characteristics about the medium making the many specific acts of self-reflection (the forms) possible. We can observe the medium in which they are made. The medium itself is normally not realized – but does none the less influence what can be perceived. For instance I shall treat scientific knowledge and moral virtues as two different media. Different media for reflection facilitate different types of reflection and make different self-relations possible. If the relation to oneself is facilitated by a Christian consciousness of sin, one gets a different self than if the relation to oneself is established in the frames of affirmative therapy. If I observe myself by means of a psychological language (that is: the medium) what I can see is influenced by what I look at but the medium mediating myself to me also ‘abstract certain properties of the
influence’. It is the purpose of this paper to contribute to the understanding of how different media for reflection offer different possibilities for those who are mirrored in them.

Media for reflection tend to be invisible while they make other things visible. When you look into the mirror you see yourself, not the mirror. In order to be able to observe a medium we have to create distance to it. In this paper I do this by means of a historical comparison of two different media for reflection, namely what is called ‘mirrors for princes’ and research based executive management educations. I ask two different questions a) what characterizes the content of the mirrors b) what societal/organizational problems are the mirrors related to?

**Mirrors for princes**

Mirrors for princes form the first example of a medium for reflection for managers. Mirrors for princes (speculum morale regium, speculum regum, speculum regis, speculum principis…) were handwritten as well as printed texts with an educational aim. They had an educational and admonitory aim and were directed to (future) kings, princes but also to other subjects (Singer 1981, Olden-Jørgensen 2001, Schmidt u.ä). Many historians have adopted the term ‘mirror for princes’ ‘to designate literary works that offer advice to rulers and high-ranking administrators.’ (Marlow 2009: 523). As the management educations do today, the mirrors formed the medium for the reflection of the rulers.

The genre is primarily associated with the Middle Ages and the renaissance, but it does not have clear boundaries neither when it comes to style and content nor to place and historical epoch.3 We find mirror-like texts in the ancient Near East, in the Antiquity (Kaplan 2012), as well as in medieval times, in the renaissance an up to around 1700. Geographically we find Asian, Arabian (Gelder 2001, Marlow 2013) as well as West-European examples. Some examples are Isokrates’ letter for his former pupil Nikokles, the ruler of Cyprus from 374BC (Blum 1981: 3), Senecas mirror, called Clementia, for his pupil Kaiser Nero (Blum 1981: 7) and Agapetos’ mirror for Kaiser Justinian in the Byzantian Reich (from around 500). The latter consists of 72 short paragraphs both praising Justinian but also warning against pride and different kinds of moral advices. Like almost all the mirrors for princes from this period and onwards it has a strong theological tone, for instance it states that ‘Durch Gottes Willen hast du deine Kaiserherrschaft empfangen, so ahme Gott nach mit deinen guten Werken.’ (XLV, p. 72 in Blum 1981). With Christianity the mirrors in general get a heavy theological horizon. Often they work with Christ as picture. The ruler should be a mediator between earth and God.

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3 The concept ‘Fürstenspiegel’ or ‘mirror for princes’ does not appear before the 12th century (Blum 1981: 1).
The mirrors are typically characterized by intertextuality which is also a dominant focus of the scientific approach to the mirrors. Textual inspirations are traced in time and space (Gelder 2001, Léglu 2011, Kaplan 2012, Marlow 2013). When it comes to numbers the mirrors had their heydays around 15-1600. In Denmark, for instance there came 10 mirrors for princes (in different formats) in the second half of the 16th century (Olden-Jørgensen 2003: 15ff). The texts could have the form of dialogues, poems, songs or plain prose. The admonitions were not least of a moral nature (justified religiously), but could also deal with questions regarding how to reach political targets, the use of advisors that is questions of a more political nature. They also reflect on the legitimacy of the royal office and its obligations to the subjects.

