

## The Break

### Work-life balance, energy and leadership anno 2015 - Reconfiguring contemporary leadership through 2400 years old coaching concept Protreptic and Material Storytelling

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*“How can we make people get energy rather than losing energy (if not burning out) from going to work?”*

## **Introduction**

This paper tries to explore the above question on how managers and employees can get energy instead of losing energy (and in worst cases burnout) while going to work? Questions like this one are asked by managers of a major Scandinavian brands and companies. A lot of organizations are today dealing with various work-life imbalances and burnout which effect both the health of the people working in the companies, their families and are costing the companies and the society billions of dollars and euro each year.

The paper tries to explore new ways to deal with these challenges through a quantum approach to storytelling where the enactment of core values, bodies, spaces and artifacts positions managers and CEO's from major Scandinavian organizations in sites where they can re-evaluate their life.

Rocks, ice, sounds of water from a small creek.....

10 managers from IKEA, Novo Nordisk and other big Scandinavia brands hiking and exploring core values in leadership and life through five days in the mountains of the Pyrenees on the border between Spain and France as part of the leadership program “Walk to Explore your Leadership”<sup>1</sup>.

*”Time to reflect closer to heaven as we did in the Pyrenees, makes me humble and simplifies the thoughts on how to lead within my own set of values. It’s all about energy”*,

(Lars Lund Hansen, manager, Novo Nordisk)

A few objects; a neckless, a candle, a dragon and five crystal stones on a table in an office of a municipality in Denmark. Silence.....

Rebuilding rooms for taking breaks with the inclusion of different activities such as a game of soccer or a hike seems to provide the tools to rework these imbalances or enslaving patterns.

Break.....

The attempt at meeting the challenges of the million-dollar question is stemming from the ‘bets on the future’ – or what David Boje coins as ‘antenarratives’, (Boje, 2008) that emerged through various reconfiguring story actions, on two different occasions.

The paper thus elaborates on two cases of restorying events; One taking place in the Pyrenees of Europe in October 2015. One taking place in the hallways of the City Hall of a Municipality in Denmark in May 2015. In both cases the ‘bets on the future’ actions were given in a materialized form and drawing on a subtle form of negotiation<sup>2</sup> of core leadership values; which values should matter and which actions should no longer be allowed to matter (as much)? In other words – a

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Jakob Aagaard, former HR executive in IKEA [www.proterpo.com](http://www.proterpo.com)

<sup>2</sup> Negotiation inspired by the way Etienne Wenger talks about it; like the subtle negotiation of curves while driving a car.

negotiation where both senses of the word ‘matter’ played a vital role and where these *founding differences* (Barad 2007) were reworked.

The paper is written through loosely connected fragments of text pieces (of different genres) and contents as a manner of being true to the heritage of living story relationality and nonlinearity within a quantum approach to storytelling (Boje 1991) and as a practical highlight of quantum entanglement as an emergence of meaning-mattering, which the reader is very much part of enacting. This means that the following pieces may be read in any different order you may choose.

The paper is organized as a ‘between’ of the following five pieces of ‘breaks’ which have in common that they all relate themselves to the million-dollar question:

As a backdrop for the posed question, the *Organizational terrain* break elaborates the terrain of Organizations anno 2015 as a terrain of complexity, streamlining, language-orientation and dis-functionality. The latter in regard to a WHO acknowledged concern for health issues related to work-related stress (Prætorius, 2012) and an ongoing urge for learning and development. Matters that are being countered by requesting a ‘full stop – and reverse’, (Brinkman, 2015). A counter narrative (Boje 2008) that is challenging the present ‘modus operandi’<sup>3</sup> of leadership both at the personal level and the organizational level. Likewise, counter-narratives are posed to argue that language and the social has been granted too much power on the dispense of the bodily, physical and biological – or in short, in dispense of the material.

The break *To be or not to be* poses the theoretical notion of *dis-/continuity* (Barad, 2007, 2010) from the quantum approach to storytelling (Strand 2012, 2014). This highlights the dynamic of how in-/exclusions matter for world-making practices also at the organizational level.

The *Taking a stance* break introduces the two different technologies of Protreptic and Material Storytelling respectively. Protreptic is a 2400 years old concept where core values are elaborated as founding differences for the leadership actions to come aka for the engagement in practices of becoming. Material storytelling story modes are posed as material-discursive attempts at rebalancing present hegemonies of mind/body, nature/culture, matter/meaning, etc. with relation to the posed question.

