Master Thesis – The role of leadership in self-managing organizations

**Background**

In recent years, the apparent inevitability of managerial hierarchy as the base principle for organizing work has been challenged. So-called “self-managing organizations” are questioning the need for formal managers, distributing decision-making authority more evenly across employees. While these organizations, and the new ways of working they have transitioned to, may do without formal leaders, they cannot do without leadership. In fact, some have even argued that leadership is a more rather than less important consideration in self-managing organizations as leadership becomes a responsibility for a wide variety of people throughout the organization. Nevertheless, a closer look at common case examples like Morning Star, Buurtzorg or Semco reveals that leadership remains to be portrayed as tied to person and position, with stories centering around the heroic, inspiring CEO-leader unleashing the potentials of the organization through implementing a self-managing approach to organizing.

**Project Description**

The purpose of this master thesis is to explore the role of leadership in self-managing organizations. While you are encouraged to shape and explore the topic yourself, potential focus points of study could be:

- What is leadership in self-managing organizations?
- How do “ordinary employees” in self-managing organizations perceive the role and concept of leadership?
- What does it mean to be a “leader” in a self-managing organization?
- What are “sources” of and “anchors” for leadership in the absence of managerial hierarchy?

For this study, we will expect you to conduct an empirical study on one or more case organization(s) which have transitioned to new ways of working relevant to the phenomenon of self-managing organizations described above, primarily through interviews. Based on our existing research collaborations and networks, we will help you with access to interesting case organizations as needed. The study will also include a review of relevant literature on leadership in the context of self-managing organizations.
Qualifications
We are looking for 2 engineering students from Chalmers with an interest in leadership and organization design. Courses in organizational and management topics are helpful.

Further information
Please send in individual applications with CV, motivational letter and grade transcripts.
Planned start: January 2023, with some flexibility
Final application date: November 13th, 2022
Duration: 30 ECTS
For questions regarding the project, please contact:
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This master thesis is made in collaboration with the Division of Innovation and R&D Management at Chalmers. Academic examiner will be professor Maria Elmquist.