The Mirror for princes were in the 15-1600 not the only kind of texts with mirror (speculum, looking glass…) in the title (Grabes 1973). Grabes distinguishes between what he calls factual and exemplary mirrors. We have for instance ‘Myrrour or glasse of helth’ (1539), ‘Mirrour of merchants’ (1609) and ‘the mariners mirrour’ (1588). The latter had maps of the European coasts and ports, tables for navigation and astronomical charts. The exemplary mirrors were, though, more widely distributed. These should not be seen as reproductions but as examples or ideals. Just as one may use an ordinary mirror to beautify ones look, these mirrors should be used to improve thoughts and behaviour (Grabes 1973: 49). There were, for instance, mirrors for virgins, for the loyal subject, for unmarried ladies of noble rank, for judges – even for the blinds there were mirrors (Grabes 1973, Singer 1981). There were also negative, warning and revealing mirrors, for instance ‘A looking-glass for a drunkard’ (1652).

Today primarily the mirrors for princes are known. The best known is perhaps Erasmus of Rotterdam’s famous mirror for prince Charles Institutio principis christiani 1516 (Erasmus 1997), which was widely translated, for instance it was printed in a Danish version in 1534 with the title Een Christen Furris undervisning oc lære (Olden-Jørgensen 2003: 15). In 1513 Machiavelli wrote his famous ‘The prince’ (not published until 1532, though). Machiavelli’s book was debated in the 16th century, but was in its focus on (increase of) power not typical for the genre of mirrors for princes. The genre was more characterized by a normative content. Virtues rather than wisdom or experiences in terms of practical politics formed the medium for the reflections of the rulers. In order to demonstrate more clearly what the princes saw when they looked in the mirror, I shall focus on one mirror: Alithia. Alithia, meaning truth, is a Danish mirror for princes from 1597 written by Johan Damgaard (probably a theologian) for the Danish king Christian IV.
Alithia – a Danish mirror for princes

Alithia was published by the historian Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen in 2003 and is 60 pages long in this printed version (Damgaard 2003). Contentwise the book builds on two former mirrors by Jens Skafbo (from 1590 and 1592), they on their side was drawing on a Danish translation of Erasmus of Rotterdam’s The Education of a Christian Prince. The original version of Alithia was handwritten and had a note by Damgaard (the author) that it had been discussed with he had discussed the book with Christian IV the autumn 1597. According to Olden-Jørgensen the manuscript also circulated in noble circles (2003).

((Here should be an English Characterization of Alithia (see the footnote for some Danish remarks))

Summing up

Alithia is a typical mirror. According to Singer (1981) it is characteristic that the mirrors are not constitutional documents, they are not about the state as an organization, but concern the prince as a person (Singer 1981: 24f). The mirrors remain ‘tractatus ethico-politicus’ and do not become ‘tractatus iuridico-politicus’. It is ethics for princes. In order to govern the prince must know and control himself, master his passions and stick to christian virtues. The mirrors offered the discursive material (virtues

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4 Alithia er et ganske veloplagt skrift, der benytter sig af forskellige litterære virkemidler og stilarter. Forstås del består af to breve, et fra satan til ”sin flittige jegermester incredulitas (vantro)” og et fra Kristus til ”sin tro Drotning Fidem (tro)”. Resten af teksten skifter mellem prosa og vers. Teksten igennem finder man markeringer af dyder og laster. Til lasterne (som satan hylder) hører: ”Avffguderi, Kietteri och Svermeri; Tyranni, wold och wrett (uret); hoor, moord och mandslet; druckenskab, fraatzeri och offerförlighed; Roffveri, Tiuffveri, Falsk, svig och bedregeri; Houfferdighed och gierighedtt; had, trette och fiennskab, ect.” (Damgaard 2003: 99). Disse elendigheder bør kongen kurere ”met desse etterfølgende Remedier och lægedome, som er, en sand Gudtz dorckelse och Kundsdb, Ædruhed, ydmighed, sagmodighed, mildhedtt, rettfedighedtt, sandhed, kyszkhed och Kierlighedtt.” (Damgaard 2003: 99).


and vices, ideals, ethics...) for the rulers self and its self-relation. Relating to the introduction we can now say that moral virtues and some good advices were the medium which the mirrors offered the prince as a media for his reflection of his own government. With a Christian ethics as a medium the prince can become visible to himself in a particular way, that is as a virtuous or a depraved person.