The piece *Lets walk*, elaborates two different cases of using two different technologies. Both based on the idea of walking to explore what matters and what should be allowed to matter. One technology - Protreptic explores core values – what a quantum approach would address as ‘founding differences that matters’ - with a fellow human as companion, provider and witness to your elaborations. Another technology employs ‘walk-alongs’ through the physical terrain of your own organization with a foreigner as company and with an entailed rebuild of the physical surroundings. Both cases are depicted in their use of the communicative platform of Object theatre from the methodology of Material Storytelling (Strand 2012).

The *Bets on the Future* piece discusses the extend to which the cases of using this kind of technologies may provide fruitful ‘bets on the future’ in regard to the million-dollar question and the challenges it raises. The piece concludes towards a set of Dogmas for future reference in

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<sup>3</sup> Modus Operandi: 1. A method of operating or functioning. 2. A person's manner of working.  
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/modus+operandi>

addressing these challenges.

## **The Break - The Organizational terrains**

- Anno 2015

The latest research from the WHO indicate that stress will be the next most frequent contact to doctors in 2020 and in Denmark, Scandinavia, it is already so. In the period of the last five years, stress among women have increased fast, which is a paradox in the country which, according to the major international research project The Globe Study should Scandinavia have the world's best management in terms of well-being and performance.

In Denmark many are using various stress managements in the form of coaching, mindfulness, self-help groups and other programs. There are different ideas about the causes of stress and burnout. Some researchers talk about the limitless work and the increase of individualization in recent years where there has been a movement from a more collective mindset, as part of the Scandinavian welfare model, to a more individualized and competitive society.

Although much is being done to change this trend, this stress tsunami does not stop and it's said to be bad for business and the health and wellbeing of managers, employees and their families.

The terrain of Organizations anno 2015 is a terrain of complexity, streamlining, language-orientation and dis-functionality. The latter not the least in regard to a WHO acknowledged concern for health issues related to work-related stress (Prætorius, 2012) and an ongoing urge for learning and development. Matters that are being countered by requesting a 'full stop – and reverse', (Brinkman, 2015). A counter narrative (Boje 2008) that is challenging the present 'modus operandi' of leadership both at the personal level and the organizational level. Likewise, counter-narratives are posed to argue that language and the social has been granted too much power on the dispense of the bodily, physical and biological – or in short, in dispense of the material. (Barad, 2007, Strand, 2012).

## **The Break - To be or not to be**

- *dis/continuity – and the practice of in-/exclusions of practices*

In attempting to elaborate on the challenges raised by the above stated 'million-dollar question' it seems apparent that at the very least we are seeking a 'break of patterns' of a practice that have shown to be dysfunctional. The question is then, how to go about such a break or such a discontinuation of the dysfunctional?

From a quantum perspective:

*"The point is that it is the intra-play of continuity and discontinuity, determinacy and indeterminacy, possibility and impossibility that constitutes the differential spacetime matters of the world. Or to put it another way, if the indeterminate nature of existence by its nature teeters on the cusp of stability and instability, of determinacy and indeterminacy, of possibility and impossibility, then the dynamic relationality between continuity and discontinuity is crucial to the open-ended becoming of the world which resists a causality as much as determinism."* (Barad, 2007: 182)

At the core of a quantum approach to the reenactment of story-patterns (inspired by Barad, 2007,

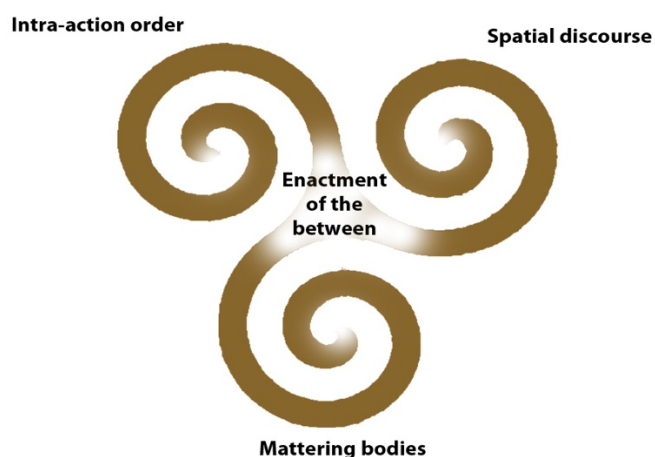
2010) lies the notion of the space-time-matter manifold and thus the iterative reenactment through which the becoming of any (re)new(ed) practice enfolds (Sørensen & Strand, 2014). Closely related to this iterative enfolding of spacetime mattering is - as the quote depicts - the dynamic of dis-/continuity.