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 in the 15-1600 are situated in a complex mixture of ideas (associated with the renaissance and its belief in education, new ideas about the relation between king, state, society, and church...) and social developments, which led to the emergence of the early modern state and to the dismantling of the society based on the estates of the realm (standssamfund). In Europe the period was characterized by increasing governmental centralization (Reinhard 2002). The centralizations were not least connected to the new ways of organizing soldiers and warfare. In Denmark, for instance, a permanent, hired army was established in 1637 (Jespersen & Petersen 2000). With the build-up of a central military administration came a huge growth in the central confiscation of taxes. This led to an increase in the civil servants and the construction of a new type of administration based on positions and separated from the private sector, that is the property of the civil servants (Heiberg 2006, Jepsersen & Petersen 2000, Harste 2001). It has been calculated that the amount of hired civil servants positions in France increased from 7-8000 in 1515 to more than 100.000 in 1661 (Harste 2001: 38). The governmental centralization and the increasing amount of civil servants created an increasing need for administrative competencies and systematic procedures. In his great work on the process of civilization Norbert Elias shows how the old war élite was de-militarized and changed into a nobility of the courts (Elias 1993 Bd 1: 351ff). The court-positions of the nobles were turned into paid permanent positions. New requirements was demanded by this new permanent staff. This was honoured by direct socialization in the apparatus (with the invention of the career as one of the mechanisms) but also by the establishment of formal educations. In Denmark the state made it possible to graduate in law in 1736 in order to qualify its civil servants.

Mirrors for princes can be seen as attempts to establish not least moral limitations to the royal power, that is to establish a moral guidance of government in line with the moral political philosophy of that time. The typical warning against tyranny points in this direction. But the growth of the amount of mirrors in the renaissance can also for a period be seen as a reflection of the need for supportive and
orienting self-descriptions of princes and the high nobility as the governmental affairs became more complex and centralized.

While the increasing amount of mirrors in 15-1600 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 makes the mirrors less relevant. In his introduction to Alithia the historian Olden-Jørgensen writes that ‘the reformatory mirrors for princes share the conviction of the crucial importance of the royal personality in relation to politics and society’(2003: 13, my translation). This conviction declines proportionally with the increase of the administrative apparatus.

There has in history been a long tradition for educating the rulers by means of primarily texts with lists of virtues and to some extent proverbs. In this sense the most remarkable historical period is the period almost without any mirrors for princes, that is, roughly, the period from 18th – 20th century. The legal historian Stolleis writes “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.”(1990: 207, my translation). The political reflection concerns less and less the person of the ruler and more and more the ‘apparatus’. As Schmidt writes “Die Beliebigkeit der Sujets sprengte letztlich den Textkorpus des Fürstenspiegels und bereitete den Boden für eine frühneuzeitliche politische Reflexion, die weniger auf die Person, als auf die Institution zielte, wie dies u. a. Jean Bodin (1529/30-1596) in seinem Werk "De la république" leistete.” (Schmidt 5). 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. Where the mirror for princes offered a medium for the reflection of the ruler as a person, Bodin and the subsequent juridico-political literature formed a medium for the reflection of the apparatus whose emergence Stolleis (and many others) have described.

If we jump 400 years ahead it is striking how we now again see the development of medium for reflection directed towards the ruler (manager) as a person. The apparatus creates mirrors in which it reflects 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 roles. The person disappeared into the apparatus during the 17th century, but re-emerges now as ‘the personal leader’. This personal leader is offered different media for reflection. What we have seen in a Danish context recently is that research based management programmes MPA-style have grown immensely. Reflecting himself in the mirror for princes the ruler can 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.

**Education**

Recently the Danish public sector has seen a remarkable growth in both in-house leadership
development programmes and in formal leadership educations. Today it is an official governmental
goal that all leaders of institutions like kindergartens, elderly homes, schools and the like have at least a
bachelor degree in management before 2015. Since 2007 many management/leadership programmes at
both bachelor (diplomleder) and graduate (master) level have been developed. New study programmes
for managers have been developed called acronyms like DOL (Diplom i offentlig ledelse) DIL (diplom
i ledelse) and MOL (Master i offentlig ledelse). In 2007 there were app. 75 public managers attending
the executives masters programme at Copenhagen business school. Today more than 700 public
managers attend the master-programmes at CBS. Also many inhouse programmes have been developed
recently. For instance The Capital Region of Denmark, one of five Danish hospital owners, has
developed a huge inhouse leadership development programme which all of its leaders (more than 2500)
should attend.

My argument is that education today form a common medium in the facilitation of the self-
reflection of public managers. If we observe educations as a medium for reflection how then do the
managers become visible to themselves using that medium? This depends on the specific programmes,
but drawing on Grabes’ distinction between factual and exemplary mirrors (Grabes 1973: 68) it is
probably not wrong to claim that educations today have a preference for the factual dimension. It is
factual mirrors not of coasts and ports but of theories of organizational culture, structure, processes of
change, leadership, reforms and strategy.

How education works as a medium for reflection depends of course on the specific program and
the level of education. Below I shall focus on management educations at a graduate level for executive
managers. In Denmark these programmes (like Master in Public Governance and Master in Public
Administration) are followed (primarily ) by public managers with managerial experience, they are
typically between 35 and 60 years of age. The programmes are offered in accordance with the
‘Masterbekendtgørelsen’ – the statutory order on executive graduate programmes – which forms the
legal frame which the different master programmes have to apply to. It is here stated that

§ 1. Masteruddannelser er *forskningsbaserede videregående uddannelser* inden for
videreuddannelsessystemet for voksne, der har til formål at give studerende med praktisk
erhvervserfaring og en forudgående uddannelsesbaggrund en videregående uddannelse inden for et specialiseret område eller i et bredere perspektiv på et fagligt eller flerfagligt område.

§ 2. En masteruddannelse skal på videnskabeligt grundlag give de studerende viden, færdigheder og kompetencer, som kvalificerer til at kunne varetage høj kvalificerede funktioner i virksomheder, institutioner m.v. Den enkelte masteruddannelse skal sikre, at den studerende er i stand til at anvende *fagområdets videnskabelige metoder og begreber* .....(Masterbekendtgørelsen nr. 1187, 07/12 2009, my emphasis)\(^5\)

If we use this legal frame as an indicator for the content of the master programmes it is clear that ‘virtues’ are no longer the medium for reflection. Instead it is scientific knowledge in the form of theories, methods and concepts. As it is stated in the quote the programmes should be based on research and they should give knowledge and competencies on a scientific grounding. This means that only universities so far have been allowed to offer master programmes. The educations are based on research and should give knowledge and competencies on a scientific basis. The individual master programmes must secure that the student is able to use the scientific methods and concepts. In relation to practices: the students write a lot of synopses in which they write about themselves, their own work practice/organizations and relate that to the curriculum in the specific courses.

When the public manager reflects herself and her practice in the educational mirror she does not observe the ideal manager, managerial virtues, proverbs or recipes for good management. What she sees is herself, her organization and activities in the light of theories, academical analyses and scientific methods. The aspired value is not, as in the mirror for princes, moral correctness but knowledge, insight, truth. Science does not tell the managers what to do. Instead the education can teach the managers to produce and use knowledge in their managerial work. The research-based education does not answer the question ‘what should I do’ or ‘how can I…’ (questions which the managers typically have a very legitimate interest in). Instead it answers questions like ‘what is the case’ or ‘what lies behind this case’.

The knowledge-oriented education does not mirror the manager as a moral person or as an acting and decision making person, but as an analyzing and knowing person (thus also as un-knowing). With knowledge comes the consciousness that there is so much you do not know. Increasing insight in the social construction of practice does not necessarily lead to more decisive actions. Knowledge about the unintentional effects and unforeseeable performative effects of attempts of steering can produce the insecure manager instead of the efficient manager. Knowledge about own lack of knowledge, incalculable complexity and lack of simple cause-effect relations can create the reluctant manager. On

\(^5\) Sorry for the Danish quote – it should be translated in later versions of the paper.
the other hand new theoretical/academical knowledge and concepts can give authority and outlook in order to catch the managers situation. The result may be a tension between insecurity and confidence, doubt and authority, hesitation and certainty.