Any practice becomes through the infinite small variations that are part of the process of in-/exclusions of what is allowed to matter (included) and what is excluded from mattering. The included and the excluded on both sides constitutes the practice as it is equally constitutive for the becoming of a practice that which is excluded from being part of it.

Further, whether it is a 'break of patters' or a mere conducting of 'a break' during a work day it is a question of dis/continuity. To put it bluntly; There is no real break if there is no discontinuation of practice. A discontinuation of organizational practices – momentarily or for good - requires a changed relationality to be enacted. A change of the relational setup of the practice by subtle or more profound changes in space, time, mattering agential components:

*“Organizations are iterative reconfigurings of spacetime matter – moment to moment, turn-by-turn, cut-by-cut which affords changed relationalities, affords a different difference to be enacted. An ongoing dis/continuous process of becoming through the iterative enactment of enfolding of spacetime matter”*, (Strand, 2012: 226 Book 1).

The following model constitutes the mattering agential components of the between of the spacetime matter manifold as *Spatial discourse* (discursive patterns, norms, values, etc. related to the specific practice in question), *intra-action order* (the specific manner through which everyday practices are conducted) and *mattering bodies* (The specific human and other-than-human factors that play a vital role for the practice)



**Figure 1: Analytical model of Apparatus of Material Storytelling (Strand, 2012)**

## **Taking a stance**

- *Protreptic* – a technology of acting from core values instead of feelings of the immediacy of the

*moment*

*“What’s the different between a good life and a true life?”*

*(Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher)*

As mentioned, we worked with three technologies to answer the question about energy instead of stress and burnout. It has from the beginning been the starting point to combine the three technologies, but to illustrate them we will here present them separately.

The oldest of them is Protreptic (Larsen, Fogh Kirkeby, 2008, p. 11) which is a management or dialogue concept that focuses on values. Protreptic was developed in ancient Greece, where Aristotle had an academy for managers, where the focal point was to explore values and concepts. Protreptic comes from the concept Protrepo which means ‘to turn to the essentials’. And Protreptic is about turning towards the things which are essential for the manager himself, the employees, the company and the community. Originally Protreptic used to train leaders who would lead and develop the Greek cities, which should rest on a set of values. These cities are the inspiration for how we understand democracy today. Moreover, it was used to train commanders and generals so they could motivate their soldiers. Alexander the Great worked with Aristotle and perhaps his success was due to his ability to motivate people and the populations he conquered, because he talked to their values and what was important for them.

Aristotle worked with some universal core value for a good life. The values are ‘justice’, ‘the good’, ‘the truth’ and ‘the beautiful’. The argument being, that if we live these core values, we will live in freedom.

The Protreptic was also used to make managers ethically strong so they could manage their responsibilities and lead through values rather than feelings. The goal was to create managers who could stand firm and deal with resistance without being blown away. Or in metaphorical terms: to stand in the eye of a hurricane without being blow away.



Plato and Aristotle in a walk 'n talk<sup>4</sup>

The idea of Protreptic as a tool for leadership and management development today is to pull managers and employees momentarily out of the everyday hamster wheel of the operation level and give them the freedom to contemplate the essence of their private life and work life. In Protreptic (Larsen, Fogh Kirkeby, 2008, p. 53) it is forbidden to come up with specific narratives from everyday life and work. Values should be examined on a general human level and the idea is that the correct understanding of the basic values in life and work influences the way we work and live. Instead of private narratives we can use metaphors and allegories to get the conversation into body and space.

The exploring of values is enacted from a place of the between, as seen in the picture of Plato and Aristotle, and each person can hide their own private secrets.

We ask and explore breaks by asking:

*“Is breaks important in life and leadership?”*

*“Has the word break several meanings?”*

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_School\\_of\\_Athens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Athens)

*“Which values and abilities do we need to take breaks in a performance culture?”*

*“In which part of the body is the break at home?”*

*“The opposite of a break?”*

*“The negative part of a break?”*

*“A metaphor for a break?”*

Language-driven inquiry as means of exploration is important in a Protreptic-approach. However, the walking aspect is equally important.

### **Taking a Stance**

*- Material Story modes as a technology of enacting breaks*

*“A different material-discursive apparatus of bodily production materializes a different configuration of the world, not merely a different description of a fixed and independent reality. We are responsible for the world of which we are part, not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing but because reality is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping and through which we are shaped”, (Barad, 2007:390).*

Central to a quantum approach to storytelling is the notion of apparatus:

*“agential realism understands apparatuses as material-discursive practices that are simultaneously the conditions of possibility of meaning making and causally productive forces in the intra-active materialization of phenomena – that is, apparatuses are about mattering in both senses of the term”. (Barad, 2011: 8)*

The Apparatus of Material Storytelling consists of three ways of enacting the between as a field of possibility for negotiating the constitution in-/exclusions of mattering:

stories of  
SPACES

- Organizational scenography
- Walk-along to explore
- Feng-shui as the primary inspirational source

stories of  
BODIES

- Performance scenography
- Improvising to explore
- Bodydynamic as the primary inspirational source

stories of  
ARTIFACTS

- Object theatre
- Miniature-worldbuilding to explore
- Sandplay as the primary inspirational source



Figure 2: The three material story modes

The Material Storytelling apparatus is a research based methodology which claims that the intra-play of the material storymodes in regard to organizational (re)configurations “*changes the relationality of presently enacted hegemonies of mind/body, language/matter, culture/nature, verbal, non-verbal communication and implicit/explicit ways of knowing by enacting them as equal and mutually constituent agencies of changing the everyday practices of organizational living*” (Strand, 2012: 42 Book 1).

As such the Material Storytelling apparatus hold technologies for addressing the million-dollar question and the related challenges. Challenges that will necessarily entail the reworking of hegemonies through the discontinuity of breaking enslaving patterns of everyday routines material-discursively.

### **Lets walk**

- *Walk to Explore in the Pyrenees and in an organization in Denmark*

The case examples that follows prove as practical examples of how these changed relationalities plays out in regard to the three material story modes.

### **Lets Walk**

- *Case walking to explore anxiety and resistance*

In the concept Walk to Explore (Aagaard Mortensen, protrepo.com), as mentioned above, we took managers to hike in the Spanish Pyrenees, where we combined hiking, Protreptic dialogue - and material storytelling in the form of the scene of mountains, the rivers, the trees, birds and valleys and in the form of working with objects and artefacts by employing the method of Object theatre (Strand 2014).



The scenery of Walking to Explore your Leadership in the Pyrenees<sup>5</sup>

One of the participants was an HR - manager from a big company who wanted to explore the concept of anxiety and resistance. While walking up a path through the mountains the manager and his partner explored questions as: "What does anxiety mean?", "What is the virtue of anxiety?". "Is anxiety important for life and leadership?", "What is the opposite of anxiety?".

The HR- manager answered "Flexibility", "How can flexibility change anxiety?" But the questions also including a material storytelling approach - the surroundings: "Is there anything in nature and the environment which is a picture of anxiety and flexibility?".

The reflections went from small pine trees, to the running creek as we walked past the memories from childhood landscape on the grass, which stood in the sand along ocean and could handle even the worst hurricanes without breaking or being blown away because it had a flexibility and long roots connecting to others like a complex cobweb. And after could examine the values that characterized the roots and back to a recognition of how the roots or values create a base or a solid ground to take action from.

*"I'm exited to go back and deal with resistance. I have a different feeling in my body."*

These realizations of the managers on the mountain were later processed through material story lab to visualize them and make them tangible.

*"I got a deeper understanding of what is important to me and what I should work towards."*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mountainbug.com/mountainbug-holidays/>

*Subsequently making the table with the figures gave me a different perspective and experience of 'necessity', 'motivation/demotivation' and 'worries' respectively, and they became an almost physical feeling to me as opposed to the common rational consideration of right and wrong.*

*Afterwards it was easier for me to enact the changes in practice as I had seen the changes materialize in the exercise.*

*I see material storytelling as a very concrete and action oriented way of working with development and change – both on a personal and an organizational level”*

Birgitte Nortvig, (Director)

The above example or break is about taking a break a long from home and work. The next example is about bringing walking, values and material storytelling into the workplace.