**Societal context for management educations**

In relation to the mirror for princes I described briefly elements of the societal background for the increase and decrease of this specific kind of medium for reflection. The general point being that media for reflection is not only an internal organizational choice. The dominating media for reflection must be understood in relation to societal structures and the positions managers are ascribed in relation to these structures. Below I shall give a very brief description of the changes in the semantics in the public sector about the relations between organization, managerial role and person since the 1980s. The analysis is based on semantical analyses of Danish public policy documents (Knudsen 2014, Rennison, Andersen). I focus on three changes.

*Firstly* we see the emergence of the idea that the manager is the one who constitutes the organization and not the other way round. Traditionally management has been conceived as a managerial role defined by the organization. In a governmental report from 1994 it is claimed that the role of the manager is changing rapidly. While the role of the manager (‘chef’) is to steer, control and report to superiors, leadership is to decide about and communicate goals, to inform, involve and motivate employees (14: 165). The manager is thus much more important in the constitution of the organization. Instead of given roles the managers must decide about the goals of the organization. As it is stated by xx:

> “the manager does have a crucial influence on the organization… The manager is very much indeed responsible for the production of the *preconditions* for that the organization can achieve its results, e.g. by means of personnelle management, development and a holistic view.”(19:8).

The picture is not that the roles, tasks and functions of the manager is given by a bureaucratic structure. It is rather the other way round: the organization is given by the manager who is made responsible for the production of the precondition of organizational production. The idea that the manager comes before and constitutes the organization raises the question: what constitutes the manager? The emergence of an idea of ‘the personal leadership’ can be seen as an answer to this question.

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6 The references will be changed to regular ones in later versions of the paper.
Secondly we see since the 1990s the emergence of a notion of ‘the personal leadership’. As the manager is seen as one who can constitute the organization, the manager cannot (only) be seen as an organizationally defined role with formal competencies, duties and limitations. Instead it is now claimed that good leadership means that the manager is “accepted and respected as the natural leader” (15: 6). Instead of the organizational leader we now get ‘the natural leader’. The ‘natural leader’ is specified as the personal leader:

“It is required that the manager contributes with the personal leadership, that the leader has a personal vision and that the leader can create a collective vision. The only opportunity you have as a manager for creating space for your own behavior is by making your own position clear. This is where the benefit should be from the personal leadership … “(16: 53)

Words like vision, courage, motivation are typical in the description of this personal leadership. Some examples: “they should be engaged in maintaining the personal motivation in the job.” (18.2: 30).

“Management is carried by personality and presupposes a personal leadership.” (21:39). “good management presupposes a personal leadership, where the personal integrity of the leader, the ability to inspire and fill with enthusiasm, responsibility are important elements.” (21.1: 3).

Thirdly we can relate these two characteristics to an ideal of organizational change. Since the early 1980s the ability to change has been a central ideal for public organizations. From around 1980 we find an increasing emphasis on temporal accelerations in society. 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 is from around 1980 replaced by a problem-definition in the temporal dimension: society changes constantly – and so should the public organizations. This is where the changes in the semantics about management comes in. The manager becomes in the talk of the public sector (‘the apparatus’) about itself a figure outside the organization which is ascribed the ability to change and innovate the organization. The manager is addressed as the actor responsible for doing the changes. The manager is described as a solution (one among others) to the problem: how to create the desired change. The manager is articulated as an instance that can create and be made responsible for the changes – an adress for the new demands and an actor who can make the changes. This means that she cannot solely be seen as a role defined by membership rules of the organization. If the manager is to be ‘an agent for change’ (as it was the motto for the first MPA in Denmark) she must be articulated as an actor who comes before the organization. While the organization is perceived as slow the manager is introduced as a dynamical factor.

7 In this paper I can of course not reconstruct all aspects and problem/solution relations in the material. Another repeated reason for the need for temporal acceleration is the mismatch between available resources and expectations.
This semantical construction of the manager as an organizational-external force gives the organization a dilemma. On the one hand the leader cannot be left with her potentially arbitrary ideas and whims. On the other hand the organization would exactly lose what it desires if it defined the management role too precise – that is took it back in the organization. As ‘the person’ becomes the name for this extra-organizational force a new question arises: How to manage the personal leader who is exactly constructed as being outside the organization? Here it has become ambiguous for organizations to form the medium for reflection for the managers. There are two reasons for that:

a) The manager should be a transformative and innovative power. As the manager is imagined as an outside, extra-organizational dynamic person that can create the wished for changes, then it becomes ambiguous for the organization to decide how the manager should reflect upon herself. If the manager is mirrored in the organization, then the organizations risks not to get, what it attributed to the leader: a power that constantly can change the person.

b) The organization does typically not have a communicative complexity which can adequately form a medium for the reflection of the managers. Organizations are inferior to their own complexity as they have for instance powergames, conflicts, dynamics, structures, memories, narratives that they cannot describe adequately. The consultants in the HR department 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 to be rather thin – sometimes even provocative in its unintentional demonstration of ignorance concerning the issues at stake in the organization. The organization thus risks that the managers distance themselves from the offers of reflectivity – with unanticipated consequences. For instance it is well known that 360 degrees evaluations risk to produce a feeling of lack of appreciation and organizational support as they are measured on generic variables which demonstrate lack of knowledge of the situation of the individual managers.

It is thus today ambiguous for organizations to decide the mirror for the reflection of their managers. At the same time organizations cannot abolish their own organization of managers. The organization hesitates to decide how the managers should mirror themselves at the same time as the organization cannot do without some kind of management of the self-management of the managers. The solution to this ambiguous situation has – as been described above – recent years not least been to displace the education of managers to the educational system and let research based education form the medium for the self-reflection of the managers. The use of formal educations can be seen as a system-displacement of the dilemma between unprofessional leaders (=the risk of arbitrariness) and domestification (=the
risk of habitual instead of innovative leaders). The task to program the leaders (in order to qualify their decisions) is displaced to education as a functional system and to educational organizations (thus the organizations of the managers relieve themselves of the task to decide the content of the qualifications of the leaders).

Discussion

We can sum up the results so far with the diagram on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>The aspired value</th>
<th>The question which the medium answers</th>
<th>How the manager becomes visible to herself</th>
<th>Societal background</th>
<th>The societal problem it attempts to solve</th>
<th>Replaced by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mirrors for princes</td>
<td>Virtues and vices Morally correct behaviour</td>
<td>Moral correctness</td>
<td>How I ought to act</td>
<td>As a moral person</td>
<td>Increasing complexity of the governmental affairs</td>
<td>How to guide the ruler</td>
<td>Reflections of a self-Referential administrative apparatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research based management education</td>
<td>Theories, analyses, methods, cases Knowledge, insight, truth</td>
<td>What is the case/what lies behind?</td>
<td>As knowing, ignorant and analyzing</td>
<td>New expectations ascribed to the personal leader in public organizations</td>
<td>How to guide the ruler</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhouse programme(^8)</td>
<td>a) Occasions and catalysts (enablers) for self-reflection b) specific organizational premises and technologies Improved self-knowledge in the light of the organization</td>
<td>What is expected from me and ‘who am I in this organization’</td>
<td>As a reflective person in a specific organization</td>
<td>New expectations ascribed to the personal leader in public organizations</td>
<td>How to guide the ruler</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^8\) I have not looked at inhouse programmes in the paper – but I might do in later versions, that is why I have put it in the diagram.
The diagram does not claim to be comprehensive and the different characteristics can of course be debated. The diagram highlights that different media for reflection answer different questions and reflect the manager to herself in different ways. The diagram thus also indicates how the manager does not come into view for herself in the different media. It also indicates which questions that cannot be answered in the different media. If the manager reflects himself by means of Alithia he will not see facts (with truth as validity claim), but virtues and vices with a normative validity claim. With Alithia he can reflect upon himself as virtuous respectively depraved. With the research-based medium she can come into light as knowing or ignorant, as studying and analyzing. With education as medium the manager is not reflected as a morally responsible person. In neither the mirror for princes nor the research-based educations is the manager mirrored as a person who must present herself and come forward – which none the less also can be part of the managerial role. If one uses more aesthetical media (like rhetorics or dramaturgical techniques) this could be the reflection.