### **Lets Walk**

*- Case 'Mellemrummet' (the middle room)*

In March 2014 a four-day long workshop was conducted related to the candidate program of Communication Studies at Aalborg University. The workshop was titled 'Organizational Scenography' and the site – or rather scenography of engagement was the City Hall of the Municipality of Hjørring in Northern Denmark, (Strand et.al, Forthcoming).

Below is a series of photos from one aspect of the workshop. Photos of the 'regime of aesthetics' that presently dominated the interior décor of the newly rebuild City Hall, and photos of 'Mellemrummet' (The middle room') – one of the meeting-rooms that were occupied by employees breaking the pattern of the presently enacted 'regime of aesthetics' while at the same time enacting a changed relationality of City Hall conduct and core values.

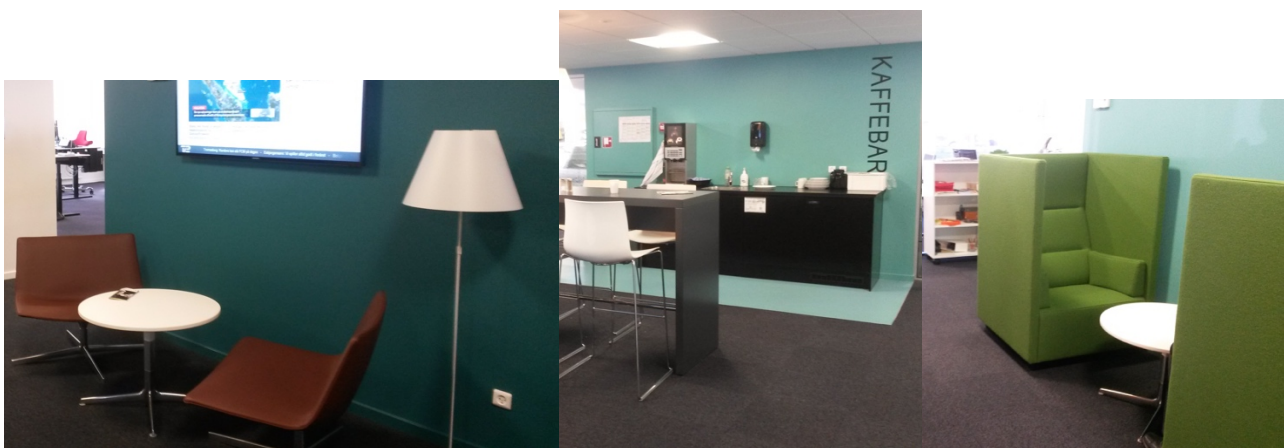


Figure 3: Photo-bits from the 'aesthetic regime' enslaving the practices of taking breaks at the City Hall



Figure 4: Photo-bits from the occupied room: ‘Mellemrummet’ (‘The Middle-Room’)

Prior to the suggestion of establishing a room for taking breaks in the outcome of the workshops, and prior to employees occupying the room one year later had been a process of walk-alongs during throughout the space of the City hall that enacted questions and comments between students and employees on the use of the configured space – also the configured space for taking breaks. The spatial discourse for taking breaks were addressed so to say. The table-soccer practice was mentioned. Later in the configuration of terrain boards using Object theatre it came up as well; that the room for these activities had been excluded during the rebuild. The table had been placed in the cellar.

The details of the shift/change of the room (see figure 4) relate to the structural reform of the Municipalities of Denmark that took place in 2007. Here smaller Municipalities were gathered together in larger entities. The Municipality of Hjørring was such a ‘gathering of many’. The practices of using a soccer-table to enact breaks during the workday was part of one of these smaller municipalities that were gathered up by the Municipality of Hjørring.

Perhaps the manner of streamlining the aesthetic surroundings is a manner of streamlining the culture and values into one? Some practices were then left out – as excluded patterns of ways of taking breaks; through a quick game of table-soccer. A different performance-scenography for the employees in terms of conducting breaks was enacted.

Second-hand furnishing is to that extend a protests of an aesthetic regime that leaves little room (literally) for constructive manifolds of being among organizational members of the Organization. Issues that came up during the walk-alongs in the organizational scenography of the City hall.

In any case the entangled genealogy of the spatial discourse of the occupied room and the suggestions from the workshop are quite clear:





Figure 5: Aspect of the presentation at the City Hall April 2014.