None of the media can answer the managers’ question how one solves a certain task or reaches specific goals. Mirrors for princes want to answer how one ought to act; research-based educations cannot answer that question. This does not mean that scientific knowledge is morally neutral (already the choice of subject to be taught is political). The validity claim for knowledge in the social sciences is not, that it can answer what one ought to do, but that it produces knowledge (stable, convincing, new…) about sections of the world.

Research-based educational institutions are not fond of getting too normative. Managers on the other hand have a legitimate interest in getting answers what to do. This schism between management practice and research-knowledge is today by the educational institutions for instance managed by the development of new pedagogical practices which endeavour to make it easier for the managers to observe theoretical knowledge and scientific analyses as resources in order to find out what to do and how to manage (Berggren & Soderlund 2011; Knudsen & Adriansen 2013).

It should also be noted that the media for reflection are formed by the use of them. If theories and methods are observed from a strategical managerial perspective then the performance of the knowledge becomes the ability to dissolve and recombine the world in ways which can make new possibilities emerge.

This is relevant for the individual leaders who can get an increased understanding of the different possibilities and limitations in different media. It is also relevant for organizational discussions of and decisions about educational policies. Deciding the medium for reflection for managers is a question of second order management – managing the self-management of the managers. Finally the paper is a contribution to the scientific discussions of reflection in relation to managers and not least management
education and development. Instead of investigating ‘what reflection is’ (a question which is often answered by means of typologies of different types of reflection) or how we can get more of it (as reflexivity generally is considered a good thing that we want to have more of) I have suggested to introduce a new perspective on reflection – a perspective centering on the medium for reflection.

**Conclusion**

Reflection needs a medium. Reflection is not – as it is often assumed in the literature on reflection – an immediate phenomenon within a subject. If we define reflection as the process in which a self establishes a relation to itself, then this relation calls for a medium in which it can take place. A medium which in Heiders sense can enable the self to perceive itself. I have above used the metaphor of a mirror to conceptualize this. The point has been that the mirror decides how the mirrored is reflected, the mirror is living (HWdP). The medium stretches and limits the reflectory space. The specific medium for reflection enables and limits how a self can become visible to itself. Even though it is the individual manager who comes into view in the mirror the decision about the mirror is seldom decided by the individual. The self-reflection is collectively or socially mediated.

This points to the relations between (changing) social structures and the medium facilitating the self-reflections of the managers. Thus I related the renaissance mirrors to state formation, 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, that in turn became the important ‘self’ to reflect. The increase in research-based management educations I have suggested to interpret as symptom of changes in the semantics on the relationship between organization and manager. It is an attempt to combine the idea of the personal leadership with the need to manage the managers’ self-reflections – a need the organizations have problems fulfilling and which they therefore displace to educational institutions.

Media for reflection can be seen as solutions to current problems. But as there may be several different solutions to the same problem we may discuss alternative solutions. Such discussions can as point of departure have the fact that no medium can mirror everything. For the managers it may be a question of identity: which mirror-identities are made possible and supported by which media for reflection? For the organizations it might become relevant to develop a kind of reflection –policy.

Media for reflection are differentiated and one can suspect that they tend to follow what Habermas – connecting to a long philosophical tradition - has termed different rationalities. In the discussion and not least critique of Business school education authors like Ghoshal and Mintzberg have criticized the
lack of ethics in the educational programs (the characteristics of the educational programs do thus have basic similarities with the characterization in this paper). They also vote for the establishing of what one might call more hybrid kinds of educational programs. I have much sympathy for this critique of the dominance of an instrumental rationality. But the analysis above raises what I think is an open question: should we go for such hybrid media combining ethics, knowledge and aesthetics or should we rather go for an increased awareness of the limitations of the particular media?

The concept ‘medium for reflection’ offers a non-totalizing way of discussing the reflection and media for reflection. Thus it can give a critical edge to a totalization of education as the one mean for improving management. But it can also make it possible to discuss what education actually can. Discussions of management educations tend to be either for or against. The voices against tend to focus on what the educations cannot (i.e. give a moral compass to managers). But it may be wiser to think in terms of limits and compensations than in terms of total solutions. Educations have limitations as medium for reflection. This does not, though, mean they should be banned. Instead the argument could be that the shortcomings of educations have to be compensated by the use of other media. Which on their side also have limitations which have to be compensated.

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