## **Bets on the Future**

- *the Dogmas for future reference in addressing these challenges through counter-narratives*

The becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter:

*“(...) since each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again,” (Barad, 2007: 185)*

While negotiating which core values should come to matter (in Organizational leadership), the breaking of patterns that are unbecoming is often a consequence to be faced. The breaking of patterns is a material-discursive practice, both when it is enacted through walk-alongs in the Pyrenees of Europe or when it is accomplished through walk-alongs within an Organizational setting.

*“The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged*

*status determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated.*" (Barad, 2007: 152)

By this statement it becomes clear that the rebuilding of a physical space of a room for taking breaks at the City Hall is not just about changing the furniture. It is about enacting a reconfigured field of possibility for becoming. It is about negotiating what values should matter. It is about enacting a break – in both senses of that word; the breaking of patterns of the enslaving patterns of the current material-discursive practices – and it is about enacting the possibility for being able to actually take a refreshing break during the workday. Occupying the room by second-hand-out-of-style-furniture, along with the previously excluded football table - was an enactment of a different difference; the difference of taking a break – and breaking out of the regime of aesthetics with specifically included fields for pauses, and making (literal) room for the constructive manifolds of beings that constituted the group of employees in the department. It was to that extend a reconfiguration of the story of the space.

In the Pyrenees of Europe, the walks to explore enacted different 'stories of bodies and spaces' through engaging in a different difference; the stepping out of the everyday realm of (work)life being in both senses of that word, and bringing core values to the forefront of attention through the intra-act of mountains, steep hill-sides, thinner air, an anonymous talking partner, small framed cards and a hiking 6 hours per day as well as the enactment of an object theatre process in the end. This field of possibility provides a dis-/continuation – a break – that enabled the breaking of patterns unbecoming for the participants. For example, the pattern of anxiety and resistance.

However, in this last case there is still the question of transfer – or as Strand points out "making the change enacted through the make-believe-miniature-world-making of the Object theatre, believable (Strand, 2012, Book 2: 266). The participant in the example did realize the unbecoming of various patterns of material-discursive practices (anxiety and resistance), and subsequently the need to change aspects of her everyday routines (material practices) as well as her attitude (discourse). The question is whether she'll be able to enact the changes – occupy the necessary territory, and exclude current practices to the benefit of the others, that she has realized she needed more. This is still to be seen.

The million-dollar question about "*How can we make people get energy rather than losing energy (if not burning out) from going to work*" may not be fully answered. However, fruitful bets on the future of handling the challenges may have arisen.

Those who have participated in these practices of taking breaks have experienced different realizations, which are not only linked to the linguistic and rational, but largely to bodily realizations which can be charged and revisited through a physical and linguistic scenography that draws participants out of the so-called hamster wheel and gives them both a physical and cognitive freedom and embody certain values which can help them to stop and take the break. Not a break which just charge our batteries so that we can take another round in the hamster wheel, but a break which transforms or transmute our way to be in life.

Or as manager from Novo Nordisk, Lars Lunde Hansen said:

*"Time to reflect closer to heaven,(...), makes me humble and simplifies the thoughts on how to lead within my own set of values. It's all about energy"*

When the Danish directors Lars von Trier, Søren Vinterberg and the dogme brothers took a break to change the way of making moving pictures in the 1990's, they created and listed a set of 'dogmas' as founding differences to work from. Examples of the dogmas were: *Shooting must be done on location*, and *Props and sets must not be brought in* (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).

We will like to conclude by listing a set of Dogmas that draw out the founding differences of pattern-breaking and constitutes counter-narratives to the dominant practices of working-life anno 2015.

### **Towards a set of Dogmas of (the pattern-breaking of) taking breaks**

- Say NO! Break out of the enslaving patterns of your life-practices (STOP)
- Just DO it! – build a break from whatever your doing (BUILD)
- Enact the required changes materially - what needs to go in/what needs to go out? (ENACT)
- Live the change - three months of repetitive action (REPEAT)

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Other

The Globe Study: <http://www.nnli.org/uploads/2/9/4/1/29412281/globesummary-by-michael-hoppe.pdf>

Modus operandi: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/modus+operandi>

Walk to Explore by Jakob Aagaard Mortensen, [www.protrepo.com](http://www.protrepo.com)

Photos of Aristotle and Plato: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_School\\_of\\_Athens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Athens)

Photos of the Pyrenees: <http://www.mountainbug.com/mountainbug-holidays/>